

Dear reader,

My name is Scott M Carter and I am Clinical Mental Health Counselor that is licensed through the state of Utah. I am the founder of the resiliency alliance. Even though I am mass producing this material, this is my personal letter to you. I may not know you on a personal level but I just want to express my appreciation that you are taking this on and choosing to read this material and be a part of the resiliency alliance. Perhaps you are a concerned parent, foster parent, guardian, caretaker, teacher, school counselor, nurse or whomever; it doesn't particularly matter. I am so happy and glad to have your participation in the resiliency alliance. We have many objectives at the resilience project but all of them are centered on one paramount goal: to reverse the trend of increasing rates of teen suicide in Utah by promoting resilience and the continuance of life. The words resiliency and alliance were chosen for very specific purposes. Resiliency because we believe that this really is the critical concept and practice for decreasing the rates of suicide and alliance because it will also be crucial to make this a collective effort. I want our kids to know that they matter to us and we are here to make sure that they know they are important and we are going to fight for them.

My main message that I want to communicate to you is that you are the difference makers. You are the ones that can make the biggest difference to the teens that are struggling the most. Especially if you are a parent. Regardless of what your relationship with your teenager is, I believe that the key to making a difference is in your hands. I have done my very best to compile the best information in the most brief and concise manner that is designed to put the power back into parents and families to improve the attitude of resilience in our youth but I believe that the difference has to be made within the family. Please refer to all the information inside for principles, practices and ideas to promote the ideas of resilience in your home and your family.

There are two packets included: Packet one is the intervention and advocacy packet. This packet is designed to help you intervene effectively to prevent suicide. Packet 2 is the family resilience packet, it is designed to be an introduction to increasing resilience in your family. It is relatively short and is packed with good information. There is also an extra credit packet with it if like the idea of resilience and want to do more to promote these ideas and practices in your home. Packet 3 is called critical conversations and it takes a bit more serious tone and angle at some of the contributing teen suicidal factors.

Please make it your active goal to make changes on an individual and family level. I know this process can be hard but it comes with the potential for a high reward. If you find this information useful, please share it with somebody else. Anyone that has children, regardless of how young. Our collective efforts are what will make the difference.

If you are worried about your child and don't know what to do, please don't hesitate to seek help as this material is not intended to be a fix or a cure but instead serve as a help and a resource. Thank you again for taking a part in the resilience project.

Sincerely,

Scott M Carter, CMHC

List of community resources

University of Utah crisis hotline (University Neuropsychiatric Institute Mobile Crisis Outreach Team or “MCOT,” Salt Lake County only) 801.587.3000. This is a good resource for those who are unsure what to do and need help in time of crisis.

National suicide prevention hotline: 1-800-273-8255

Find a local therapist in your area via psychology today: www.psychologytoday.com - Click on “find a therapist.”

SafeUT smartphone app: This app is sponsored by the University of Utah neuropsychiatric institute. It’s a free app that allows people to chat with someone, call someone, submit a tip from someone who is concerned, etc. We recommend that every parent have it installed on their teens phone.

Frequently Asked Questions

What do I do if I think my teen might be suicidal?

The first thing that you need to do is talk to them and open a dialogue. For ideas on how to open these kinds of conversations, please refer to the packet number 2 for information on how to better facilitate this dialogue. The right response and the right dialogue can make a big difference.

How do I know if my teen is serious about suicide or not?

A lot of people think about, contemplate suicide or consider it to be an option without any serious intentions. Open and productive dialogue can often reduce an individual's intentions. In most cases, it's important for a trained and experienced professional to help make this determination. If you are unsure, please get help from a qualified mental health professional. They can help you make an accurate assessment.

What should I do if my teen is serious about suicide?

One of your first and best options is to take them to the hospital emergency room. Every emergency room has a crisis worker that is a licensed therapist. They will work with the medical staff in the ER to determine the risk level, explore options, establish safety contracts and safety plans and connect you with resources.

What if my teen refuses to go to the emergency room?

One option is the UNI crisis line and mobile crisis team. Depending on your insurance plan and location, they can send a crisis response team directly to your home. You can also call emergency services and get help from police and emergency medical technicians.

What are some of the additional steps that I can take?

One of the most important things that you can do is to get rid of or at least reduce the accessible to dangerous things. While it's not possible to eliminate every means by which a person can harm themselves, the idea is to get rid of or reduce the accessibility of the most lethal means.

- Get rid of firearms or keep them locked in a safe.
- Lock up medications that can become lethal quickly.
- Get rid of long lengths of rope.
- Get rid of or lock up lethal chemicals such as bleach or drain cleaner.

You can make it a goal to spend at least ten minutes a day talking to your teen. Just sit down with them and ask them how their day went and ask them how they are doing.

Advocating for Your Teen When they are in Crisis

Sooner or later, everyone has a crisis and even though the specific topic of this packet is suicide, in times of crisis, everyone needs a supportive advocate. Sometimes all we need is to know that someone cares. When someone is seriously considering suicide, they often do so because they are overwhelmed by feelings that they aren't loved or that there isn't a single person that cares about them. One man, who was very close to completing the act stated that the only thing that stopped him was the thought of his mom. He said that he knew that she would be completely devastated so he stopped right before he ended it and started looking for help. He went to therapy and found a therapist that he worked well with. It made a huge difference for him and he has continued to live a full and happy life.

When we talk to teens who are thinking seriously about suicide, we have found that it is far more effective to come from a place of love and support because this is the obvious answer to one important question: If they are suicidal, what do they need? Maybe a close second would be the question of what is most effective. What will help them become less suicidal and feel more hopeful and optimistic in a short amount of time? We, at the Resiliency Alliance, contend that being an advocate for your teen is the most effective thing you can do.

Here's how to advocate for your teen:

- Give them a front row seat in making a determination of what they need and how they can be helped.
- Ask them what they need.
- Ask them what you can do to help them.
- Focus on their strengths and what you love about them.
- Make sure that they know how important they are to you.
- Express empathy, draw from your own experiences and remember times when you were feeling down and you were struggling, this will help you relate to their experiences by reflecting on your own.
- Help them get those needs met.
- Focus on making changes and improvements; help show that life can improve.
- Listen and empathize; don't tell them how to think and feel.
- Show them that you will fight for them and do anything to find the right answers.

Your goal is simply to show that you are on their side, that you are here to help fight their battles for them and support them.

Life Improvement Plan

Typically, a safety plan and/or a contract for safety is used by professionals to help ensure that an individual won't inflict harm onto themselves. Unfortunately, there's not a lot of evidence that shows that these are effective. If a suicidal individual goes anywhere to be evaluated by a crisis worker and is assessed for suicide, that crisis worker will fill out a safety plan and/or a contract for safety. There is research, however, that indicates that a more effective approach is to create a life improvement plan. When people are suicidal, they feel hopeless and lose sight of the fact that life can be improved; that it can get better. Instead of trying to work off a "hang in there" attitude, we believe it's more effective to build on the idea and attitude that life has a lot of good things in the past, present and future.

What are some of your favorite memories:

What things do I enjoy doing more than anything else?

What is something that I haven't done in awhile but want to do again soon:

Write a bucket list, don't hold back, what places do you want to visit, what fun things do you want to do, what experiences would you like to have, what kinds of things do you want to do as an adult, getting married, having a family, what kind of pet do you want someday, what goals do you have for your life, etc :

What areas of your life do you want to improve? Examples: More friends, more fun activities with friends, better relationships with family members, feeling better about myself, doing better in school, getting better at something, reconnecting with a friend or family member.

What things in your life need to change the most? What changes need to happen in order to help you feel more hope?
