



Supporting Student & Educator Mental Health in 2021

FALL EDITION





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Addressing a Growing Need: We're Here to Help

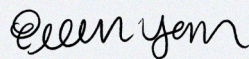
Before the pandemic, students nationwide had a growing need for mental health support. Suicide was already the *second-most leading cause of death* for 10- to 24-year-olds — and that's just one marker across the wide spectrum of mental health struggles. Over the last 18+ months, those struggles have increased among students and adults alike as the pandemic has fueled isolation and anxiety, separating students from their peers and loved ones, sometimes permanently.

Additionally, there's evidence that mental health struggles can change with the seasons: Research has shown that reported youth suicide attempts and ideation peak in the spring and fall.^{1,2} This means educators have a direct line to students when they may need them the most.

Schools have an opportunity to support students in crisis, and GoGuardian is here to help you in supporting them.

In this mental health guide, we've compiled a collection of practical resources to help administrators and educators help students. The resources cover areas such as social emotional learning, school-home partnerships to support student mental health, a model school policy for suicide prevention, and universal care for educators — because you can't help others without first taking care of yourself.

We hope this collection is helpful to you and your staff as you begin the new school year. Thank you for everything you do for students, families, and your learning communities.



Ellen Yan | General Manager
Beacon at GoGuardian

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Building School-Home Partnerships to Support Student Mental Health



REBECCA GARCIA
President | Nevada PTA

A mother of four children ages 10 to 26, Rebecca Garcia is a passionate parent advocate dedicated to ensuring that the unique needs of all students are met regardless of zip code. Navigating the complexity of public education with her own exceptional children led her to get more engaged as a parent advocate and PTA leader. She currently sits on a number of educational committees and councils at the school, district, and state level, including the Blue Ribbon Commission for a Globally Prepared Nevada.

Research indicates that as many as **1 in 6 American youth** ages 6 to 17 experience a mental health disorder each year. Sometimes as parents, we notice changes or our child asks us for help; other times, a caring educator reaches out to raise concerns. This year as schools moved virtual and students spent more time online, parents became more familiar with the tools that schools utilize for mental health support, like GoGuardian Beacon. In my role as president of Nevada PTA and an administrator of an active parent Facebook group in the nation's fifth-largest school district, I hear frequently from parents seeking guidance and resources to support their children's mental health needs. As a mom of four, including children with ADHD, anxiety, and depression, I've had to navigate these issues myself.

Families and educators share a common goal: We want children to be happy, healthy, and thriving. And while we have a common goal, the ways we work towards that goal can look very different. Schools have mental health resources that families need, though caregivers often don't know they exist or how to best utilize them. Children are best served when caring adults, including educators and families, partner together to support their wellness. Recognizing our common goal, there are a variety of ways we can build strong partnerships between educators and families to support children's mental health needs.

Focus on Partnership

Children are best served when caring adults, including educators and families, partner together. When caregivers are empowered with appropriate resources and tools, they are better able to ensure children receive effective mental health support. At each step of the process, seek to understand each child's unique needs.

Recognize That Families Are Unique and Diverse

Caregivers have different levels of knowledge and understanding about mental health and how to support their kids emotionally. It's important to provide resources that meet needs for a wide variety of issues and concerns. Be culturally responsive; recognize that families have varied cultures, religions, customs, and practices that could impact mental health services and treatment.

Seek to Understand

Recognize that stigma and stereotypes regarding mental health are still pervasive. Be aware of bias and preconceptions that may influence how you engage with families and the support you offer. Assumptions erode trust and are a barrier to effective partnership. If you seek to understand, you are more likely to be able to effectively guide families toward specific resources that will have the most impact.

Understand That Language Matters

Education and mental health professionals use terminology and jargon that is often technical and may not be understood by all families. Add in new and constantly evolving technology and programs that are used to support student mental health, and everything quickly becomes overwhelming — especially to a parent trying to support a child in need or in crisis. Recognize that a parent may not know the abbreviations, program names, and professional licensure differences. Provide information that is clear, accessible, and in the language spoken by the family.

Help Families Navigate Logistics

Families want to help their child but may not know where to start. Schools or insurance companies too often provide parents with a list of resources without context. Families may need help understanding the types of resources and various mental health providers available and which options would be the best fit for their child's current situation. School-created resources can also go unused if they are not often and widely distributed beyond simply posting on a website. Taking time to ask questions, listen, and provide more context can help ensure that children get connected to the right supports.

Connect to the Community

School and mental health systems are often stretched to capacity. Families may feel lost in the shuffle and forgotten. Families see the needs of their children and often don't understand the systemic challenges that cause barriers to support. Be honest with families about barriers, while also working together to find appropriate resources and solutions that best help the children.

Collaborate Now

Students benefit when families and schools proactively collaborate on mental health and wellbeing. Work together to build relationships, understand needs, and encourage families to contribute authentically. As a school or district staff member, you often have a lot on your plate. As you build partnerships, parent and student organizations like the PTA can help by hosting workshops, guest speakers, or events to help provide a space for dialogue, community building, and resources to be shared. This can be done virtually or in person. When families, educators, and students come together to make mental health a priority, everyone benefits.

Looking for additional support and resources?

National PTA provides a variety of online resources in collaboration with trusted partners to strengthen mental health in the community — just visit pta.org/home/programs/mental-health. Together, empowered with resources and in partnership, parents and educators can help ensure students receive the support and tools needed for their mental health. ■



Seasonality of Suicidality

Students are returning to school this fall with mixed emotions from last year and lingering uncertainty about this year. Additionally, research has shown that reported youth suicide attempts (SA) and suicide ideation (SI) peak in spring and fall, making it more critical than ever to build support systems that can identify students in need of help.

HERE'S WHAT RESEARCH SHOWS US ABOUT THE SEASONALITY OF SUICIDALITY:

Psychological Factors

Individuals with **mood disorders** see an increased rate of suicide in the spring.¹

93% of suicide victims were seen to have a **psychiatric disorder** at the time of suicide completion.²

- Approximately 59% were experiencing **depression**.
- 43% had signs of **alcohol dependence or abuse**.
- Only 12% were believed to have no comorbid mental disorders.²

Diagnoses for neurotic, stress-related, or somatoform disorders also see spring and early summer peaks.¹

Environmental Factors

Temperature increases and anomalously warm weeks are associated with higher rates of suicide.^{1,3,4}

Spring peaks are higher in **rural** areas than in urban, while **urban** areas still have higher rates of suicide overall.¹

Spring sees higher rates of **allergens**, which cause **inflammatory reactions** and dysregulation of the **immune system**.^{1,5} Both are correlated with higher rates of suicide.^{4,5,6}

- Raised levels of inflammatory mediators cause **neurobiological** effects that might cause changes in **emotion and behavior**, and ultimately suicide in **vulnerable** individuals.⁵

Considerations

Reported youth suicide attempts (SA) and suicide ideation (SI) peak in spring and fall, and are lowest during summer, which might be due to **less monitoring** in **school vacation** months.^{7,8}

Google searches for "suicide" peak in week 10 of the year (beginning of March). There is a positive relationship for **youth** Google searches for "suicide" or "self-harm" and completed suicides, but not in the **general population**.⁹ This suggests that youth use searches to **facilitate** suicide and self-harm.⁹



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Protecting Students & Their Privacy



TEDDY HARTMAN
Head of Privacy | GoGuardian

A future-oriented advocate for educational justice, Teddy believes students have a right to data privacy and championing that right helps students thrive in the interconnected civic, academic, and digital realms. He also believes in a forward-leaning view of how student data privacy, edtech strategy, and educational policy can and should interact to create equitable, safe, and impactful digital ecosystems for students and schools.

Nine out of ten teens who report symptoms of depression say they have gone online for information on mental health issues¹, making it critical for schools to have tools like [GoGuardian Beacon](#) that can spot warning signs of crisis when a student is online. As it is for administrators, teachers, parents, and students themselves, student privacy is one of GoGuardian's top priorities, and is a key part of the design of products like Beacon. To give a behind-the-scenes look at how GoGuardian prioritizes student privacy while supporting student safety, we chatted with GoGuardian's Head of Privacy, Teddy Hartman.

Before coming to GoGuardian, Teddy was the Director of Strategy and Data Privacy for a large school system in Maryland, where he designed and managed one of the first school district privacy programs in the country. Additionally, Teddy has been recognized as a leader in the field of student data privacy, having served as the chair of The Future of Privacy Forum's National Network of School Privacy Leaders and currently serving as an Advisory Board Member for SXSW EDU. At GoGuardian, he collaborates with every team across the organization to help keep student privacy at the forefront of everything we do.

How does your teaching background influence how you think about the interplay of student privacy and safety?

"I was a high school educator for almost a decade, and during that time I saw first-hand how seemingly innocuous pieces of data had the potential to create a downstream effect for a student. I've witnessed when information we collect at school, even a data point like the number of school absences, could actually put a student in physical danger at home. This means that we should be mindful of the features we create and how those features can become data points about real students.

So, for me, privacy is about more than compliance and standards — which are obviously important to privacy work — it's also about really understanding how the data we're collecting about students has the potential to impact them in the real world. We want to make sure, for example, that if we're generating an alert about suicide or self-harm through Beacon, that we've worked with the experts to really understand what types of things a student might be searching for that indicate an imminent risk."

How does GoGuardian approach student privacy as a company?

"We take a very proactive approach to privacy. For example, we're certified as FERPA compliant by an external company, [iKeepSafe](#). This means that schools maintain control over their data. We are a provider of technology for schools, but it is always the school system's data at the end of the day.

We are also signatories of the [Student Privacy Pledge](#), a list of public commitments that are FTC binding. Those commitments are around having privacy by design, privacy impact assessments — which is thinking through privacy of different features — and having a public-facing privacy page."

In addition to being certified externally, GoGuardian has thoughtful internal processes to ensure that student privacy is prioritized in product design. Can you tell us about that?

"One way we assess privacy in product design is by asking three important questions about data each time we start creating a new feature. If it's a yes to any of those questions, it generates a bigger review by me and my team. If the answer to all three is a no, then the product team can keep moving the development forward.

The first one is: *Do we need to collaborate with a third-party to build out this feature?* If a feature requires a vendor for collaboration, we assess if and how that vendor would need access to data and initiate a vendor approval process.

Second: *Does this feature collect new data? If so, what are we using the data for?* For example, we wouldn't try to start collecting new information like formative assessment scores unless we're creating a feature that helps administrators or educators do something with that information.

The third one is: *Are we using current data to create a new data point?* In other words, are we combining the data we currently have to create a new feature or insight? If so, it needs a check from my team to consider: Do we need to change our policies? Should we notify users about this? What sort of information can we share to increase the transparency of our products?

Overall, we want to make sure that with anything we build, the data we use passes a 'reasonable' test. Would a reasonable person understand that this feature uses and collects this data? If the answer is no, then we have to ask ourselves, how can we build this feature differently?"

What advice would you give school leaders or teachers in helping students and parents understand how Beacon works and why it's an integral part of supporting student mental health?

"One thing schools can do is have a clear, user-friendly conversation with parents, kids, and their community about how GoGuardian's tools work — what they do and they don't do — and why these tools are important to the school system's approach to supporting student mental health. As we can all relate to, if a student or parent first learns about device monitoring when discovering it themselves, they are more likely to make assumptions about how it works and why it's enabled. The more a school system can proactively communicate the process and value before actually deploying it, the better." ■

For more information about GoGuardian's commitment to privacy and to hear answers to commonly asked questions, visit our [Trust & Privacy Center](#).

1 "[Figure 2. Reported use of online health resources, by depressive symptoms](#)" Hopelab. 2018

Redefining Our Campus Culture: SEL Is Not Extra, It's Essential!



REBEKAH KMIECIAK
Social Emotional Learning Coach

Rebekah is currently serving as a district Social Emotional Learning Coach. Her work is deeply rooted in promoting education that is founded on principles of equitable practices and supportive teaching structures.

There is no denying that social emotional learning (SEL) has been the central focus in the education world over the last year. We have been reminded this past year that schools are not just learning institutions; they are spaces that cultivate curiosity and where students and teachers alike develop lifelong connections. They are spaces that provide physical and emotional safety, and quite frankly, where basic needs, like food and clothing, are met on a daily basis. Now, more than a year into this pandemic, people are learning more about the actual experiences of their students, families, teachers, and educational leaders.

As a community and a society, we are making stronger connections regarding the importance of authentic SEL implementation and reflecting on all the ways it shows up in our daily interactions. In education, school districts are working hard to provide teachers and students the support they need to build schools back better than before. But doing so starts with acknowledging the fact that teaching and learning is about more than just content and curriculum.

Teaching involves building positive relationships and promoting a sense of community. With virtual teaching, hybrid settings, and in-person teaching all occurring this school year, it goes without saying that teachers are being asked to do more than ever before. And as teachers attempt to balance this on a daily basis, it can feel like there is no time for intentional SEL practices. But this is simply not true.

SEL is not an extra thing, an additional task, or a supplemental activity. It is the intentional practice of co-creating an environment where people demonstrate and experience safety and belonging. As educators, if we don't spend our time building and fostering relationships, we miss a tremendous opportunity. It's important to see SEL implementation as a practical application and not just "one more thing."

We can't ask teachers to give what they don't have — districts need to re-examine their campus systems to ensure that teachers have the resources they need. When districts intentionally create space and offer resources for

continuous professional learning, teachers can make stronger connections to their current practices.

There are countless ways to meaningfully integrate SEL into classroom instruction and culture, but let's look at some simple practices that help build and foster relationships in any space, virtual or otherwise:

Acknowledge Emotions

Emotions are not good or bad, they just are. And because emotions don't just go away, it's important to create spaces to let those feelings in, and as Dr. Dan Siegel says, "name them to tame them." Daily and consistent check-ins with students are key to normalizing emotions and making space for folks to feel whatever they are experiencing. As an SEL coach, one way I check in with teachers and students is by using a practice called Four Corners (adapted from the CASEL Playbook). With virtual platforms like Google Jamboard or an interactive Pear Deck slide, teachers can check in with students both in person and in virtual spaces. Teachers can also use interactive tools like Pear Deck's Classroom Climate for a more anonymous way to check in that only the teacher can see.

Explicitly Teach and Model Expectations

When we explicitly teach and model expectations, we create more spaces for SEL skill integration to occur. Oftentimes as educators, we make assumptions about the skills that students have, or what prior knowledge they should have by a certain age. If we can see behavior as a skill, we can teach and model expectations for mastery, just like we would any other academic skill.

One way to achieve this is to look for opportunities to explicitly teach SEL skills. For example, if I'm a teacher, and part of my lesson involves students working with a partner, I want to use that opportunity to emphasize that working in pairs is an opportunity to build teamwork and collaborative problem-solving skills. When educators make concrete connections to the "why" behind their actions, students can better understand what the intended outcomes are. One tool that I find useful in connecting commonly used strategies with SEL skill development is this chart (see left), created by Ashley Taplin, Secondary Math Curriculum Specialist. It provides explicit dialogue for highlighting SEL skills during check-ins, goal setting, self-assessments, partner work, and problem-solving.

EXPLICIT DIALOGUE FOR

Social Emotional Learning

BASED ON CASEL'S 5 CORE COMPETENCIES

Self Awareness CHECK-INS	<i>"We're doing this check-in as a way for you and me to be aware of our energy level before beginning today's lesson."</i>
Self Management GOAL SETTING	<i>"When you set a goal based on today's target, we are working on self-management to achieve it."</i>
Responsible Decision Making SELF-ASSESSMENT	<i>"When we discuss expectation for virtual learning, we're going to use responsible decision-making. Let's think about how others might react if rules are not followed."</i>
Relationship Skills PARTNER WORK	<i>"I'm pairing you up so we can develop effective communication, collaboration, and relationships."</i>
Social Awareness PROBLEM SOLVING	<i>"Someone might not have seen it the same way you did, when we talk about different strategies and perspective, we're working on social awareness."</i>

Ashley Taplin, Rebekah Kmiecik, and Carrie Edmond

Find (or Build) Your Community

Teachers need other teachers, this school year more than ever. With virtual teaching being done from empty classrooms, educators are finding themselves feeling isolated and sometimes overwhelmed. Staying connected to our peers and colleagues becomes imperative. But to do so, we have to intentionally make collaboration and connection a priority.

Simple practices, like taking brain breaks, cultivating mindfulness, and other routines that are geared to reduce stress, are all small steps that can make a big difference. Finally, set an intention to work in collaboration—and not just with others in your content area or grade level. When we reach out to our counterparts in different departments, we find answers to questions like: How can we integrate literacy into math lessons? How can we use technology to bring science lessons to life? Co-creating with people who can offer a varied perspective brings a new layer of richness to our work.

Let's change the norm and create a new culture where SEL is seen as a core component of our work in schools and classrooms, not as an "extra." ■

Don't miss Rebekah's presentation from our March virtual event, *Conversations About: Student Mental Health and Wellness!* Hear her discuss [Fostering Social Emotional Learning in Any Space](#) by watching the session on-demand from our website.

You can also boost SEL learning with [Pear Deck's SEL templates](#), available for free in the [Pear Deck Orchard](#).

Supporting Students in Crisis



SAM BRINTON (THEY/THEM)

VP of Advocacy & Government Affairs
The Trevor Project

The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ young people. As The Trevor Project's chief advocacy officer, Sam ensures that the organization is advancing policies and positions that help LGBTQ youth in crisis on the federal, state, and local level, and in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

In this interview, we talk with Sam Brinton about the Model School District Policy for Suicide Prevention, a resource from The Trevor Project that outlines best practices for K-12 school districts to prevent, assess the risk of, intervene in, and respond to youth suicidal behavior.

The Model School District Policy for Suicide Prevention is exactly what its name describes: a policy that school districts can model their own suicide prevention policies after to better support students in crisis. Can you tell us how this resource developed?

“In 2014, the National Association of School Psychologists, the American School Counselor Association, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and The Trevor Project all got together to make sure that schools weren't left in a spot where they were being told to have a suicide prevention policy, but not actually having any of the processes that would be best practice. The Model School Policy outlines best practices for K-12 school districts to protect the health and well-being of all students by having procedures in place to prevent, assess the risk of, intervene in, and respond to youth suicidal behavior.”

What are the main elements of the Model School Policy?

“The Model School Policy is made up of three major components: prevention, intervention, and postvention. It is important, however, to remember that no matter which stage you are in, that populations placed at high risk due to the environment or history can require specialized services that center around those high-risk youth.

LET'S START WITH PREVENTION:

Prevention is about making sure that whether you're school staff or a student, you know what the warning signs of suicide are. Let's make sure that before there's ever an actual attempt, that we understand what's happening right in front of us. Knowing the warning signs is kind of like knowing the symptoms. Let's say you have a sniffly nose — do you need tissues, or do you need cold medicine, or do you need to go to the doctor? These are all different interpretations that we have to figure out.

THEN THERE'S INTERVENTION:

Okay, now we know this isn't just the sniffles; we need to go to the doctor. The intervention policy means that when a student is identified by a peer, educator, or other source as thinking about dying by suicide, there is a process for what to do next. Are you taking them to the school counselor? Are you taking them off-site? What is the notification of the caregivers? Intervention is about making sure that in the moment of crisis, we know what to do. It's kind of like the Ghostbusters, 'who are you going to call,' right? You don't need to solve everything, but you need to make the call so that you can activate the process. This is why these model school policies are so important because yes, you can have as much prevention as possible, but in the moment of crisis, if a teacher's having to Google the word suicide to figure out what to do, then we have a problem on our hands.

Intervention is about making sure that in the moment of crisis, we know what to do.

AND THEN THERE'S POSTVENTION:

Let's say there's been a death by suicide, or an attempt in the community, whether a teacher or a staff member or a student. Regardless of the outcome of that attempt, it's really important to recognize that the transition back into the school system can be really difficult. And so postvention says, let's make sure that if there is an attempt, we've given this student as many support systems as possible. So that way, when they're coming back into school, we don't place them right back into crisis and start this cycle all over again. Let's make sure there's a soft landing, if you want to think about it like that.

And then of course, for community members or others who may die by suicide, it's about talking about memorialization. What are ways that we can honor a person's memory without potentially creating what we call suicide contagion, this idea that by glorifying an act you could lead more individuals to consider suicide due to the glory that has occurred. That doesn't mean all memorials are bad, it just means you need to know what you're going to do so that people aren't trying to make it up on the fly. That's the most important part — have a process, have a plan."

You mention high-risk populations. Can you talk more about that?

"Now let's be clear. These populations are not at risk because of who they are. They are at risk because of a variety of factors — some may have family members who were veterans, and that has led them to hear about suicide attempts or deaths by suicide more often due to the higher rates of suicide attempts by former members of the military; some of them are LGBTQ and because of cultural rejection and discrimination, they are at higher risk of suicide due to that rejection. They don't have a support system that can see those warning signs of suicide and can try to prevent it in the first place.

And then of course, there's youth of color. We need to recognize that due to socioeconomic discrimination and just plain racism, we are not serving every young person who walks in a school's doors equally. They're not getting the same experience. That means that we need to make sure that no matter what language you're speaking or what the color of your skin is, you are being served by a suicide prevention policy."

What's the most common challenge you see educators or districts face when you work with them to implement the Model School District Policy for Suicide Prevention?

“Without a doubt, the greatest challenge is the idea of an unfunded mandate. The idea that I need to do all of this without the support to make it happen. When The Trevor Project works to implement laws requesting or requiring these types of policies in every school, we want to make sure there are financial resources that go along with it.

For example, there was a California bill that required policy, but not teacher training. The California state auditor did an audit of school suicide prevention policies and basically found what we always say — policy is helpful and it's good, but without teacher training and staff training, they don't know that the policy exists or what to do. What gets funded is what gets done.

Whether [your school is] urban or rural, large or small, you need to make sure that you have the resources available to make that training available — and to make sure that your PTA, school board, school staff, students, parents, the bus driver, the community member, etc., have bought into the idea that it's not just the job of the teacher. We have to make sure that this pressure doesn't rest only on a teacher who's already doing so much to save the lives of young people each and every day.”

How do you know that the Model School Policy is effective?

“Without actual research being done on the implementation of model school policies, we will never truly know how many lives they are saving, but it was created based on established best practices in suicide prevention, so we believe in its efficacy. We know that one supportive adult can reduce suicidal ideation by more than 40%, and by implementing this policy, you'll have more of those adults, because there will be more adults in the community who

have been trained. We know that affirming spaces can halve the rate of suicide among LGBTQ people, and that creating an inclusive suicide prevention policy creates a potentially inclusive affirming space.”

...one supportive adult can reduce suicidal ideation by more than 40%...

When the Model School Policy was developed, we hadn't yet ventured into the challenges of the pandemic, which research shows is having a profound impact on mental health. What can educators expect to experience when more students return to school after the pandemic?

“We know that COVID has caused a variety of different experiences for a variety of individuals. Depending on your zip code, your socioeconomic status, your race, and your gender identity or sexual orientation — you experienced COVID differently. The one common factor is that it caused significant harm, which has not been able to be addressed because individuals have not been able to actually go to a therapist and maybe speak about it as easily, and their parents are currently still under the pressure. There is no pressure relief valve.

Eventually, the school will become the pressure relief valve. If you do not have a policy in place, there is the potential for a very difficult school year supporting the mental health of young people. And this is not something that's only going to be happening in high schools. These are young individuals who watched their world, all of their support structures potentially, become inaccessible. So when those structures become accessible again, they will be put under strain trying to recapture a year's worth of support.

We do not want to wait for the potential for increased suicidal ideation and attempts to be the catalyst for getting suicide prevention policies in place.

When we return after a year unlike any other, we have to have at least the bare minimum of a process — the intervention — in place for every school. When we did research of schools that were implementing school suicide prevention policies, we found them in clusters around a death by suicide. We do not want to wait for the potential for increased suicidal ideation and attempts to be the catalyst for getting suicide prevention policies in place. It is important to recognize that the rate of death by suicide during COVID has not increased in a way that the government has been able to measure. However, I can tell you that The Trevor Project is sometimes receiving more than twice our normal contact volume of crisis in the middle of COVID compared to pre-COVID times. So when students return to schools, what is it going to look like when it's not calling The Trevor Project every night and instead talking to your favorite teacher, lunch lady, principal, or school guidance counselor? These are conversations we need to be prepared for, and we do not have enough preparation. One-third of schools around the country have no mention of suicide prevention in their policies." ■

Learn more about the [Model School District Policy](#) by visiting [The Trevor Project](#) online, and watch Sam's closing keynote from our virtual event, [Conversations About: Mental Health and Wellness](#).

If you, or someone you know, are thinking about suicide and in need of immediate support, please call the TrevorLifeline at 1-866-488-7386 or visit [TrevorChat](#) to connect with a counselor.

ACT:

How to Respond to Someone Who Shares Suicidal Thoughts

Jonathan B. Singer, Ph.D. LCSW
President, American Association of Suicidology

ACKNOWLEDGE

Acknowledge that you're seeing signs of suicide in a student

CARE

Show a student that you care

TELL

Tell an administrator

6 Tips for Schools to Help Address Suicide Risk



1. Conduct universal screening



2. Collaborate with parents and communities



3. Aspire to zero suicides



4. Train staff to recognize and respond to suicide risk



5. Recognize mistakes as learning opportunities



6. Care for staff

Jonathan B. Singer, Ph.D, LCSW is Associate Professor at Loyola University Chicago, the President of American Association of Suicidology (AAS), author, speaker, and podcast host.

Don't miss Dr. Singer's opening keynote from our March virtual event, Conversations About: Student Mental Health and Wellness. Hear him discuss how self-care is a misnomer, what schools can do to take care of staff, and six things schools need to do to address suicide risk. Watch the session on-demand from our [website](#).



A Student Self-Care Recipe



**MICHAEL E. CREEKMORE,
JR., LPC**

Social Emotional Learning Coach

Michael is currently a Professional School Counselor for 4th and 5th grades, and has been a Licensed Professional Counselor for 16 years.

The 2020-2021 school year was like something out of a suspense — no, no, a drama — no, more like a horror movie. From an educator perspective, the relentless debate regarding in-person versus virtual school has been exhausting! The debates, conversations, and decisions regarding which format to choose are overwhelming for every educator, parent, and adult with vested interest. Ironically, these conversations and debates occur around students but rarely with students. For a moment, let's reimagine this from a student perspective:

You're a bright-eyed, energetic student. You have been home since March 2020. At first, it was a bonus Spring Break. You figured you would get an extra week off but nothing more. Fast forward to a year later, you are still learning virtually, trying to foster estranged relationships, trying to muster enough motivation to complete assignments and receive passing grades. You are also experiencing anxiety, escalating fears, and unparalleled angst because there is a pandemic wreaking worldwide havoc. Just when you feel your spirits are at an all-time low and you've worn the same t-shirt and lounge pants for the hundredth time, the light at the end of the tunnel comes into focus. Hope is near! Vaccines are administered to educators, ushering in a return to traditional in-person school.

After more than a year, everything is finally returning to normal. Gone are the anxiety, fears, and angst, right?

Not so fast. School buildings are different now. If you transitioned to elementary, middle, or high school in the past year, you have never seen the inside of your school before. Where are your classes? How are you supposed to find your way around without being late to class? It's like the first day of school all over again. Educators and other adults have been vaccinated, but you haven't. Does this mean you will contract COVID-19 from a classmate? Will you have to wear a mask all day? What about recess? PE? Lunch? Prom? Graduation? Wait a minute. It's standardized testing time. How are you supposed to be ready to take a standardized test after virtual school for the past year?

The reality is that fears, anxieties, and angst will still exist post-COVID-19, and social emotional learning (SEL) is the key to helping manage these emotions, for both students and educators. Healthy self-care stems from SEL competency and self-management.

Here's how we can help students build those skills:

Students may wonder, what exactly is self-care? It's been talked about a lot and seems to have many definitions. In short, **self-care** is an intentional act one takes in an effort to promote their own mental, physical, and emotional health. Although many experts and professionals talk about self-care and how essential it is for adults, students can benefit as well. Self-care may not be the answer to all of life's questions, but it most certainly can help students (and us!) manage those difficult times when life becomes hard and overwhelming.

As ceremonial events and celebratory milestones near, uncertainty grows. Some may wonder, what does self-care have to do with this? Well, it depends on your recipe — yep, **your self-care recipe!**

In a lot of families, there is someone who cooks exceptionally well. The ingredients are proportionately distributed throughout the dish, the seasoning is perfect, and the taste is exquisite. To those that love the dish, it's delicious, but not everyone will agree.

With self-care, you're the amazing chef, cooking the perfect dish just for you! Of course, you'll need some main ingredients — relaxation, sleep, and exercise — but you will undoubtedly add different ingredients to your finished dish. The moment that recipe loses its amazing taste, consider changing the ingredients. Don't worry about someone else's critique of your recipe. What tastes good to you may not taste good to someone else, and that's OK, as long as your recipe works for you and is:

Which of these ingredients do you think are essential for your own recipe?
Feel free to add your own ingredients in the blank boxes!

Relaxation time	Sleep	Hobbies	Foods you like
Spending time with friends & family	Meditation	Reading	Exercise
Time away from screens and devices	Music		

Students, draw anywhere on this slide! Pear Deck Interactive Slides

To help students develop a strategy for self-care and a greater understanding of what that term means, we collaborated with Michael to create a set of Pear Deck templates for building a [Student Self-Care Recipe](#).

1. Addressing emotional management
2. Improving physical health
3. Improving mental health

When you think of self-care, you may wonder what makes one plan better, more effective. The three target areas above serve as a fundamental compass when creating your recipe. Throughout your life, there will be times when you feel physically exhausted; you'll need to sit down and rest.

Throughout your life, there will be times when you feel physically exhausted; you'll need to sit down and rest.

Sometimes social situations, friendships, or the state of society will upset you and cause you emotional distress; you'll need to step away to catch your breath, to put your phone down, to disconnect. Of course, by now you realize life can be tough; you can feel great today and terrible tomorrow. If you want to shake that terrible feeling away but you can't — if it sticks with you, causes you discomfort, makes life harder — those thoughts and feelings may be indicative of worsening mental health. By targeting those three specific areas, your self-care recipe adopts a holistic approach to mending your mind, body, and soul.

A Self-Care Recipe for Students

An effective self-care recipe should address all three categories:



PHYSICAL HEALTH

The state of our physical body and how well it's operating.



MENTAL HEALTH

Our cognitive, behavioral, and emotional well-being. It's all about how people think, feel, and behave.



EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Our ability to accept and manage feelings through challenge and change.

EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT

Reducing our amount of social media consumption can improve our emotional state. It's harder to become upset or vicariously traumatized if we don't watch the videos. Sometimes we simply have to stop scrolling. Our mood is often influenced by what we see and hear, and interactions we have with others. During those times when we're feeling a little down, something as simple as listening to some upbeat music may help put a little "pep in our step." We can also try to surround ourselves with people who have a positive effect on our emotional wellness. For example: we all have friends that may require more time, attention, and energy, but when those friends constantly leave us feeling exhausted and with limited energy for anything else, it's time to re-evaluate that friendship. It is okay to prioritize yourself and say "no" sometimes, even to a friend.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Even though “working out” may not be one of your desired self-care recipe ingredients, consider this: exercising regularly has been scientifically proven to combat and decrease the likelihood of anxiety and depression. When we exercise, the body releases endorphins (chemicals) that make our bodies feel energetic and serve as a natural mood boost. Here’s a list of some endorphin-producing activities:

Walking, hiking, jogging, running, jumping rope, jumping jacks, mountain climbers, jump squats, kickboxing, burpees, HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training) workouts, step aerobics, yoga, and pilates, just to name a few.

MENTAL HEALTH

This school year has served as one of the most challenging times in many of our lives. We’ve all done hard things this year, but our students have had to do hard things at a younger age. Trying to navigate feelings associated with COVID-19, being traumatized by racial injustices, and feeling socially disconnected from friends takes a significant toll on your mental health. It’s often recommended that you go to a doctor when you feel physically ill, right? Why shouldn’t the same be said when we’re not feeling well mentally? There is no shame in seeking help from a mental health professional to work through those feelings. Seeking help is actually a sign of strength and a wonderful display of self-awareness.

As students embark on the creation of their own self-care recipe, remember — creating the perfect recipe is a matter of trial and error. Someone’s specific ingredients may change over time due to life circumstances and individual growth. Just don’t forget the most important fact about self-care: it’s a verb — it only works if you do it! Let’s help students create a recipe just for them. ■

To help students develop a strategy for self-care and a greater understanding of what that term means, we’ve collaborated with Michael to create a set of Pear Deck templates for building a [Student Self-Care Recipe](#). Be sure to check out [Michael’s Pear Deck Templates for School Counseling: Feelings](#).

You can also boost SEL learning with [Pear Deck’s SEL templates](#), available for free in the [Pear Deck Orchard](#).



In the Pear Deck templates for building a Student Self-Care Recipe, students can reflect on their individual needs for self care.

What are a few specific actions you can take to help manage and maintain your Universal Care?

Jonathan B. Singer, Ph.D. LCSW

In a special-edition GoGuardian webinar, Conversations About: Mental Health and Wellness, Dr. Jonathan Singer introduces the concept of Universal Care, which is a different way to think about taking care of yourself and those in your educational community.

For more information on specific ways to practice Universal Care, watch Dr. Singer's keynote session from our Conversations About webinar [here](#).

10 WAYS TO HELP MAINTAIN YOUR UNIVERSAL CARE



For Crisis Support

If you or someone you love is struggling with suicidal thoughts or feeling hopeless, please call or text one of these organizations to be connected with support now.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Call 1-800-273-8255.

Crisis Text Line

Text TALK to 741741.

Trevor Lifeline

Call 866-488-7386.

Text START to 678-678

Additional Resources from Our Partners

Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), American School Counselor Association (ASCA), National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), The Trevor Project

Preventing Suicide

The Trevor Project

School Resources

American Association of Suicidology

Suicide Prevention Education Programs

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Preventing Suicide: The Role of High School Teachers

Suicide Prevention Resource Center

Preventing Youth Suicide

National Association of School Psychologists

GoGuardian Resources

Self-Harm & Suicide Prevention Resource Center

GoGuardian Blog

Be there for your students when they need you most

To learn more about Beacon, GoGuardian's student safety solution for K-12, visit our site and request additional information.







[Learn more](#)

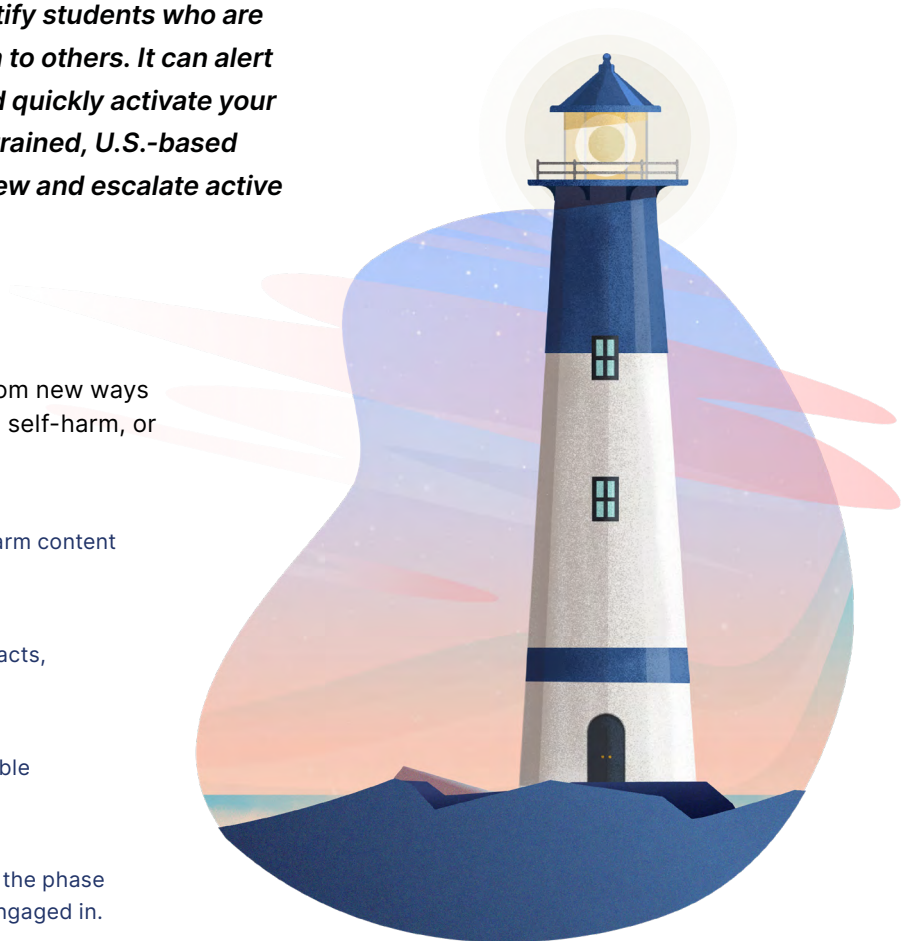
The Student Safety Solution for K-12

GoGuardian Beacon is designed to help identify students who are at risk of suicide, self-harm, or possible harm to others. It can alert the right responders to get students help and quickly activate your school's response plan. An optional team of trained, U.S.-based safety support specialists is available to review and escalate active planning alerts 24/7.¹

Key Features:

School mental health professionals can benefit from new ways to identify students who may be at risk of suicide, self-harm, or possible harm to others.

-  Identify students engaging in suicide or self-harm content online (including through Search).
-  Identify searches for guns and bombs, violent acts, bullying, and cyberbullying.
-  Activate the right responders with a customizable escalation list.
-  Create faster response plans with insights into the phase of suicide and self-harm activity a student is engaged in.
-  Get alerts with context, screenshots, and past activities for faster, more informed responses.
-  Receive phone calls for active planning alerts 24/7 from an optional team of U.S.-based safety specialists.



To request additional information about Beacon and try GoGuardian for free, visit our site.

[Learn more](#)

