

# Hamlet

## 2025-26 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 Tami LoSasso (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), Professor Kevin Rich (CU Theatre & Dance), and Josue Miranda (Spanish translator).

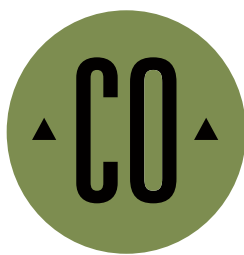
### COLORADO CURRICULUM STANDARDS

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
- School Counseling Standards

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## SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

### 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 *Hamlet* that explores the cycle of violence, using research from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence. In a 50-60 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, manipulation, suffering, and isolation. 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 HAMLET

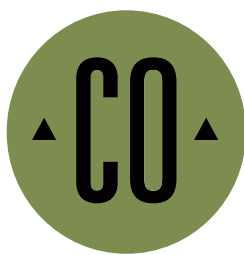
**Why this play?** Hamlet returns home from college to find his family life in shambles—his dad has died, his mom has hastily remarried his uncle, and things don't feel right. Haunted by visions of his father and disturbing stories about his corrupt uncle, Hamlet believes it falls to him to set things right. This abridged production of *Hamlet* is an opportunity to explore mental health, and how we show up for ourselves and others in the face of difficult circumstances. The play tackles grief, blended family conflict, romantic relationship mistreatment, revenge, depression, and suicidal ideation. Exploring this play through the lens of mental health and violence prevention can help young audiences connect with this 400-year-old story and invest in alternatives to the violence depicted.

**Actors Playing Actors** In CSF's touring production, our director, Kevin Rich, decided to employ a metatheatrical lens. The Players (actors) who are invited to perform at Elsinore Castle in Shakespeare's full-length version are now performing the events of *Hamlet* as they remember them. As they reenact the story, notice how the Players pause, interrupt, redirect, and reimagine Shakespeare's play. How can theatre help us imagine different outcomes in this 400-year old play? How can difficult experiences be transformed into artistic expression?

Shakespeare's version of this play has more than 30 characters; we combined some roles and eliminated others to focus on 9 central characters played by 3 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

*Hamlet* features the following content that may be disturbing to some students:

- death of a parent
- remarriage of a parent
- physical abuse
- murder and physical violence
- thoughts of suicide

We encourage you to have conversations with your students prior to the performance, particularly students who may have been personally impacted by the content above. Please work with your students to make the most appropriate decisions for them regarding viewing the performance and participating in post-show workshops.

**CSF can provide the script and lesson plan in advance if you are concerned about a particular topic.**

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](http://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](http://www.safe2tell.org)
- **Cyberbullying Research Center** (resources, research, and presentations about cyberbullying, directed by Dr. Sameer Hinduja and Dr. Justin W. Patchin): [cyberbullying.org](http://cyberbullying.org)
- This study guide also includes information and handouts on Standing up to Cyberbullying (pg. 13) and Mental Health & Suicide Prevention (pg. 14-16).

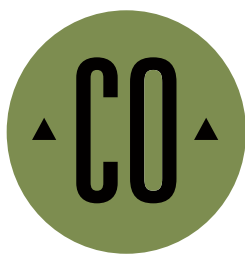
## SHAKESPEARE & VIOLENCE PREVENTION: A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK FOR EDUCATORS



Want to learn more about Violence Prevention and Shakespeare? This new book, authored by CSF Director of Outreach Amanda Giguere, explores 8 Shakespeare plays through the violence-prevention lens. Discover new strategies to approach Shakespeare as you learn about the overlaps between preventing violence and studying Shakespeare. The book includes an appendix of exercises, discussion questions, and activities to implement in the classroom.

Order a copy for your classroom [here](#).

For bulk orders, educator, and special sales, contact Beth Svinarich, [beth@upcolorado.com](mailto:beth@upcolorado.com)



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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?

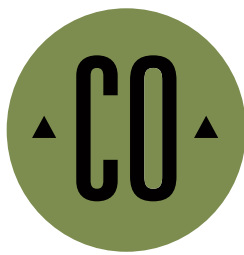
- ☐ Review Plot & Characters Overview (pg. 5-6) with your students.
- ☐ Use the Mini-Lesson Plan (pg. 7), Text Analysis, Empathy, and Character activities (pg. 8-10), and Things to Look For (pg. 11) to help your students think through some of the big questions presented in *Hamlet* in advance of the 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. 12) 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

## THE PLAYERS

After a harrowing experience in Elsinore Castle, a group of actors (“players”) struggles to make sense of what they witnessed. Finding themselves with a few costumes, some props, and an audience, they decide to retell the story of *Hamlet*.



## SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THE STATE OF DENMARK

Prince **Hamlet** has left school, and is now home in Denmark. His father, the king of Denmark, has died, and his mother (**Gertrude**) has quickly remarried his uncle (dad’s brother **Claudius**). Hamlet is haunted by visions of his father. In his vision, Hamlet’s father says he was murdered by Claudius. Hamlet shares this information with his friend **Horatio**, but swears Horatio to secrecy.



Gertrude



Hamlet



Hamlet’s dad  
(ghost)



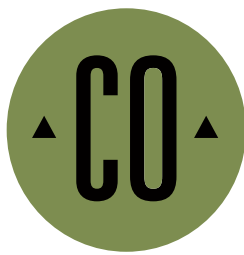
Claudius



Horatio

## 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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# Plot & Characters (cont'd)

## ANOTHER FAMILY IN THE CASTLE

The king's advisor **Polonius** bids farewell to his son **Laertes**, who's off to travel abroad, and instructs his daughter **Ophelia** to stop dating Hamlet. Hamlet starts acting erratically to buy himself time.



**Polonius**



**Laertes**



**Ophelia**

## THE PLAY'S THE THING

Hamlet hires a group of actors to stage a play that mimics his dad's murder, hoping that Claudius' reaction to the play might reveal his guilt. Hamlet accidentally kills Polonius, mistaking him for Claudius.

Overcome by grief after her father's death, Ophelia experiences a mental health crisis and drowns in a nearby body of water. Laertes returns and vows to avenge his father's death. Claudius and Laertes concoct a plan to challenge Hamlet to a friendly duel, with secret plans to poison Hamlet during the match.



**Gravedigger**

The comic relief. Cracks jokes in a graveyard. His casual, irreverent approach to death gets Hamlet thinking about mortality, impermanence, and loss.

## GOOD NIGHT, SWEET PRINCE

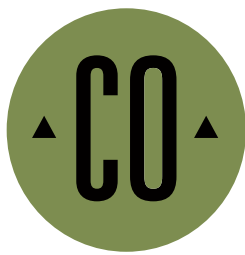
Although Horatio urges his friend to avoid the duel, Hamlet fights Laertes. During the match they are both wounded and poisoned, and Gertrude is accidentally poisoned. In his final moments, Hamlet kills Claudius, and then dies in his friend's arms. Horatio promises to tell Hamlet's story.



**Swing / Stage Manager**

Our stage manger, Emma, does a lot 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, Emma can perform in their place!





# Mini-Lesson Plan

## Before the Performance

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR TEACHERS

**Rationale:** These mini-lessons will introduce students to the plot, characters, and themes of the Colorado Shakespeare Festival's production of *Hamlet*, and prepare them to take part in a Shakespeare & Violence Prevention workshop with a CSF actor.

**Objective:** Students will analyze text from the play, put themselves in the shoes of the characters, and participate in a class discussion about mental health, violence prevention, and supporting peers who may be struggling.

**Instructions:** Use this study guide to introduce the characters, plot, and themes in *Hamlet* to your students. You may also wish to review the mental health warning signs on pg. 11.

Share the handouts on page 8-10 with your students. Encourage students to answer questions individually or in pairs, and then share responses 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

##### **School Counseling Standards (American School Counselor Association, [www.schoolcounselor.org](http://www.schoolcounselor.org))**

- Mindset standards: Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being / Sense of acceptance, respect, support and inclusion for self and others in the school environment
- Behavior Standards: Ethical decision-making and social responsibility / Social Skills / Empathy / Positive, respectful and supportive relationships with students who are similar to and different from them

## ACTIVITY 1: ANALYZING AND ADAPTING TEXTS

Share your version of the speech with your class and discuss how the choices made by each student / group impacts the overall effect of the speech. Did many of you choose to cut or re-phrase the same words / sentences? Why did you keep what you kept?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

## ACTIVITY #2A: TEXT ANALYSIS, EMPATHY, AND MENTAL HEALTH

### General Instructions:

In this activity, we'll analyze a speech, or "soliloquy," from *Hamlet*, then analyze what the speech reveals about character, context, mental health, and warning signs.

1. Read the passage below aloud as a class, taking turns with the punctuation (commas, hyphens, etc.).

2. On your own or with a partner, paraphrase the text in your own words. Look up words you don't know, help each other with meaning, etc.

3. Underline the language that indicates how Hamlet is feeling—what are the signs that he might be struggling?

4. In a larger group or as a class, discuss the following questions:

- Why might Hamlet be feeling the way he's feeling?
- What kind of support does he need right now?
- Imagine you are Hamlet's friend—what could you say or do to try to help?
- Identify three resources that could help Hamlet with his current situation.
- What connections do you see between the feelings Hamlet is expressing here and the violence that occurs later in the play?
- How might mental health support in your school or community help to prevent violence?

### HAMLET'S ORIGINAL SOLILOQUY

I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises, and, indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the Earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestic roof, fretted with golden fire—why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable; in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals—and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me.

### YOUR VERSION (PARAPHRASED)

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### 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.
- 11.1% of high school students and 17% of middle school students seriously considered suicide in the past year.
- 28.4% had a friend tell them they had thoughts of suicide one or more times in the last 12 months.
- 73.9% of high school students have experienced the death of a family member or close friend.
- More info: [stopbullying.gov](https://stopbullying.gov), 2023 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

## ACTIVITY #2B: TEXT ANALYSIS, EMPATHY, AND MENTAL HEALTH

### General Instructions:

In this activity, we will analyze a speech from *Hamlet*, then analyze what the speech reveals about character, context, mental health, and warning signs for those witnessing a loved one in crisis.

1. Read the passage below aloud as a class, taking turns with the punctuation (commas, hyphens, etc.).
2. On your own or with a partner, paraphrase the text in your own words. Look up words you don't know, help each other with meaning, etc.
3. Underline language that indicates how Ophelia is feeling or what she has observed in Hamlet. What are the signs that either or both of them might be struggling?

4. In a larger group or as a class, discuss the following questions:

- How is Hamlet's mental health and behavior affecting Ophelia?
- How does gender impact Ophelia's experience here?
- Ophelia may have a chance to be an "upstander" (someone who chooses to help) - what actions could she take to help Hamlet?
- Ophelia is also impacted by Hamlet's crisis and behavior. Imagine you are Ophelia's friend. What could you say or do to help *her*? Identify three resources that could help Ophelia with her current situation.
- Based on what you know right now about the play, what's the best case scenario for what might happen next for Ophelia? What's the worst case scenario for her? What makes the difference between these two outcomes?
- How might mental health support in your school or community help people who are struggling? How might those tools help people who are witnessing mental health struggles in loved ones?
- How can you balance empathy for the people around you without sacrificing your own well-being?

### OPHELIA'S ORIGINAL SOLILOQUY

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!  
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue,  
sword,  
Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,  
The glass of fashion and the mold of form,  
Th' observed of all observers, quite, quite down!  
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,  
That sucked the honey of his musicked vows,  
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,  
Like sweet bells jangled, out of time and harsh;  
That unmatched form and stature of blown youth  
Blasted with ecstasy. O, woe is me  
T' have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

### YOUR VERSION (PARAPHRASED)

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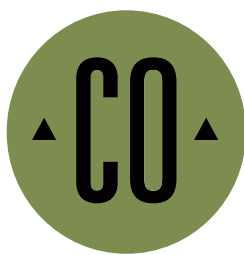
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## During the Performance: Things to Look For

- A character who keeps a secret
- A character experiencing a mental health crisis
- A character attempting to solve a problem with violence
- An unsupportive parent
- An act of physical or emotional violence
- A supportive friend
- A character asking questions or stopping to think before making an important decision
- A character trying to control or manipulate others
- Warning signs (see below)
- A character who asks for help

## 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)

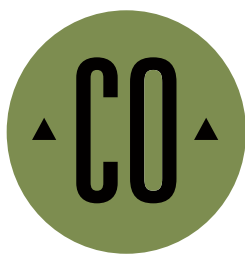
### VIOLENCE

- 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 self-harm
- expressing an interest in violence
- speaking of suffering from or having suffered from aggressive bullying
- declining grades or attendance
- harassing others



**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. Safe2Tell sends the report to the school who then looks into the safety concern.

**REPORT: (877) 542-7233 | [safe2tell.org](https://safe2tell.org) | Mobile app | Text S2TCO to 738477**



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# After the Performance: Discussion Questions

- When Hamlet learns that his father was murdered, he says “O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right.” Why does Hamlet believe it is his responsibility to set things right? How might things have turned out differently if Hamlet was not shouldering the full burden of his father’s death?
- How would you describe the community of Elsinore (where the play is set)? What behaviors and norms are accepted? What changes might you introduce at the community level that could lead to healthier outcomes for the characters in the play?
- What were some examples of healthy, supportive relationships in the play?
- What are some examples of negative, unsupportive relationships in the play?
- How do the characters change from the beginning of the play to the end? What causes these changes?
- What is empathy? How might empathy have changed the outcomes in the play? How can you balance empathy for the people around you without sacrificing your own well-being?
- You are watching this play as part of a violence prevention program—but *Hamlet* depicts a LOT of violence! How can watching a play in which people hurt others help shed light on our own time, our own world? How does it make you feel to watch a play in which violence occurs? Why do YOU think the Colorado Shakespeare Festival is using Shakespeare’s plays to think about violence?
- Read the full play (or watch a film version) and imagine what you would cut to get the play down to a one-hour version. What would you leave out and what y would you 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 with difficult circumstances or big feelings, 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.

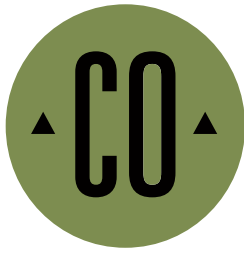
**Hard to Notice** – Because teachers and parents may not overhear or see cyberbullying taking place, it is harder to recognize.

### 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.

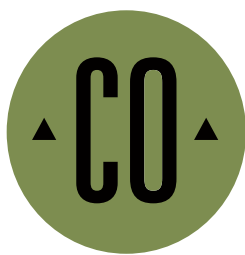
Don't be a bystander -- stand up to cyberbullying when you see it. Take action to stop something that you know is wrong. These **Top Ten Tips** will give you specific ideas of what **you can do** when you witness cyberbullying.

- 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

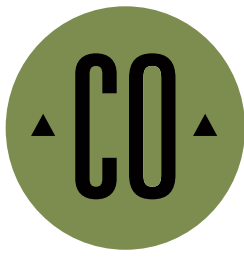
## Understanding youth stressors

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**

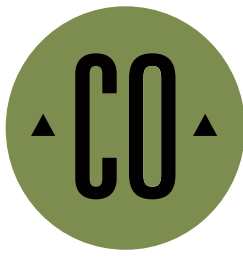
Although suicide attempts and suicide deaths among youth and children are rare, even one death by suicide is too many. In order to prevent children and youth suicide attempts and deaths, it is important to be aware of the following potential warning signs that can indicate that the young person is severely 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 or text 988 (or visit [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org)), 24/7/365.**

## **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](https://www.coosp.org)

**988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline:** Call or text “988” or visit [www.988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org).

**The Trevor Project:** [www.thetrevorproject.org](https://www.thetrevorproject.org) (for LGBTQ+ youth)

**Colorado School Safety Resource Center:** [www.colorado.gov/cssrc](https://www.colorado.gov/cssrc)

**The Second Wind Fund:** [www.thesecondwindfund.org](https://www.thesecondwindfund.org)

**National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Colorado:** [www.namicolorado.org](https://www.namicolorado.org)

**The Suicide Prevention Coalition of Colorado:** [www.suicidepreventioncolorado.org](https://www.suicidepreventioncolorado.org)

**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention-CO Chapter:** [www.afsp.org/chapter/afsp-colorado](https://www.afsp.org/chapter/afsp-colorado)

**Mental Health Colorado:** [www.mentalhealthcolorado.org](https://www.mentalhealthcolorado.org)

**The Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council:** [www.cbhc.org](https://www.cbhc.org)

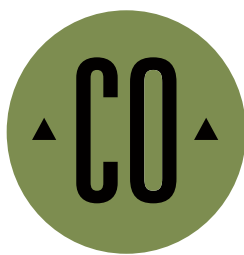
**Youth Mental Health First Aid:** [www.MHFACO.org](https://www.MHFACO.org)

For more information, please contact:

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Director, Colorado Office of Suicide Prevention

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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](mailto:cspv@colorado.edu) or by phone at 303-492-1032.

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

## Program Sponsors

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

*-Twelfth Night*

The Colorado Shakespeare Festival is deeply grateful for the support of these generous sponsors, who make the Shakespeare & Violence Prevention program possible.



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