

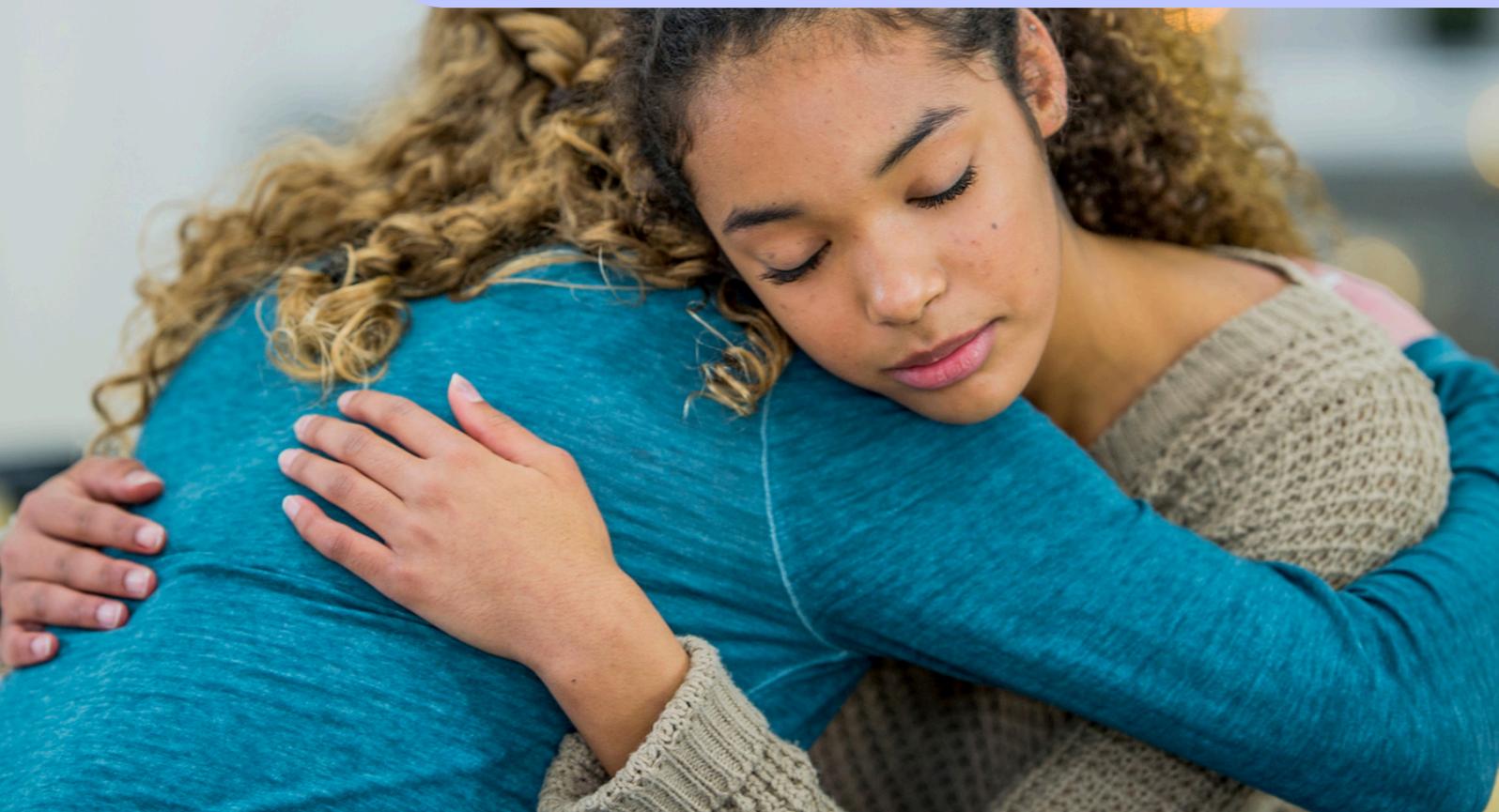
**Silence
the ~~Shame~~**

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD AFTER A SUICIDE LOSS

A PARENT'S GUIDE

The loss of a student to suicide affects the entire school community. As a parent, you play an essential role in helping your child navigate this difficult experience. This guide provides practical strategies to support your child while being mindful of your emotional needs.

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WHAT'S INSIDE

3 **Understanding Suicide**



7 **Differentiating Normal Teen Mood Swings from Emotional Distress**



8 **Communication**



13 **Coping Strategies & Support**



20 **Resources**



21 **Connecting with Silence the Shame**





WHAT IS SUICIDE?

Suicide is the act of intentionally ending one's own life. It is often the result of overwhelming emotional pain, mental health disorders, or a combination of factors that can include trauma, substance abuse, and social isolation. Understanding that suicide is a complex issue can help in addressing the stigma surrounding it and in fostering open conversations about mental health.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS



TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE WILL ENCOURAGE IT.

MYTH

Open discussions about suicide can help reduce stigma and encourage individuals to seek help.

ONLY PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES DIE BY SUICIDE.

MYTH

While mental health issues are a significant risk factor, people from all backgrounds and circumstances can experience suicidal thoughts.

SUICIDE IS A SELFISH ACT.

MYTH

Individuals who die by suicide often feel trapped in their pain and may believe their loved ones would be better off without them.

WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE

RECOGNIZING THE WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE CAN BE CRUCIAL IN PREVENTING IT. HERE ARE SOME COMMON INDICATORS THAT SOMEONE MAY BE AT RISK:

VERBAL SIGNS



- Talking About Wanting to Die: Expressing a desire to end their life or feeling hopeless.
- Mentioning Feelings of Burden: Statements like “I wish I could disappear” or “Everyone would be better off without me.”
- Discussing Unbearable Pain: Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable emotional pain.

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS



- Withdrawal: Isolating from friends, family, and activities they once enjoyed.
- Changes in Mood: Experiencing extreme mood swings, irritability, or sudden calmness after a period of depression.
- Risky Behaviors: Engaging in reckless activities or substance abuse.



EMOTIONAL SIGNS



- **Feelings of Hopelessness:** Expressing feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness about the future.
- **Increased Anxiety or Agitation:** Heightened levels of anxiety or agitation that seem out of character.
- **Loss of Interest:** A noticeable disinterest in previously enjoyed activities or hobbies.

PHYSICAL SIGNS



- **Changes in Sleep Patterns:** Insomnia or sleeping excessively.
- **Changes in Appetite:** Significant weight loss or gain due to changes in eating habits.
- **Physical Complaints:** Frequent headaches, stomachaches, or other unexplained physical symptoms.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU NOTICE WARNING SIGNS



- **Take Them Seriously:** Always take any mention of suicide seriously.
- **Talk Openly:** Encourage open dialogue about their feelings. Ask direct questions about their thoughts on suicide.
- **Seek Help:** If you believe someone is in immediate danger, contact emergency services or a mental health professional right away.

UNDERSTANDING NORMAL MOOD SWINGS

Adolescence is a time of significant emotional and physical changes. It's common for teens to experience mood swings due to hormonal changes, social pressures, academic stress, and identity exploration. Normal mood swings may include:

- **Short-lived Changes:** Mood shifts that last for a few hours or a day.
- **Situational Triggers:** Changes in mood that correlate with specific events, such as arguments with friends or stress from school.
- **Generalized Emotions:** Feelings of sadness or irritability that are not persistent and often resolve on their own.



SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

While mood swings are normal, certain signs may indicate deeper emotional distress that requires attention:

- **Persistent Changes:** Mood changes that last for weeks or months without improvement.
- **Severe Irritability or Anger:** Intense anger or irritability that seems disproportionate to the situation.
- **Withdrawal from Activities:** A significant loss of interest in activities they once enjoyed, leading to isolation.
- **Changes in Sleep or Appetite:** Noticeable changes in sleeping patterns (insomnia or excessive sleeping) or eating habits (loss of appetite or overeating).
- **Decline in Academic Performance:** A sudden drop in grades or lack of motivation to complete schoolwork.
- **Expressing Hopelessness:** Frequent comments about feeling worthless, hopeless, or expressing a desire to escape life.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE UNSURE

- **Observe Patterns:** Keep track of your child's mood changes and any accompanying behaviors. Look for patterns that may indicate a deeper issue.
- **Engage in Conversation:** Talk to your child about their feelings and experiences. Encourage them to share what's on their mind.
- **Consult a Professional:** If you're concerned about your child's emotional well-being, consider seeking advice from a mental health professional. They can provide guidance and support tailored to your child's needs.



TALKING WITH TEENS WHO DON'T LIKE TO TALK

UNDERSTANDING RELUCTANCE TO COMMUNICATE



Many teens may be hesitant to open up about their feelings, especially after a traumatic event like a suicide loss. This reluctance can stem from various factors, including:

- **Fear of Judgment:** Worrying about how parents or peers will perceive their feelings.
- **Desire for Independence:** A natural inclination to assert independence and handle emotions on their own.
- **Difficulty Expressing Emotions:** Struggling to articulate complex feelings or not knowing how to start the conversation.

STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION

1

Create a Comfortable Environment: Choose a relaxed setting for conversations, such as during a walk or while doing a shared activity. This can help reduce pressure and make your teen feel more at ease.



2

Use Open-Ended Questions: Instead of asking yes/no questions, ask open-ended questions that encourage discussion. For example, “What do you think about what happened at school?” or “How have you been feeling lately?”



3

Be Patient and Available: Let your teen know you’re there for them without pushing them to talk. Sometimes, being present can encourage them to open up when ready.



4

Share Your Own Feelings: Model vulnerability by sharing your own feelings about the loss. This can help your teen feel less alone and more comfortable expressing their emotions.



5

Use Alternative Communication Methods: If verbal communication is challenging, suggest writing letters or journaling as a way to express feelings. This can be less intimidating for some teens.



6

Respect Their Space: If your teen isn’t ready to talk, respect their need for space. Let them know that you’re available whenever they feel ready to share.



7

Encourage Professional Support: If your teen continues to struggle with communication, consider suggesting they speak with a counselor or therapist. A professional can provide a safe space for them to express their feelings.



COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES



LISTEN MORE THAN YOU SPEAK:



Prioritize active listening. Give your child your full attention, and show that you value their thoughts and feelings. This can help them feel heard and understood.



VALIDATE FEELINGS WITHOUT JUDGMENT:



Acknowledge your child's emotions, even if you don't fully understand them. Use phrases like "It's okay to feel this way" or "I can see you're really upset." Validation helps them feel accepted and encourages further sharing.



USE DIRECT, AGE-APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE:



Tailor your language to your child's age and maturity level. Avoid euphemisms or overly complex explanations. Being clear and straightforward can help them grasp the seriousness of the situation.

COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES



SHARE YOUR OWN FEELINGS APPROPRIATELY:

It's okay to express your emotions but be mindful not to overwhelm your child. Sharing your feelings can help normalize emotions and show that it's okay to talk about difficult topics.



ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS:

Encourage deeper conversations by asking questions that require more than a yes or no answer. For example, "What do you think about what happened?" or "How are you coping with this?" This invites them to share their thoughts and feelings more freely.

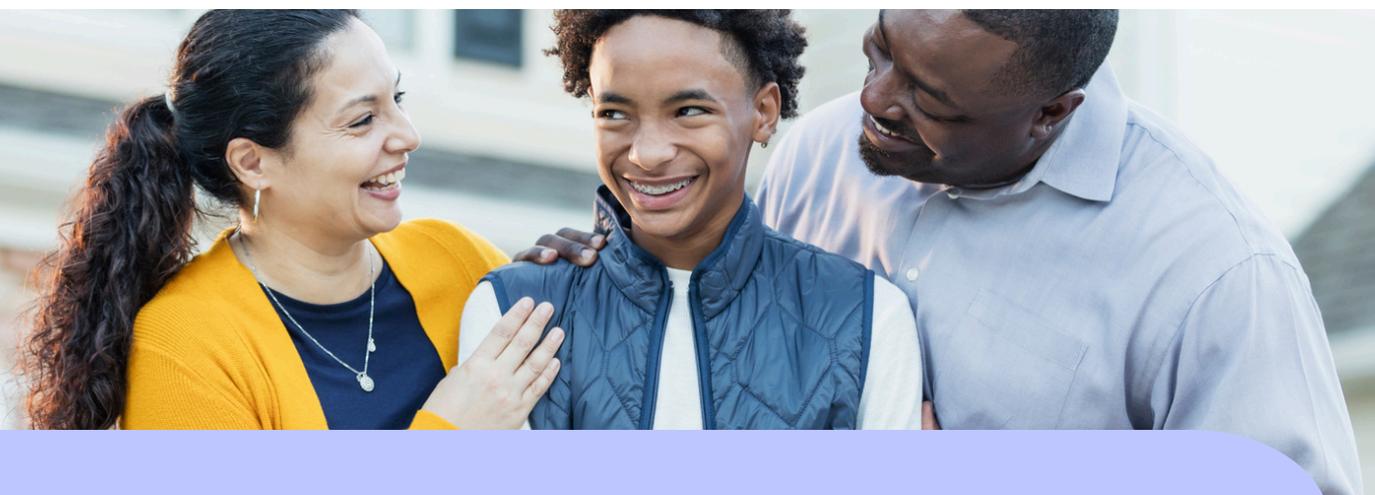


ACKNOWLEDGE THAT YOU DON'T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS:

It's important to be honest about your limitations. If you don't know how to answer a question, say so. This can help your child feel more comfortable expressing uncertainty and seeking help together.



COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES



WHAT NOT TO DO:

- **Avoid the Topic:** Ignoring the situation can lead to feelings of isolation for your child. It's important to address the loss directly and create a safe space for discussion.
- **Use Phrases Like "Committed Suicide":** Language matters. Use "died by suicide" instead of "committed suicide" to avoid implying guilt or criminality. This can help foster a more compassionate conversation.
- **Glorify or Sensationalize the Death:** Avoid discussing the details of the death in a way that could romanticize or sensationalize it. Focus on the impact of the loss rather than the method.
- **Share Detailed Information About the Method:** Providing graphic details can be harmful and may trigger distress in your child. Keep discussions focused on feelings and support.
- **Make Promises You Can't Keep:** Avoid making promises about what will happen next or that everything will be okay. Instead, focus on being present and supportive.
- **Rush to "Fix" Their Feelings:** Allow your child to express their emotions without trying to immediately solve their problems. Sometimes, they just need to be heard and validated.

HELPING YOUTH COPE WITH GUILT

It's common for youth to experience feelings of guilt after a peer's suicide. They may think they could have done something to prevent it, such as asking more questions, reaching out, or noticing signs of distress. This guilt can be overwhelming and may manifest in various ways, including self-blame and regret.

STRATEGIES TO HELP YOUR CHILD PROCESS GUILT



- 1. Acknowledge Their Feelings:** Let your child know it's normal to feel guilt after a loss. Validate their emotions by saying, "It's okay to feel this way. Many people feel guilt after losing someone."
- 2. Encourage Open Conversations:** Create a safe space for your child to express their feelings of guilt. Ask them to share their feelings and why they think they feel that way. This can help them process their emotions and understand they are not alone. Try not to overreact or dismiss their thoughts and feelings.
- 3. Reframe Their Thoughts:** Help your child understand that they are not responsible for another person's choices. Encourage them to reframe their thoughts by discussing the complexity of mental health and the many factors that contribute to someone's decision to end their life.
- 4. Focus on Positive Memories:** Encourage your child to remember the positive moments they shared with their friend. This can help shift their focus from guilt to gratitude for the time they had together.
- 5. Promote Self-Compassion:** Teach your child to practice self-compassion. Encourage them to treat themselves with the same kindness they would offer a friend in a similar situation. Remind them that it's okay to grieve and that they deserve care and understanding.
- 6. Encourage Helping Others:** Suggest that your child engage in activities that honor their friend's memory, such as volunteering or participating in mental health awareness campaigns. This can provide a sense of purpose and help them feel like they are making a positive impact.
- 7. Seek Professional Support:** If feelings of guilt persist or become overwhelming, consider seeking help from a mental health professional. A therapist can provide guidance and coping strategies tailored to your child's needs.

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S GRIEF



UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT GRIEF RESPONSES



Emotional Reactions

- Shock and numbness
- Anger and irritability
- Guilt and self-blame
- Relief (if there was a difficult relationship)
- Anxiety about other losses

Physical Reactions

- Sleep disturbances
- Changes in appetite
- Headaches or stomach aches
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating

AGE-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS



Middle School Students (11-14)

- May experience intense emotions but struggle to express them
- Might worry about their mortality
- Could show regression in behavior
- May need help maintaining an academic focus

High School Students (14-18)

- May question meaning and purpose
- Might engage in risk-taking behaviors
- Could struggle with identity and future plans
- May need support managing academic pressure

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

AT HOME



Maintain Routines

- Keep regular meal times: Eating together as a family can provide stability and connection during uncertain times.
- Maintain sleep schedules: Encourage consistent bedtimes to ensure teens get enough rest, as grief can disrupt sleep patterns.
- Continue family activities: Whether it's movie nights, game nights, or shared hobbies, maintaining traditions can offer a sense of normalcy and comfort.

Create Safe Spaces

- Designate quiet areas for reflection: Provide a calm, peaceful area where teens can sit with their thoughts or emotions without interruption.
- Allow privacy when needed: Respect their need for alone time while gently checking in to ensure they aren't isolating themselves.
- Keep doors open for conversation: Let them know they can talk to you at any time without fear of judgment or pressure. Use open-ended questions like, "How are you feeling today?" to start conversations.

Encourage Healthy Expression

- Journal writing: Encourage teens to write about their feelings, memories of their peers, or hopes for the future.
- Art projects: Drawing, painting, or creating collages can help process emotions in a non-verbal way.
- Physical activity: Suggest yoga, walking, or sports to release tension and improve mental health.
- Music or creative outlets: Listening to music, writing songs, or playing an instrument can be cathartic and healing.

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

AT SCHOOL



Foster Peer Support

- Support groups: Encourage participation in school-based grief support groups where teens can connect with others who understand their experience.
- Encourage buddy systems: Pair teens with trusted peers to offer mutual support during difficult times.

Provide Access to Counseling

- School counselors: Ensure teens know how to access counseling services at school and feel comfortable reaching out.
- Grief workshops: Partner with local organizations to host workshops that teach coping skills and provide a space for teens to share their feelings.

Create Inclusive Spaces

- Safe zones: Create spaces within the school where teens can go if they feel overwhelmed or need a moment to regroup.

Encourage Creative Outlets

- Student-led initiatives: Allow teens to organize memorials, art projects, or other activities to honor their peers and process their grief collectively.
- Writing or storytelling: Encourage teens to write letters, poems, or stories to express their emotions and remember their peers.

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

IN THE COMMUNITY



Connect with Trusted Adults

- Mentorship programs: Pair teens with mentors who can provide guidance, support, and a listening ear.
- Faith-based support: If appropriate, connect teens with faith leaders or spiritual advisors who can offer comfort and perspective.

Encourage Community Healing

- Memorial events: Organize culturally sensitive memorials or remembrance events that allow teens to honor their peer in meaningful ways.
- Volunteer opportunities: Encourage teens to give back to their community as a way to find purpose and healing.

Celebrate Culture and Resilience

- Cultural traditions: Incorporate cultural practices or rituals that honor the deceased and provide connection and healing.
- Storytelling and legacy: Encourage teens to share stories of resilience and strength from their own families or communities, helping them see that healing is possible.

ADDITIONAL COPING TOOLS

Encourage Open Communication

- Normalize conversations about grief and mental health. Reassure teens that it's okay to feel a range of emotions, from sadness to anger to confusion.

Model Healthy Coping

- Show teens how you process your emotions in healthy ways, such as talking openly, seeking support, or practicing self-care.

Teach Stress Management Techniques

- Introduce mindfulness practices like deep breathing, meditation, or grounding exercises to help teens manage overwhelming emotions.

Provide Reassurance

- Remind teens that their feelings are valid and that healing takes time. Let them know they are not alone and that support is always available.



LONG-TERM CONSIDERATIONS

MOVING FORWARD



- **Acknowledge That Grief Has No Timeline:** Understand that grief is a personal journey and can resurface at unexpected times. Be patient with yourself and your child as you navigate this process together.
- **Prepare for Anniversary Reactions:** Significant dates, such as the anniversary of the loss or the deceased's birthday, may trigger intense emotions. Plan ahead for these dates by discussing them with your child and considering ways to honor the memory of the lost peer.
- **Stay Alert to Delayed Responses:** Sometimes, grief can manifest weeks or months later. Be attentive to changes in your child's behavior or mood, and encourage open discussions about their feelings.
- **Maintain Open Communication:** Keep the lines of communication open with your child. Regularly check in on their emotional well-being and encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings.
- **Build Resilience Through Honest Discussions:** Use this experience as an opportunity to discuss mental health openly. Encourage your child to express their feelings and thoughts about life, loss, and coping strategies.

BUILDING HOPE



- **Focus on Positive Memories:** Encourage your child to share happy memories of their friend. This can help shift the focus from loss to celebration of life.
- **Encourage Helping Others:** Engaging in community service or advocacy related to mental health can provide a sense of purpose and connection.
- **Discuss Future Plans:** Talk about hopes and dreams for the future. This can help your child regain a sense of normalcy and optimism.
- **Celebrate Progress:** Acknowledge and celebrate small milestones in your child's healing journey. This can help reinforce their resilience and coping skills.
- **Foster Connection and Community:** Encourage your child to stay connected with friends and family. Building a supportive community can help them feel less isolated in their grief.



RESOURCES

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN GEORGIA



- Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD): Oversees mental health and developmental disabilities services in Georgia. Website: dbhdd.georgia.gov | Suicide Resources: <https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/document/document/sos-guide-0/download>
 - Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL): Provides 24/7 crisis support and access to mental health services. Website: georgiacollaborative.com
 - Mental Health America of Georgia: Promotes mental health awareness and offers educational programs and support services. Website: mhageorgia.org
 - National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Georgia: Provides education, support, and advocacy for individuals affected by mental illness. Website: namiga.org
 - Georgia Association of Community Service Boards: Represents community service boards providing mental health and substance abuse services. Website: gacsb.org
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SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCES IN GEORGIA



- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: Immediate, 24/7, free, and confidential support for people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Phone: 988 (Call or Text) | Available in English and Spanish, 24/7/365 | Website: <https://988lifeline.org/>
 - Crisis Text Line: Provides free, 24/7 text support for individuals in crisis. Website: crisistextline.org | Text: "SILENCE" to 741741
 - Georgia Suicide Prevention Program: Focuses on reducing suicide rates through education and outreach. Website: dbhdd.georgia.gov/suicide-prevention | <https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/bh-prevention/suicide-prevention/sos-resources> |
 - Trevor Project (LGBTQ+ Youth): Offers crisis intervention and suicide prevention services for LGBTQ+ youth. Website: thetrevorproject.org | Phone: 1-866-488-7386 or 988
 - Veterans Crisis Line: Provides confidential support for veterans in crisis, available 24/7. Website: veteranscrisisline.net | Phone: 988 and press 1, or 1-800-273-8255 and press 1
-

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): Offers information and resources for mental health and substance use disorders. Website: samhsa.gov | Phone: 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)
- Georgia 211: Connects individuals to community resources and support services. Website: georgia211.org | Phone: Dial 211



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