

SUICIDE PREVENTION
IT'S UP TO ALL OF US

Transition Guide



Maine Youth Suicide Prevention
Education, Resources and Support – It's Up to All of Us

Maine
Crisis
Hotline
1.888.568.1112
(Calls in Maine only)

National
Suicide
Prevention
Lifeline
1.800.273.8255



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
You've Got Rhythm.....	3
Advanced Planning for the Transition.....	5
Advice for Young Adults and Their Parents.....	7
Finding a Job	9
Alcohol and Mental Health	10
Staying Healthy	11
More Advice from Recent Graduates.....	12
Sexuality and Relationships	13
Signs of Trouble	15
Depression	17
Is Your Drinking Problematic?	18
Dangerous Situations — Suicide	19
A Word About Alcohol Poisoning	21
National Hotline Numbers	23
Maine Hotline Numbers	24
Military Resources	25
Helpful Websites	25
Books About Transitioning to Life After H.S	26



John E. Baldacci, Governor

Brenda M. Harvey, Commissioner

Introduction

Leaving high school and all the changes that will bring sometimes results in anxiety or worry about leaving the comfort of the “known” for the uncertainty that lies ahead. Whether you plan to attend college, enter the workforce, or enlist in the military, it is best to prepare to take charge of your life, your health and well-being, and to plan for the changes ahead.

This Guide was written for you, your parents/guardians and teachers to discuss the issues that might come up and to provide some tools to ease the transition. This book is divided into sections including planning, staying healthy, signs of trouble and dangerous situations. Please share your thoughts about this Guide. We want it to be useful for YOU!

You’ve Got Rhythm

Life has structure, rhythm, and flow based on many things which are not in your control. High school is a highly structured experience, all day, every day, five days a week. Add homework, meals, curfews, sports, part-time jobs and for some there is little time left.

Life after high school can look very different. Let’s take college as an example. In college, there are many distractions to someone’s desire to be a successful student. The fact is that in college your schedule is up to you and this freedom derails many college freshmen. Some derail academically because they fail to budget their time well. Others derail emotionally because they find themselves adrift without an anchor.

College is not the only place you may need to readjust. While jobs and life in the military are highly structured during the day, there still may be many more hours to fill. They can also involve new challenges where you may lose your anchor as well.

Depression may develop because you depended on the support and structure of home, parents/guardians, school, and the familiar in order to cope. Understanding these changes can help you to think about which aspects of the structure in your home and family have been supportive. Once you take an honest look, begin to think about how to provide yourself with whatever schedule and routine (life jacket) that will allow you to “float” rather than “sink”. You are in charge now.

PLANNING

Advanced Planning for the Transition

Ask how your family provides structure for you.

Does someone:

- | | |
|---|--------|
| _____ | Wake |
| you up when you oversleep? | |
| _____ | Remin |
| d you of your key tasks, responsibilities, or projects each day? | |
| _____ | Do |
| your laundry or dry cleaning for you? | |
| _____ | Buy |
| your favorite foods/make your meals for you? | |
| _____ | Help |
| you figure out how to do new things? (e.g. replace driver's license, register for classes, open a bank account, etc.) | |
| _____ | Take |
| care of you when you have a fever or feel sick? | |
| _____ | Provid |
| e you with a weekly allowance or give you \$\$ when you need some cash? | |
| _____ | Ask |
| what you're doing and how you're feeling? | |

Now, you need to create some new structure for yourself.

Here are some suggestions:

- _____ Buy
an alarm clock with battery back-up and two alarm settings for
oversleeping.

- _____ Place
tasks on a wall calendar or your computer calendar; use sticky notes in
different
colors as reminders.

- _____ Practi
ce doing laundry now while at home.

- _____ Go
grocery shopping for basics to bring with you to college and stock up
every two weeks so you can eat when you're up late or miss breakfast;
ask for care packages from home.

- _____ Make
a list of a few key people who can help you when you have questions.

- _____ Learn
the location and hours of the nearest (or campus) health center.

- _____ Have
a regular day and time to call home and reconnect; send emails in
between.

- _____ Ask
someone to help you set up a budget.

Advice from a Deering High School graduate

E.W. Know what you're going to have to do for yourself that you probably didn't have to do before - like laundry. The first time I had to do my own laundry I didn't check the pockets for things and washed a pen. I got ink all over my shorts.

Advice for Young Adults and Their Parents/Guardians

Just as graduation represents a success for your hard work, parents also experience pride and joy in their parenting accomplishments. Arguments over finances, social life and substance use can erupt in the early months after graduation as life experiences test both parties in their belief that the dangerous waters of adolescence are behind them. Here are some things to discuss with your parents or caregivers.

Discussion about Values

- Discuss and negotiate new adult rules before the first visit home.
- Frankly discuss issues such as sexual conduct and substance abuse.

Parental Communication Tips

- Allow mistakes, support good decision-making, and do not jump in to solve problems.
- Encourage, but do not push, the development of new relationships.

Young Adult Communication Tips

- Call your parents when you are doing well and when things are not going well.
- Practice the words that you can use to alert your parents of a situation that needs immediate assistance.

Questions about Finances

- Should you get a credit card? (It is easier to negotiate a reasonable budget with your parents than to get out from underneath credit card debt.)
- Setting up a budget and sticking to it (if going to college - discuss what is a reasonable amount of money per semester and whether a part-time job is expected).

Questions about Academic Expectations (if attending college)

- How good is “good enough” for you and your parents?
- How can you let your parents know if you are not meeting this “good enough” standard?
- How many credit hours will you need to take each year to graduate on time while maintaining a reasonable course load in the first semester?

Finding a Job

There are many books and web sites (such as jobsinmaine.com or monster.com) that you can use to locate jobs. You can Google job interview tips and resumes to find good advice on these topics. One little known resource is described on the next page.

How do you find a job through the Career Center? When you visit your local Career Center, (view the list of Maine Centers at www.mainecareercenter.com) you can build your own individual job profile with your qualifications and the type of job you want. Once you are registered in the system, it searches for jobs that match your profile. You are notified of openings and will be referred to a job if you request it. Career Centers are also equipped with computers so that you can do your own job search. If you need help with anything having to do with getting a job, staff will assist you.

Remember: Employers can and do search online at Facebook and other such sites. Never post anything that you wouldn't want a potential employer to read or see. You might consider that what you do when not at work is personal - your employer may see it as a reflection of your judgment and maturity.

STAYING HEALTHY

Alcohol and Mental Health

Alcohol can cause depression and make depression worse as well as cause other problems. Alcohol can cause people to do things they wouldn't normally do and it lowers inhibitions which can be deadly to someone who is feeling suicidal.

After high school you will not be monitored by your parents in the same way as you were at home. Before you make a decision to drink, use drugs, or engage in sexual activity ask yourself the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of the gathering I'm attending?
 2. Do I know who has handled my drink?
 3. Do I have a friend or buddy with me?
 4. Am I prepared to take any negative consequences of my actions?
 5. Do I know how one drink can affect my perception or what two drinks do to judgment?
 6. How am I getting home safely?
 7. How will I feel the next day?
 8. Who will know where I am?
 9. Would I do this sober?
 10. What are my values and beliefs?
- Come up with a phrase to praise yourself such as, "I deserve dignity and respect" or "I don't have to please anyone else, I just have to take care of me." Repeat this phrase each day. Over time you will change your thought patterns and this will help you feel better about yourself.
 - Eat healthy food. Excessive amounts of sugar, caffeine, or alcohol, contribute to mood disturbances. Foods such as vegetables, fruit, oil-rich fish and whole grains may help your outlook. Even regularly taking vitamins can help you feel well.
 - Slow down. At least once a day, turn off the iPod, cell phone, TV, video games and computer. The answers to your problems may be unable to be heard if you're always listening to something else.

- Identify stress busters that work for you. They may be things like laughing (watch a funny TV show, read a joke), deep breathing, exercise, getting organized (making lists with timelines, prioritizing items, etc.), setting limits about what you can accomplish in a day and doing the hardest things first when you have more energy. For more ideas, type in stress busters and let Google find other ideas.
- It's OK to make mistakes - most are not life-threatening. If you are away at college and homesick, maybe attending a community college at first is the best idea.
- Avoid alcohol and other drugs, including caffeine. Too much caffeine can cause anxiety, nervousness, sleeplessness and mood swings. **Alcohol can cause or worsen depression, interfere with sleep, and contribute to suicidal behavior.** Drugs have negative effects like clouding your judgment, interfering with your ability to think clearly, and can lessen inhibitions.
- Make sure to get enough sleep. Experts suggest that young adults need 9 to 10 hours of sleep in order to feel alert all day. Problems will feel more manageable if you're well-rested.

Staying Healthy

Someone wrote, "Life is difficult" and sometimes it can be! Everyone has problems and things are not always easy. These tips are meant to give you support and some ideas for surviving and thriving.

- Set one achievable goal each day. When you've met your goal, give yourself credit for your success.
- Work on accepting and appreciating your feelings. Even though sometimes it might not feel like it, all of our feelings are important and expressing and accepting them is healthy. Write about how you're feeling in a journal or talk to a friend or family member.

- Do something nice for someone else (play ball with your younger brother, pay a compliment to someone, help an elderly person rake their lawn, volunteer at the animal shelter, etc.). Not only will your efforts be appreciated, but you'll feel better too.
- Find ways that are fun, healthy and legal for helping yourself to feel better. Have you heard about endorphins? Endorphins are chemicals in your brain that, when released, give you a good feeling. Some simple ways to release endorphins are giving or getting hugs, petting your dog/cat, and exercise (at least 20 minutes) that produces a "runner's high".
- Repeat this short meditation (or another one that is helpful to you) in times of stress:

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;

The courage to change the things I can;

And the wisdom to know the difference.

Other tips can be found at:

mainesuicideprevention.org/youth

www.

More advice from recent graduates

A.P. It would have been helpful to know that even though a lot of people transition well, there's a strong possibility that it's actually going to be really hard. It also would have been helpful if someone had said, "You might be miserable at first, but things will probably turn around and be okay, so don't shut yourself out."

A.F. My advice is to make sure to manage your time. Time management, for me, was critical in getting all my work done.

L.O. Stay true to yourself.

A. P. There isn't always going to be someone there to hold your hand. You might feel like you're all alone, but you have to step out of your comfort zone in order to find a place for yourself in the world. It's one of the hardest

Sexuality and Relationships

Pregnancy Prevention: It is important that you and your partner be ready for the responsibilities and possible consequences of being sexually active. For information about the choices and experiences other young adults have had with pregnancy, you could visit www.sexetc.org, a website written by young adults for young adults. For additional information about pregnancy prevention, visit the Maine Family Planning Association website at www.mainefamilyplanning.org.

Sexually Transmitted Infections/Diseases: Sexually Transmitted Infections/Diseases (STI) are the most commonly reported type of infectious disease in both the United States and Maine. Currently, over half of people ages 15 to 25 in the United States have been diagnosed with an STI. Testing for HIV and STIs is important to you and your partner's health. Chlamydia, the most common infectious disease, usually has no symptoms which is why regular testing is the best prevention and can reduce later problems. It is recommended that a sexually active person be tested once a year. There are local clinics across Maine that provides services at little or no cost. For a list of clinic locations and for information about STIs, visit the Maine Family Planning Association website at www.mainefamilyplanning.org.

Sexuality: Is a natural, lifelong part of who you are as a sexual being. Your sexuality includes how you think about yourself, how you express yourself, and how you work together with others in all parts of your life. You are responsible for the decisions and choices you make about your sexual health. Your sexuality is communicated through a variety of ways, such as, the clothes you wear, the art you create, religious beliefs, and your relationships, be they heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (GLBTQ).

Healthy Relationships: Healthy relationships are an important part of a person's overall health. Communication, respect, and trust are key pieces in a healthy relationship. There is no such thing as a perfect relationship and it is normal to have differences that need to be discussed and areas where give and take is necessary. It is important to discuss emotions and needs in positive ways and learn from experiences. Respect means that each person values who the other is, understands, and would never question the other person's limits .

Sexual Violence and Unhealthy Relationships: Child sexual abuse, sexual assault, and substance abuse can all affect a person's sexuality. Even if you have not experienced abuse in your life, it's important to realize your partner may have. Unhealthy relationships are based on power and control and can include verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, and financial abuse. For more information visit either the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault at www.mecasa.org or the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence at www.mcedv.org.

Other informational resources:

Talk About Sex: www.seriouslysexuality.com

Teens Health: www.teenshealth.org/teen

I Wanna Know: www.iwannaknow.org

Teen Talk: www.plannedparenthood.org/teen-talk

SIGNS OF TROUBLE

Let's Talk About Stress

Everyone experiences stress. A certain amount of stress can be helpful. We prepare for tests or performances because we want to do well. But all people respond differently to stress. The amount of stress that motivates one person can overwhelm another.

Stress occurs in response to many things such as impossibly high self-expectations; pre-existing illness; social pressures; the move to a new school or job setting; the illness of a family member; relationship turmoil or breakup; or financial worries.

Signs that stress is too great (stress overload) can include: becoming overly emotional; anxiety; withdrawal; anger; feelings of physical illness, including stomach upset and headaches; and the overuse of alcohol and drugs as a way of trying to cope with and deal with stress. Prolonged stress can also result in physical illnesses that affect our entire beings, such as high blood pressure, heart attack, or major depression.

See tips for Staying Healthy Living on pgs. 10 thru 13 for suggestions on coping with stress.

Did You Know That...

- Among 18-25 year olds, serious mental health conditions are common, yet this age group shows the lowest rate of help-seeking behaviors.
- A very important part of recovery from mental illness is the understanding and acceptance of friends. Friends can make a difference by offering reassurance, companionship, and emotional strength.
- Depression is a common disease that affects almost 10% of the U.S. population. Depression is a **treatable medical disease** and not a sign of weakness.
- Depression places people at risk for suicide. Two-thirds of the people who die by suicide are depressed at the time of their deaths.
- About every two hours, a young person in the U.S. dies by suicide.
- Many suicides are preventable. Peers are often the first to recognize warning signs in their friend. The three steps to helping a suicidal individual are:

you care Show

about suicide Ask

help Get

- The crisis hotline in Maine is **1-888-568-1112**. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is:

1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Depression

Depression is more than the occasional “bad day”. People who have not experienced a serious depression may mistakenly believe that it is nothing more than feeling a little down. In fact, people who have suffered from serious depression describe it as physically and emotionally painful and weakening.

These symptoms may indicate that someone is suffering from depression. Generally if these symptoms last for two weeks or more, there is reason to be concerned.

- Lasting sadness.
- Withdrawing from family and friends.
- Losing interest in activities that were once enjoyed.
- Frequently complaining about physical symptoms, such as headaches and stomach aches.
- Eating or sleeping much more or less than usual.
- Low energy level or chronic fatigue.
- Anger or rage or overreacting to criticism.
- Becoming obsessed with poetry or music with morbid themes.
- Missing school frequently or begin to do worse in school.
- Being bored all the time, unable to concentrate on schoolwork, a conversation, or watching TV.

Depressed young adults seldom recognize their need for treatment. If you are concerned that you and/or a friend might be suffering from depression, please take this on-line assessment. www.stopasuicide.org (click on Signs of Suicide.)

Most people find relief from depression once treatment is initiated. Treatment may include diet, exercise, and/or medication along with counseling. It may be necessary to adjust the treatment to get the best effect. Please note: it can take 2-6 weeks for medication to produce results. Call 211 for a list of treatment providers in your area.

The risk of suicide connected with depression makes this a life-threatening illness that requires professional help.

Did you know that...

- A can of beer (12 oz), a glass of wine (7 oz.), and a mixed drink (3 oz.) all have the same amount of alcohol (1/2 ounce).
- Lite beer may have fewer calories but it still has the same amount of actual alcohol.
- Alcohol is a depressant (slows your body down).
- Your liver can oxidize (break down) 1/2 ounce of alcohol per hour. Excess alcohol continues to circulate to all parts of the body, including the brain until the liver can handle it.

Is Your Drinking Problematic?

Take an on-line assessment at: www.alcoholscreening.org

DANGEROUS SITUATIONS

Suicide

On average, every year in Maine 20 young people between the ages of 15-24 die by suicide and the extent of suicidal behavior is much greater. More males die by suicide although more females attempt suicide. The effect of a suicide on friends and family is shattering.

Many suicides are preventable. Recognizing the warning signs is key. Any of the following signs require immediate attention. **Do not leave the person alone** if they are:

- Thinking or talking about suicide.
- Making a detailed plan including how, when, and where.
- Looking for the means to die by suicide.
- Putting affairs in order - making a will and/or giving things away.
- Writing or drawing with constant themes of death and dying.

Other warning signs of concern are:

- Substance abuse.
- Purposelessness - seeing no reason for living.
- Agitation/anxiety.
- Hopelessness - believing that things won't ever get better.
- Helplessness.
- Dramatic mood changes.
- Recklessness.

Tips for having the “Suicide Conversation”

- Stay calm - if you remain calm, it also will help calm down the other person.
- Talk privately and allow plenty of time.
- Offer your full attention.
- Be persistent - you might have to ask directly about suicidal thoughts more than once.
- Trust your gut - if you think that something is wrong, you're probably right.

Three Step Intervention

1. Show you care - let the person know you really “hear” what they are saying. Do not judge, minimize or argue. Simply accept what they are saying and how bad they are feeling.
2. Ask the question - ”Are you thinking about suicide?” or “Do you plan to take your life?”
3. Get help - this might mean calling a crisis hotline in Maine: **1-888-568-1112**, finding a trusted adult, calling 911, or going with the person to the emergency room. This is not a secret that you can keep or handle by yourself.

If you can’t bring yourself to have this conversation with the person you are worried about, find someone who can.

A Word About Alcohol Poisoning*

Alcohol depresses nerves that control involuntary actions such as breathing and the gag reflex (which prevents choking). A fatal dose of alcohol will eventually stop these functions.

It is common for someone who drank too much alcohol to vomit, since alcohol is an irritant to the stomach. This means the person could choke on his or her vomit, which could cause death by asphyxiation in an unconscious person.

A person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) can continue to rise even while he or she is passed out. Even after a person stops drinking, alcohol in the stomach and intestine continues to enter the bloodstream and circulate throughout the body. It is dangerous to assume the person will be fine by sleeping it off.

Critical Signs of Alcohol Poisoning:

- Mental confusion, stupor, coma, or person cannot be roused.
- Vomiting.
- Seizures.
- Slow breathing (fewer than eight breaths per minute).
- Irregular breathing (10 seconds or more between breaths).
- Hypothermia (low body temperature), bluish skin color, paleness.

What If I Think Someone Has Alcohol Poisoning?

- Know the danger signals.
- Do not wait for all symptoms to be present before taking action.
- Be aware that a person who has passed out may die.
- If there is any suspicion of an alcohol overdose, call 911 for help. Don't try to guess the level of drunkenness.

What If Alcohol Poisoning Is Left Untreated?

- Victim chokes on his or her own vomit.
- Breathing slows, becomes irregular, or stops.
- Heart beats irregularly or stops.
- Hypothermia (low body temperature).
- Hypoglycemia (too little blood sugar) leads to seizures.
- Untreated severe dehydration from vomiting can cause seizures, permanent brain damage or death.

**Used with permission from Phoenix House's Facts on Tap*

Even if the victim lives, an alcohol overdose can lead to irreversible brain damage. Binge drinking (which often happens on a bet or a date) is especially dangerous because the victim can ingest a fatal dose before becoming unconscious.

Don't be afraid to seek medical help for a friend who has had too much to drink. Don't worry that your friend may become angry or embarrassed - remember, you cared enough to help. Always be safe, not sorry.

National Hotline Numbers

This list is not all-inclusive but covers many important areas. Calls to these numbers are FREE!

AIDS National Hotline

342-2437

1-800-

Al-Anon/Al-Ateen Hotline

344-2666

1-800-

(Hope and help for young people who are the relatives and friends of a problem drinker.)

Alcohol/Drug Abuse Hotline

662-HELP

1-800-

Domestic Violence Hotline

799-SAFE

1-800-

Eating Disorders Center

236-1188

1-888-

Gay and Lesbian National Hotline

THE-GLNH

1-888-

Homeless/Runaway

231-6946

1-800-

Panic Disorder Info Hotline 1-800-64-PANIC

Rape, Abuse, Incest Nat'l Network 1-800-656-HOPE

Self-Injury Hotline 1-800-DONTCUT

The Trevor HelpLine 1-800-850-8078
(Specializing in gay and lesbian youth suicide prevention.)

Maine Hotline Numbers

Statewide Crisis Hotline 1-888-568-1112

Maine Warm Line 1-866-771-9276
(Peer to peer support serving adults [over 18] from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. daily.)

DHHS - child abuse and neglect 1-800-452-1999

Information and Resource Center 1-800-499-0027

(Substance abuse and suicide prevention clearinghouse from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. M-F.)

National Alliance on Mentally Illness-ME

1-800-464-5767

Northern New England Poison Center 1-800-

Military Resources

Crisis Help in Maine

Maine TOGUS VA Medical Center: 1-877-421-8263 (enter extension 4443 or 5515) during business hours; on weekends or in the evenings (enter 0 and ask for Patient Care Coordinator).

National Numbers:

National VA Suicide Hotline: 1-800-273-8255 (24 hours a day, 365 days a year).

Military One Source: 1-800-342-9647 which supplements existing installation services, provides free help and information by phone with a professionally trained consultant or on-line, on a wide variety of issues that affect you and your family - from budgeting and investing to relationships and deployment. It is available whenever you are - 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Helpful Websites

Mental Health

What A Difference A Friend Makes:

whatadifference.org

www.whatadifference.org

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance:

bsalliance.org

www.bsalliance.org

Mental Health America: www.nmha.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness: www.nami.org

American Association of Suicidology:

[uicidology.org](http://www.aasuicidology.org)

[www.a](http://www.aasuicidology.org)

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:

[fsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)

[www.a](http://www.afsp.org)

Suicide Prevention Resource Center: www.sprc.org

Suicide Prevention Action Network: www.spanusa.org

College Students

Active Minds on Campus:

[ctivemindsoncampus.org](http://www.activemindsoncampus.org)

[www.a](http://www.activemindsoncampus.org)

Half of Us: www.halfofus.com

The Jed Foundation: www.jedfoundation.org

General

Health topics: <http://kidshealth.org/teen/>

RU Ready? Life After High School: www.gatewayva.com/edu/ruready/index.shtml

Books About Transitioning to Life After High School

Get A Jump: What's Next After High School? - Peterson's Guide

Job Interviews for Dummies - Joyce Lain Kennedy

The Gap Year Advantage: Helping Your Child Benefit from Time Off Before or During College - K. Jaigler, R. Nelson

Getting Ready for College: Everything You Need to Know - Polly Berent & The Princeton Review

The Secrets of College Success - Lynn F Jacobs & Jeremy S. Hyman

Letting Go: A Parents' Guide to Understanding the College Years - Karen Coburn and Madge Treeger

The Smart Student's Guide to Healthy Living: How to Survive Stress, Late Nights and the College Cafeteria - Fred Smith and M.J. Smith

Parents' Guide to College Life - Robin Raskin

Don't Tell Me What to Do, Just Send Money; The Essential Parenting Guide to the College Years - Helen E. Johnson & Christine Schelhas-Miller

First in the Family: Advice About College From First Generation Students - Kathleen Cushman

The Launching Years: Strategies for Parenting From Senior Year to College Life - Laura Kastner & Jennifer Wyatt

The Naked Roommate: And 107 Other Issues You Might Run Into in College - Harlan Cohen

*Real College: The Essential Guide to Student Life
Douglas Stone & Elizabeth Tippitt*

Living the College Life: Real Students, Real Experience, Real Advice - Kenneth Paulsen



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We are DHHS.**

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