



Texas Suicide Fact Sheet: Hispanic Americans

FAQ

Q: Are suicide risk factors different for the Hispanic/Latino population than other groups?

A: While the majority of risk factors apply to all ethnic groups (see other side), there are additional risk factors that can sometimes appear in the Hispanic/ Latino community. These include:

- ▶ **Generational differences, beliefs and customs:** Differences between generations can increase family conflict and problems, which can increase risk for suicide.
- ▶ **Added stress for recent immigrants:** Hispanic/Latino immigrants tend to arrive with less money, fewer social networks, less employment opportunities and experience more discrimination than other immigrant groups.
- ▶ **Reduced access to professional mental health assistance:** Language barriers, cost of care, and cultural stigma relative to mental health all increase risk.

Q: Are suicide protective factors different for the Hispanic/Latino population than other groups?

A: As with risk factors, the majority of protective factors are the same for all ethnic groups. However, research has shown the following protective factors to be especially strong in the Hispanic/ Latino community:

- ▶ **Familism:** Placing shared family needs over those of the individual while offering the individual family group support.
- ▶ **Moral Objections:** Individuals identifying themselves as Hispanic have registered higher levels of moral opposition to suicide.
- ▶ **Ethnic Affiliation and Pride:** Greater pride in this area is associated with a lower risk of drug use. Drug use is a suicide risk factor.
- ▶ **Birthplace:** Hispanic youth born outside of the U.S. have a lower suicide attempt rate than Hispanic youth born in the U.S.

Q: Are there specific segments of the Hispanic/Latino population that seem to be more "at risk" than others?

A: Yes, recent research indicates Hispanic/Latino female teens are particularly vulnerable to suicide attempts. In fact, according to the Youth Behavioral Risk Survey 2011 results, compared to other demographic groups, high school-age Hispanic/Latino females reported:

- ▶ Nearly 20% higher rates of "seriously considered attempting suicide"
- ▶ 25% higher rates of "having made a suicide plan"
- ▶ Nearly double the rate of having made a suicide attempt
- ▶ Nearly double the rate of having made an attempt requiring treatment by a doctor or nurse

Q: Are suicide protective factors different for Hispanic/Latino female teens?

A: Research by Dr. Luis Zayas (founder of the Center for Latino Family Research and current dean of the School of Social Work at The University of Texas at Austin) reports that there are specific protective factors for Hispanic/Latino female teens that may aid in preventing suicide. These include: greater support from friends and family, and a greater ability to deal with problems at home.

Q: Are there specific risk factors associated with Hispanic/Latino female teens?

A: Dr. Luis Zayas also found that Hispanic/Latino female teens had added risk factors associated with this demographic.

Hispanics/Latinos May Soon Be the Majority in Texas

People of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity account for a substantial portion of the Texas population. In fact, in 2010, nearly 10 million people of Hispanic/Latino descent resided in Texas—over 1/3 of the total state population. This number is expected to grow significantly in coming years, accounting for 60% of the total Texas population within a few short decades. As a result, suicide prevention initiatives must be culturally competent in addressing the needs of this substantial portion of our population.

Hispanic female teens who had attempted suicide were more likely to have conflict with their parents and reported lower levels of affection, support, and communication with their parents. Dr. Zayas' research also found that overwhelming emotions such as feeling trapped, helpless, and agitated often acted as "triggers" for suicide attempts.

Warning Signs

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means
- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person
- Feeling hopeless
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society
- Feeling rage or uncontrolled anger, or seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities—seemingly without thinking
- Experiencing dramatic mood changes
- Feeling trapped—like there's no way out
- Feeling anxious, agitated
- Not sleeping or sleeping all the time
- Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life

What Should I Do If I'm Concerned?

If you suspect that someone you know is thinking about suicide, the best way to approach the situation is to ask.

Asking is the first step in saving a life and is an important way to show that you are hearing them and that you will listen. You can ask the question directly (examples: "Have you thought about suicide?" "Do you want to kill yourself?" "Are you thinking about suicide?") or indirectly (examples: "Sometimes when people are sad as you are, they think about suicide. Have you ever thought about it?" "Do you ever want to go to bed and never wake up?"). Once you've asked, follow the steps in the blue box.

Find a private area to talk and seek to establish a relationship (if it is someone you don't already know well). Comment on what you see and observe non-judgmentally and be curious about the perceived problem (how long they've thought about suicide, if they've attempted in the past). Seek to find out if they are at immediate high risk of suicide (**see below**). Find out to who and where they normally go for help and if they have a regular doctor, mental health provider or counselor (if you don't already know this information). Always be sure to be aware of your own non-verbal reactions and tone of voice.

If you feel that someone is at risk for suicide, take all signs seriously and refer him or her to a mental health professional or one of the additional resources below.

If you feel that someone is at a high risk for suicide (he or she has a plan and/or access to means such as pills or a gun), do not leave the person alone. Call 911, seek immediate help from a mental health provider at school or in the community, call a mobile crisis outreach team, or take him or her to the nearest hospital emergency room.

Mental Health Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org • 1-800-273-Talk (8255)

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
www.afsp.org

Help Lines
 Pick up phone and dial 211
 Or 1-800-833-5948

School Counselors, Doctors, Nurses, Mental Health Professionals, Religious Leaders

Mental Health America of Texas
www.mhatexas.org

Texas Suicide Prevention Council
www.TexasSuicidePrevention.org

Boys Town 24/7 Hotline (for all teens, parents, and families)
 1-800-448-3000