



SUICIDAL THOUGHTS AND AUTISM: ONE FAMILY'S JOURNEY

PREVENT SUICIDE WISCONSIN
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WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT AUTISM?

- Social/Communication Difficulties
- Repetitive Behavior/Restrictive Behavior and/or Thinking
- Sensory Issues (Common)

SOME OF WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT AUTISM AND SUICIDE

Kennedy Krieger April 2024

- 36.2% wanting to die
- 35.2% wanting end their own life
- 18.1% having a suicide planned

WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

- Autistic people are at higher risk
- Autistic females are a higher risk of suicide attempts and self-harm, but mortality and ideation are similar in females and males.
- Late diagnosed autistic adults

WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

- Risk is higher for those without a co-occurring IDD
- Co-occurring mental health issues

POSSIBLE IMPACT OF BEING AUTISTIC

- General risk factors more common in autistics
- Plus trauma/painful life experiences
- Plus barriers to access

POSSIBLE IMPACT OF BEING AUTISTIC

- Ruminatation (core feature)
- Camouflaging/Masking
- Double Empathy (communication core feature)
 - Feelings of Isolation and Burdensomeness
 - Thwarted Belonging

POSSIBLE IMPACT OF BEING AUTISTIC

- More communication challenges (core)
 - Identify feelings
 - Identify own risk
- Caregiver communication

POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS

- Sudden or increase withdrawal
- Loss of words/communication
- Current traumatic event
- Marked increase in rate/severity of self-harm
- Worsening anxiety and/or depression

POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS

- Death and suicide becoming an item of interest
- Perseverative suicidal thoughts
- Seeking means/making plans
- Statements – no sense of purpose, threats
- Hopelessness

POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS

- Regression
- Increase in repetitive behavior
- Preoccupation with death on media
- Reckless/High Risk behavior
- Chronic pain

POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS

- Decreased response to reinforcers
- Increase irritability/crying/sadness/agitation
- Negative self-statements

HUNTER'S STORY

- Downward spiral
- Not talking about
- Preparation
- That day – impulsive, just enough
- Small voice – talk

HUNTER'S STORY

Autism and the Spiral

Late diagnosis—not seen by anyone

Not asking for help – hiding/isolation

HUNTER'S STORY

Autism and Recovery

Hyper fixation on things

Choose to hyper-fixate on talking about it

HOW I SELF-ADVOCATE -- HUNTER

- Tools

- Self-Talk
- When I get angry, I lose
- Breath (Deep Breathing)
- 3 Rs
- Music

HOW I SELF-ADVOCATE -- HUNTER

- Tools

- Look at an area and take a mental break
- Become aware of thoughts

HOW I SELF-ADVOCATE -- HUNTER

- Life is hard, not hopeless
- Roll with punches
- Get back up
- Medication

HOW I SELF-ADVOCATE -- HUNTER

- Make an effort to make friends and stay connected
 - Theatre
 - Discord
 - Gaming
 - Work
- Make an effort to engage & open up

STEPS TO SELF-ADVOCACY -- HUNTER

- Search for people who accept/work to understand you
- Continue to be who you are
- Don't let others dictate who you are
- Ask questions/keep learning
- Accept you will always be different
- Accept who you are— more than label

HOW I SUPPORT -- TIM

- Time
- Notice
- Ask questions
- Offer help (not demand its acceptance)
- What really matters

TIPS TO SUPPORTING

- Ask – concretely and literally
- Keep it short
- Avoid talking in childish language
- Use visual aids – how do they normally communicate?
- Share your concern and they won't get in trouble

TIPS TO SUPPORTING

- Allow processing time Allow more processing time
- Be aware of people pleasing – get more points of view
- Active listening, empathy, non-judgmental, validate

IF YOU DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING ELSE

TIM: Taking care of ourselves gives us the energy and space to notice others.

HUNTER:



THANK YOU!

QUESTIONS?

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RESOURCES

- Risk Factors, Warning Signs, Crisis Supports and Suicide Prevention for the Autism Community with Lisa Morgan – Recording and Resource Sheet from Conversation in April of 2023

<https://crcsouth.waisman.wisc.edu/autism-acceptance-month-2023/>

- Lisa Morgan Consulting, LLC

<https://www.autismcrisissupport.com/resources>

RESOURCES

- autistica <https://www.autistica.org.uk/what-is-autism/suicide-and-autism>
- JAMA Pediatrics Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors Among Children and Adolescents With Autism Spectrum Disorder
<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2817132>
- Molecular Autism 2018 <https://www.deepdyve.com/lp/pubmed-central/risk-markers-for-suicidality-in-autistic-adults-7xxeh4AqNG>

RESOURCES

- 6 Reasons Autistic People Are at Greater Risk of Suicide

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/women-with-autism-spectrum-disorder/202302/6-reasons-autistic-people-are-at-greater-risk-of>

- Texas Health and Human Services

<https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/idd-suicide-prevention-flyer.pdf>