

SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

Much Ado About Nothing 2024-25 Study Guide

ABOUT THIS STUDY GUIDE

The Colorado Shakespeare Festival will soon share a Shakespeare & Violence Prevention project with your school. This study guide is a resource for you, whether you are an administrator, counselor, teacher, or student. Our program is most successful when participants have prepared in advance, so we encourage you to use this study guide to connect the material to your curriculum. Shakespeare offers a wonderful opportunity to explore meaningful questions, and we encourage you and your students to engage deeply with those questions.

This study guide was written and edited by Dr. Amanda Giguere, Dr. Heidi Schmidt, with input from Lulu Buck (Educational Equity & Community Engagement, St. Vrain Valley School District), Georgina Owen (Colorado Office of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education), Judi Hofmeister (Colorado Department of Education), Dr. Lena Heilmann (Colorado's Office of Suicide Prevention), Dr. Beverly Kingston and Laurie Keith (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence), Brett Cogswell (Safe2Tell), Rebecca Brown Adelman (Applied Theatre consultant), and Josue Miranda (Spanish translator).

COLORADO CURRICULUM STANDARDS

This program was developed with a standards-based focus in multiple content areas. Content areas addressed by the performances, classroom workshops, and the contents of this study guide include:

- Reading, Writing, and Communicating
- Drama and Theatre Arts
- Comprehensive Health
- Social and Emotional Learning
- Colorado Essential Skills

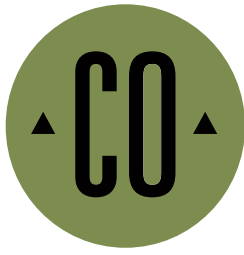
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CU ★ PRESENTS





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ABOUT SHAKESPEARE & VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The Colorado Shakespeare Festival (CSF) partners with CU Boulder's Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV) and the Department of Theatre & Dance to create an interdisciplinary program that increases awareness of Shakespeare and violence prevention.

Our actors will visit your school to perform an abridged, three-actor version of *Much Ado About Nothing* that explores the impact of rumors and misinformation (within the larger context of the cycle of violence), using research from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence. In a 45-minute performance and a 50-minute classroom workshop, we draw parallels between Shakespeare's world and our own. We recommend the performance for grades 6-12.

Theatre is about teamwork, empathy, and change. When your students watch the play, they will observe mistreatment, rumor-spreading, manipulation, and reconciliation. They'll see examples of unhealthy and destructive relationships, as well as characters who become "upstanders" (people who take action to help). We hope this production opens up a dialogue about the cycle of violence and mistreatment -- and reminds us all that change is always possible.

The post-show classroom workshops, facilitated by actors from the performance, use theatre activities to increase your students' ability to work as a team and be upstanders. We employ empathy-building and team-building activities, key elements in creating a positive school environment.

Our visit to your school aims to inspire your students with live, professional theatre, but the work does not end when our actors depart. We encourage you to continue this conversation after our visit to create positive change in your own school.

ABOUT MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Why this play?

In Shakespeare's comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*, "frenemies" Beatrice and Benedick are known for their constant verbal sparring, and their friends manipulate them into confessing their mutual affections. In the meantime, Don John fabricates a false rumor about Hero's reputation, which leaves her publicly humiliated on her wedding day.

This play explores the power of words, especially in terms of rumors, gossip and misinformation. When does a "merry war" turn hostile? When does teasing go too far? What kind of damage can rumors cause? This play engages students with questions about the cycle of violence, cyberbullying, and the negative impact of gossip on a community.

Three-Person Cast

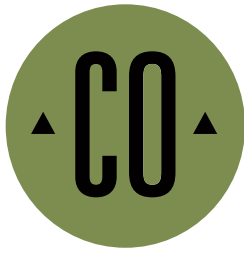
Shakespeare's version of this play has more than 20 characters; we combined some roles and eliminated others to focus on seven central characters played by three actors. Pay attention to how actors change character along the way.

Bilingual Shakespeare

In this production, some characters speak occasionally in Spanish. Shakespeare belongs to all of us, and we hope that when you see a Spanish-speaking character, this helps you see Shakespeare's ability to cross boundaries and connect people from different backgrounds. Whether or not you speak Spanish, how does this choice impact the way you listen to the play?

Gender and Casting

In Shakespeare's time, only men were allowed to perform publicly, so Shakespeare's plays feature a LOT of male characters. These restrictions don't make sense in today's world, so in our production, the gender of the actor may not always match the gender of the character. We hope to carve out new possibilities within these 400-year-old plays, so that the plays reflect our own time.



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CONTENT WARNING

Much Ado About Nothing features a character who is targeted by false rumors, and fakes her death to escape her mistreatment. This content may be triggering to some members of your school community. We encourage you to have conversations with your students prior to the performance, particularly students who may have been personally impacted by rumors, gossip, or the death of a loved one. Please work with your students to make the most appropriate decisions for them regarding viewing the performance and participating in post-show workshops. If you are concerned about a student, below are some resources:

Resources

- **Counseling team** at your school
- **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.** Provides 24/7 free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals in the United States. Call “988” or visit www.988lifeline.org
- **Ayuda en Español.** Lifeline ofrece 24/7, gratuito servicios en español, no es necesario hablar inglés si usted necesita ayuda. Cuando usted llama al número 1-888-628-9454, su llamada se dirige al centro de ayuda de nuestra red disponible más cercano.
- **Safe2Tell** (anonymous reporting, connects with local law enforcement and other resources): 1-877-542-7233; www.safe2tell.org
- **Cyber Bullying Research Center** (resources, research, and presentations about cyberbullying, directed by Dr. Sameer Hinduja and Dr. Justin W. Patchin): cyberbullying.org
- This study guide also includes information and handouts on Standing up to Cyberbullying (pg. 11) and Mental Health & Suicide Prevention (pg. 12-14).

RUMORS, MISINFORMATION, AND DISINFORMATION

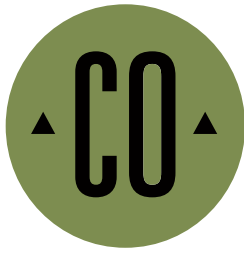
In *Much Ado About Nothing*, several characters make big decisions based on unreliable information. These decisions cause a lot of harm. As you watch the play, look for these moments and ask yourself how the characters might have prevented the harm. In the play, misinformation and disinformation are spread person to person. Rumors, gossip, clickbait, online scams, fake photos, and other distorted or unreliable information can be spread using different methods, but they often rely on the same human impulse to believe our eyes and our ears.

Tips / Questions to Ask Yourself:

- **How does it make you feel?** Misinformation and disinformation are “sticky” because they generate a strong emotional reaction. If you have strong feelings (particularly anger or fear) when you hear/see a piece of information, it’s probably a good idea to step back and try to evaluate it critically or intellectually instead of just trusting your emotions.
- **Consider the source.** Who made / shared this with you? What’s their motivation, bias, or agenda? Are they trustworthy? Are they in a position to really know what they say they know?
- **Can this be verified?** Online, check out the creator’s account, the website’s “About Us” section (are they a legitimate news site? Or a joke site?), etc. Sites like snopes.com or factcheck.org can be helpful for confirming accuracy. In person, can you confirm or dispel the rumor directly?
- **What’s the impact?** Who benefits from this information? Who might be harmed?

Misinformation is inaccurate or false information shared in good faith
Disinformation is inaccurate or false information created or shared with intent to deceive

Misinformation is a **M**istake. Disinformation is **D**eliberate.



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How Do I Prepare?

TEACHER CHECKLIST

This might be your students' first exposure to theatre and/or Shakespeare, so we recommend establishing some norms with your students to prepare for this program:

- In theatre, actors are vulnerable onstage; they step into the shoes of another character (metaphorically) and help us see the world from another person's perspective. For actors to do their jobs, they need to know that their audience will respect their work, their bravery, and their honesty.
- We will respect the actors, we will respect one another, and we will respect ourselves. How do we cultivate a classroom of mutual respect?
- Trying new things is hard! When we work with CSF actors, we might be asked to step out of our comfort zone and participate in some activities. Let's support one another for being brave, being honest, and for trying new things.
- The Shakespeare & Violence Prevention post-performance workshops emphasize three key ideas: Teamwork, Empathy, and Change. What do these things have in common? How can we prepare ourselves to work as a team, practice empathy, and rehearse the change we'd like to see in our community?

How do I prepare my students for the play?

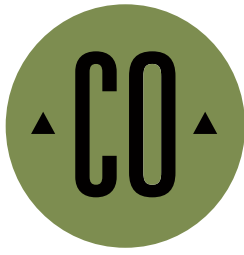
- Review Meet the Characters & Plot Overview (pg. 5-6) with your students.
- Use the Mini-Lesson Plan (pg. 7), Text Analysis, Empathy, and Character activity (pg. 8), and Things to Look For (pg. 9) to help your students think through some of the big questions presented in *Much Ado About Nothing* in advance of the performance.
- Discuss appropriate theatre etiquette with your students. Our performance is frequently interactive (like Shakespeare's original performances). Students are encouraged to laugh and applaud when they enjoy the show, though we ask them not to have private conversations, use cell phones, eat during the performance, or otherwise distract the performers or their fellow students. Remind them that just as they can see and hear the actors, the actors can also see and hear the audience.

How do I prepare for post-show workshops?

- Be ready to participate and co-facilitate with our teaching artist. The more involved you are, the more your students learn!
- Talk with your class about the upcoming actor-led theatre workshop. Set expectations about trying new things and respecting one another.
- Push desks/chairs to the side of your classroom to create an open, movement-friendly space.
- At the end of the workshop, our teaching artist will step out of the room while you conduct an anonymous, 3-question poll with your students. Don't worry about preparing - they'll give you a card with the questions pre-printed.

What should I do after the visit?

- Take the 5-minute survey in your thank you email to give us feedback on the program.
- Use the Discussion Questions (pg. 10) to have a follow-up discussion with your students about the performance and the workshops.
- Look for ways to integrate the ideas and questions raised in the Shakespeare & Violence Prevention program into your lesson plans throughout the year.



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Plot & Characters

A MERRY WAR

The lively **Beatrice** and her cousin, **Hero**, encounter **Benedick** and his friend **Claudio**, newly returned to Messina from the war. While Claudio falls in love with Hero, Beatrice and Benedick continue their “merry war” of witty but wounding banter.



Beatrice

Known for her quick wit



Benedick

Swears off marriage



Hero

Beatrice’s cousin



Claudio

Quick to believe rumors

A FRIENDLY TRICK

Claudio and Hero, newly engaged, decide to play matchmaker with Beatrice and Benedick. They gossip about the pair’s mutual affection (within earshot of Beatrice and Benedick) and the rumor mill is set in motion. Because of Claudio and Hero’s meddling, Beatrice believes Benedick loves her, and Benedick believes Beatrice loves him.

A NOT-SO-FRIENDLY TRICK

The disgruntled **Don John**, who despises Claudio, decides to ruin Claudio and Hero’s happily-ever-after. Don John spreads a false rumor that Hero is unfaithful to Claudio. When Claudio is presented with “proof” from Don John, he abandons Hero at the altar, leaving her publicly disgraced and humiliated.



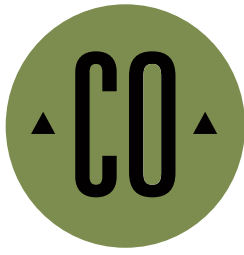
Don John

Another soldier, newly returned from war



SAFE2TELL provides students, parents, and community members a safe and anonymous way to report information about any issues that concern their safety or the safety of others. You can use your voice to make the life of someone else better. Sometimes if YOU don’t speak up for someone, no one else will. You can make a difference. Safe2Tell will not ask for your name or contact information when you make a report.

HOW TO REPORT: (877) 542-7233 | safe2tell.org | Download the mobile app



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Plot & Characters

HERO'S ALLIES

After the interrupted wedding, **Hero and her supporters** concoct a plan to save her reputation; another false rumor is circulated, this time with news of Hero's "death." Beatrice demands that Benedick kill Claudio for ruining her cousin's good name.



Dogberry

A constable in Messina



Verges

Dogberry's second-in-command

JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

Meanwhile, a well-meaning but bumbling constable, **Dogberry**, and his aide, **Verges**, uncover Don John's plot.

Don John's confession makes Claudio regret his rash actions, and he publicly acknowledges he was wrong. Hero emerges and reveals the rumor of her death was untrue; she chooses to forgive Claudio, and the play concludes with the promised weddings of Claudio to Hero, and Beatrice to Benedick.

As the couples celebrate, Don John must face the consequences of his choices.

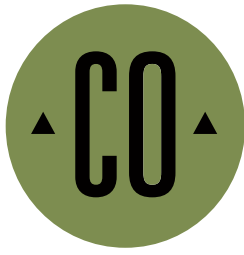


Swing / Stage Manager

Our stage manger, Sarah, does a log of work backstage to make sure this performance goes well. She is also a "swing," or understudy. She has learned ALL the roles in this production so if someone gets sick, Sarah can perform in their place!

PROTECTIVE FACTORS: PREVENTING YOUTH VIOLENCE AND SUICIDE

- Sufficient Sleep
- Supportive relationships
- Feeling connected to peers, school, family, and community
- Involvement in prosocial activities
- Having a trusted adult
- Feeling safe at school



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Mini-Lesson Plan Before the Performance

INSTRUCTIONS FOR TEACHERS

Rationale: This mini-lesson will introduce students to the plot and a foundational theme of the Colorado Shakespeare Festival's production of *Much Ado About Nothing* (empathy), and prepare them to take part in a Shakespeare & Violence Prevention workshop with a CSF actor.

Objective: Students will analyze a character's motivations, put themselves in the shoes of other characters, and participate in a class discussion about the connection between

empathy and violence prevention.

Instructions: Use this study guide to introduce the characters, plot, and key themes and ideas of *Much Ado About Nothing* to your students.

Share the handout on page 8 with your students. Encourage students to answer questions individually, and then in larger groups. Invite your students to ask follow-up questions when their peers share a response.

COLORADO CURRICULUM STANDARDS

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/standards>

Reading, Writing and Communicating: Standard 1: Oral Expression and Listening

- Prepared Graduates: collaborate effectively as group members or leaders who listen actively and respectfully; pose thoughtful questions, acknowledge the ideas of others; and contribute ideas to further the group's attainment of an objective

Reading, Writing and Communicating: Standard 2: Reading for All Purposes

- Prepared Graduates: read a wide range of literary texts to build knowledge and to better understand the human experience

Drama and Theatre Arts: Standard 3: Critically Respond

- Perceive and analyze artistic work
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work
- Connect artistic experiences to our world; past, present and future

Comprehensive Health: Standard 4: Prevention and Risk Management

- Prepared Graduates: apply knowledge and skills that promote healthy, violence-free relationships

ADDITIONAL CONNECTIONS

SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) Core Competencies <https://casel.org>

- Self Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making
- Relationship Skills

Colorado Essential Skills

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/essentialskills-pdf>

- Self-awareness
- Personal responsibility
- Adaptability/flexibility
- Perseverance / resilience
- Critical thinking / problem-solving
- Creativity / innovation
- Inquiry / analysis
- Informed risk taking
- Collaboration / teamwork
- Cultural awareness
- Civic engagement
- Leadership

KINDNESS IS NEVER
A SIGN OF WEAKNESS

NAME: _____

ACTIVITY: TEXT ANALYSIS, EMPATHY, AND APPROACHING A CHARACTER

CHARACTER #1: DON JOHN

General Instructions: In this activity, we'll analyze a character from *Much Ado About Nothing* and his actions in the play. One critical component of an actor's job is demonstrating empathy by analyzing their character's motivations, and understanding the character's perspective.

Actors ask questions like:

- Why does the character say what they say?
- Why does the character do what they do?
- What does the character want?
- What does the character believe to be true?

CHARACTER: DON JOHN

Context: Don John circulates a rumor about Hero in order to get back at Claudio, but first shares his feelings / exhibits some warning signs.

Instructions: The text to your right is abridged and condensed from a few of Don John's scenes in the play. Read the text aloud; if you're with others, try dividing the lines amongst your group members.

Go deeper!: Compare this version to the full text of *Much Ado About Nothing*. What changes do you observe in the text (and who speaks the lines)? What do these changes tell you about character?

Reflection Questions (respond at first on your own, and then share responses with the group):

- What questions do you have about this speech? Words you'd like clarified, etc?
- What is Don John saying? How would you express these thoughts in your own words?
- What does Don John want, according to this speech?
- Which line in the speech resonates with you the most, and why?

Characters don't exist within a vacuum; just like real humans, a character is influenced by multiple forces, and has a rich inner life. This analytical work leads to more fully realized, believable on-stage performances. While this kind of work is vital for live theatre, it's also a key component of preventing violence. When we consider the world from someone else's perspective through empathy, we're more likely to recognize the ways we're connected to that person. Read the following speeches and respond to the reflection questions.

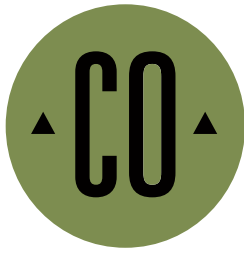
- What might have happened in the past that is influencing Don John's behavior in this moment?
- If a peer shared these thoughts directly with you, what would you say or do to support this person?
- If someone demonstrated empathy, and took the time to understand Don John's experience, how might the play have turned out differently?

DON JOHN

Why am I thus out of measure sad? There is no measure in the occasion that breeds, therefore the sadness is without limit. I cannot hide what I am. I must be sad when I have cause, and smile at no man's jests; eat when I have stomach, and wait for no man's leisure. I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in their graces, and it better fits my blood to be disdained of all. If I had my mouth I would bite. In the meantime, let me be that I am, and seek not to alter me. I have intelligence of an intended marriage. The most exquisite Claudio looks on Hero. This may prove food to my displeasure. That young start-up hath all the glory: if I can cross him any way, I bless myself every way.

YOUTH VIOLENCE & MENTAL HEALTH STATISTICS

- 5% of students in this country miss school each day because of bullying. That translates to 160,000 students missing school daily.
- 57% of the time, bullying stops in 10 seconds or less when a bystander becomes an upstander.
- 20-25% of middle school students have been bullied in the past 30 days.
- 25% of high school youth have seriously considered suicide in the past year.
- In 2019, approximately 37% of middle and high school students reported experiencing cyberbullying in their lifetime, and 30% within the last 30 days (Source: Cyberbullying Research Center)
- More info: stopbullying.gov



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During the Performance: Things to Look For

- An opportunity to speak up and prevent harm
- Moments of empathy
- Moments of reconciliation
- A character attempting to solve a problem with violence
- A supportive friend
- Words used as weapons
- A character facing a mental health challenge
- A character making a decision based on unreliable information
- A character asking questions or stopping to think before making an important decision
- Warning signs (see below)

Warning Signs

During the performance, watch and listen for moments when a character is not okay, or might be on the verge of hurting themselves or others. Here are some examples of behaviors that might be reason for concern.

MENTAL HEALTH

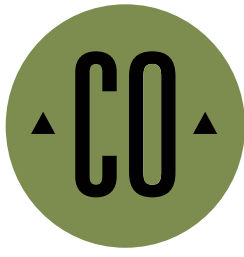
- having lost interest in things
- having low energy
- sleeping too much or too little
- spending more and more time alone
- engaging in self-harm
- having little to no interest in engaging with peers
- struggling academically or experiencing a decline in grades

SUICIDE

- talking about feeling hopeless
- having a lack of relationships and social support
- talking about wanting to die, kill oneself, or having no reason to live
- sleeping too little or too much
- seeing a local cluster of suicides
- having impulsive or aggressive tendencies
- experiencing a mental disorder (e.g., anxiety, depression, schizophrenia)

VIOLENCE

- threatening to harm another or expressing an intent to attack
- expressing intense or escalating anger
- experiencing sadness, depression, or isolation
- having an interest in weapons
- changing appearance or behavior
- attempting suicide and/or engaging in selfharm
- expressing an interest in violence
- speaking of suffering from or having suffered from aggressive bullying
- declining grades or attendance
- harassing others



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After the Performance: Discussion Questions

- What rumors are spread in the play?
- How are the rumors spread in the play?
- How are rumors spread in your community, school, etc.?
- How could you use social media and electronic communication to be an upstander in your community?
- Who believes rumors easily? Who questions the rumors they hear?
- What do you think of the reconciliation between Claudio and Hero? Does Claudio deserve forgiveness?
- What were some examples of positive, supportive relationships in the play?
- What were some examples of negative, unsupportive relationships?
- How do the characters change from the beginning of the play to the end? What causes these changes?
- What is empathy? Why is it important? How might empathy have changed the outcomes in the play?
- In a healthy community, everyone should feel supported and valued. When a person is mistreated or alienated, they often mistreat others in return. After watching the play, how could Don John have been more supported and invited back into the community? How would that have changed the outcome of the play?
- Read the full play, and imagine you will cut the play down to 45 minutes. Discuss what you would leave out and what you would need to keep. What do you see as the heart of the play?
- Actors use teamwork to trust one another when they are onstage. How is teamwork useful in school?
- How could you apply what you've learned here in your school? How could you apply this outside of school? If you saw someone struggling, how could you safely take action?

Cyberbullying

(from the Cyberbullying Research Center)

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets. Cyberbullying can occur through SMS, Text, and apps, or online in social media, forums, or gaming where people can view, participate in, or share content. Cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation. Some cyberbullying crosses the line into unlawful or criminal behavior.

Cyberbullying has unique concerns in that it can be:

Persistent – Digital devices offer an ability to immediately and continuously communicate 24 hours a day, so it can be difficult for children experiencing cyberbullying to find relief.

Permanent – Most information communicated electronically is permanent and public, if not reported and removed. A negative online reputation, including for those who bully, can impact college admissions, employment, and other areas of life.

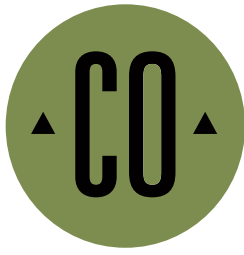
Hard to Notice – Because teachers and parents may not overhear or see cyberbullying taking place, it is harder to recognize.

Colorado Shakespeare Festival Education Programs

coloradoshakes.org/education
csfedout@colorado.edu
(303) 735-1181

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence

colorado.edu/cspv
(303) 492-1032



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Standing up to Cyberbullying

Top Ten Tips for Teens

Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D. and Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D.

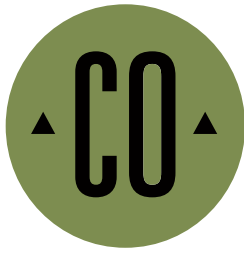
Don't be a bystander -- stand up to cyberbullying when you see it. Take action to stop something that you know is wrong. These **Top Ten Tips** will give you specific ideas of what **you can do** when you witness cyberbullying.

- 1. REPORT TO SCHOOL.** If the person being cyberbullied is someone from your school, report it to your school. Many have anonymous reporting systems to allow you to let them know what you are seeing without disclosing your identity.
- 2. COLLECT EVIDENCE.** Take a screenshot, save the image or message, or screen-record what you see. It will be easier for an adult to help if they can see -- and have proof of -- exactly what was being said.
- 3. REPORT TO SITE / APP / GAME.** All reputable online environments prohibit cyberbullying and provide easy tools to report violations. Don't hesitate to report; those sites/apps will protect your identity and not "out" you.
- 4. TALK TO A TRUSTED ADULT.** Develop relationships with adults you can trust and count on to help when you (or a friend) experience something negative online. This could be a parent, teacher, counselor, coach, or family friend.
- 5. DEMONSTRATE CARE.** Show the person being cyberbullied that they are not alone. Send them an encouraging text or snap. Take them aside at school and let them know that you have their back.
- 6. WORK TOGETHER.** Gather your other friends and organize a full-court press of positivity. Post kind comments on their wall or under a photo they've posted. Encourage others to help report the harm. There is strength in numbers.
- 7. TELL THEM TO STOP.** If you know the person who is doing the cyberbullying, tell them to knock it off. Explain that it's not cool to be a jerk to others. But say something -- if you remain silent, you are basically telling them that it is ok to do it.
- 8. DON'T ENCOURAGE IT.** If you see cyberbullying happening, don't support it in any way. Don't forward it, don't add emojis in the comments, don't gossip about it with your friends, and don't stand on the sidelines.
- 9. STAY SAFE.** Don't put yourself in harm's way. When your emotions are running high, resist posting something that may escalate the situation. Don't hang out online where most people are cruel. Never physically threaten others.
- 10. DON'T GIVE UP.** Think creatively about what can be done to stop cyberbullying. Brainstorm with others and use everyone's talents to do something epic!

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Mental Health and Suicide Prevention: How to Talk to Children and Youth

Office of Suicide Prevention, Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

A suicide death is a traumatic and difficult loss, and the impact of suicide can leave grieving individuals and communities with questions. One of the first questions people often ask is: Why? Why did this person die by suicide?

Suicide is always a complex issue: There is never just one reason why someone will attempt or die by suicide. Learning about a young person's death by suicide often evokes complicated feelings and raises an additional question: How should we talk with children and youth about mental health and suicide prevention?

It is important that adults establish open communication with children and youth to ask about their emotions, their worries, and what gives them hope. Being able to talk about complex and challenging emotions is a way to build and strengthen resilience, coping skills, and connections to caring, trusted adults. Although it can be scary, normalizing these conversations and being empathetic listeners can be the most important first step we can take in preventing suicides among children and youth and in supporting good mental health.

KEY TERMS

Child: those younger than age 12

Youth: those between ages 13 and 18

Young adults: those between 19 and 24

Young people: all of the above

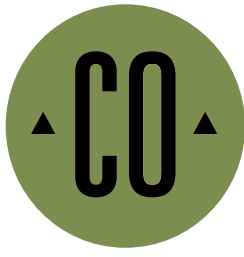
Understanding youth stressors

As parents, caregivers, and trusted adults, we can support youth and children with the stressors they face on a daily basis, and that, in rare circumstances, may contribute to suicidal behaviors and attempts. For a young person, factors that could contribute to a suicidal crisis might include a combination of the following:

- stress.
- feeling socially isolated.
- lack of sleep or irregular sleeping patterns.
- exposure to bullying.
- mental health conditions.
- adverse childhood experiences and traumatic experiences.
- discrimination about one's identity (gender identity and/or sexual orientation).
- periods of transition.
- economic stressors.

How to listen and offer support

In order to have open conversations around mental health with young people, it is important to show that we are listening: Ask questions that show we care, validate emotions, help build problem-solving skills (which is different from solving their problems for them), and make space and time for ongoing conversations.



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During these conversations, ask open-ended questions about mental health and listen closely and openly to the responses. Possible questions can be:

- Do you ever get sad or lonely? What do you do to feel better?
- Do you ever feel stressed? What do you do to feel less stressed out?
- Do you or your friends ever talk about hurting yourselves or wanting to die?

Sleep is an often overlooked stressor, and lack of sleep or irregular sleeping patterns can be a risk factor for suicide. Ample sleep can protect young people from many negative health consequences. Adults can support a young person's mental health by creating and maintaining healthy sleeping habits. It is recommended that children between the ages of 7 and 12 get 10-11 hours of sleep each night. Adults can help support a healthy sleeping environment by limiting access to social media at night, or by establishing routines that help ensure that a child or youth is getting the appropriate amount of sleep. Getting enough sleep is important for the mental well-being of people of any age!

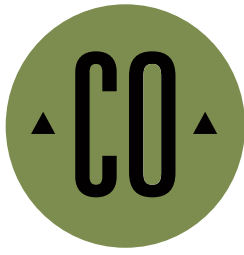
Knowing the warning signs and life-saving resources

Although suicide attempts and suicide deaths among youth and children are rare, even one death by suicide is too many. In order to prevent children and youth suicide attempts and deaths, it is important to be aware of the following potential warning signs that can indicate that the young person is severely depressed or having thoughts of suicide:

- Expressing unbearable emotional pain, feeling trapped, or hopelessness.
- Giving away prized possessions.
- Talking or posting on social media about suicide or wanting to die.
- Suddenly becoming calm or cheerful after a long period of depression.
- Looking for a way to kill themselves.
- Telling people "good-bye."
- Saying they wish they could fall asleep and never wake up, or that everyone would be better off without them.
- Change in sleeping patterns (including sleeping too much or too little).

If you are concerned about possible suicide risk for anyone, including a young person, please ask that person if they are thinking of hurting themselves or are having thoughts of suicide. Research clearly shows that talking or asking about suicide will not put the idea of suicide in their head. It shows that you are concerned about them and willing to help. Direct questions like, "Are you having thoughts of suicide?" or "Are you thinking of killing yourself?" are straightforward and ask for a clear yes/no answer.

If someone responds "yes," it is important to listen to their emotions and for information about a possible plan, including if the individual has identified how, where, and when they may attempt suicide. When an individual has specific plans regarding suicide, this can indicate a higher risk. No matter the level of specificity, it is important to connect an individual who is considering suicide with a mental health provider or mental health resources as soon as possible.



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If you are concerned that a loved one is struggling with a mental health crisis, is having thoughts of suicide, or if you just have a gut feeling that something is off, please call Colorado Crisis Services, available 24/7/365 at 1-844-493-8255. A trained crisis counselor will answer your call and help you navigate your situation.

Safer Environments Reduce Suicide Risk

When we consider how to reduce suicide risk, especially when someone is in a mental health crisis, a crucial first step is to reduce access to lethal means. Many suicide attempts occur with little planning during a short-term crisis, and ensuring that an environment is as safe as possible is essential in preventing potential suicide deaths.

Suicide attempts by firearms are particularly lethal. The majority of firearms used in youth suicides belong to a parent. Securing firearms or temporarily storing them away from the home greatly reduces the risk of a child or youth dying by suicide using a firearm. Safely and securely storing medications and substances also reduces risk. It is also important to continue to be aware of the individual and their environment. If an individual has shared that they are thinking about suicide, learning more about this despair and if they have a plan can also provide important information on how to keep an environment as safe as possible for that individual and everyone else.

In It Together

The best suicide prevention is comprehensive and collaborative. The more that people, organizations, and communities work together to support positive mental health, coping skills, resiliency, and openness around discussing suicide and mental health, the better the result for everyone, including young people. Talking about suicide with those we care about can feel scary, but there are resources in Colorado to help support you, your family, and your community.

Helpful Resources:

Colorado Office of Suicide Prevention: www.coosp.org

**Colorado Crisis Services: 1-844-493-8255, www.coloradocrisisservices.org.
Text TALK to 38255.**

The Trevor Project: www.thetrevorproject.org (for LGBTQ+ youth)

Colorado School Safety Resource Center: www.colorado.gov/cssrc

The Second Wind Fund: www.thesecondwindfund.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Colorado: www.namicolorado.org

The Suicide Prevention Coalition of Colorado: www.suicidepreventioncolorado.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention-CO Chapter: www.afsp.org/chapter/afsp-colorado

Mental Health Colorado: www.mentalhealthcolorado.org

The Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council: www.cbhc.org

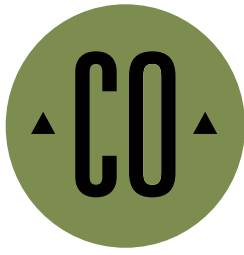
Youth Mental Health First Aid: www.MHFACO.org

For more information, please contact:

Lena Heilmann, Ph.D., M.N.M.

Director, Colorado Office of Suicide Prevention

lena.heilmann@state.co.us, 303.692.6366



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Tips from CSPV

HOW TO BE AN UPSTANDER

- Refuse to join in if someone tries to get you to taunt and torment another person.
- Get a teacher, parent, or other responsible adult to come help. This isn't snitching. You are saying that you don't think bullying is acceptable and don't want anyone to get hurt.
- Try to get the person being bullied to tell a trusted adult. Offer to go with them.
- Tell a trusted adult yourself if the person being bullied is unwilling to report it. Do not let the person behaving as a bully know so that they do not become aggressive toward you.

SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEYS

One of the most important components of a safe school is a climate where youth feel secure and supported in their learning environment. As part of the Safe Communities Safe Schools (SCSS) project, the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence offers school climate surveys, at a low cost, with options for students, staff, and parents. For more information about our surveys or to administer any of the SCSS Surveys at your school, please contact us via email at cspv@colorado.edu or by phone at 303-492-1032.

<https://cspv.colorado.edu/what-we-do/surveys/>

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"I can no other answer make but thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks."

-Twelfth Night

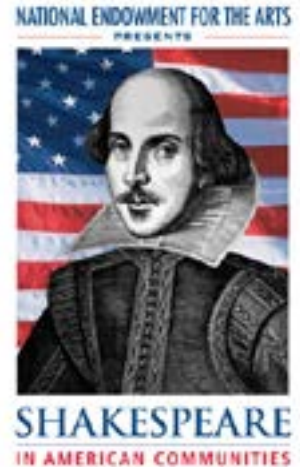
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Land Acknowledgment

We honor and acknowledge that the Colorado Shakespeare Festival resides on the traditional territories and ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute Nations. We recognize the sophisticated and intricate knowledge systems Indigenous people have developed in relationship to their lands and respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land. You can learn more about the original inhabitants where you live by searching your (or your school's) address at native-land.ca