



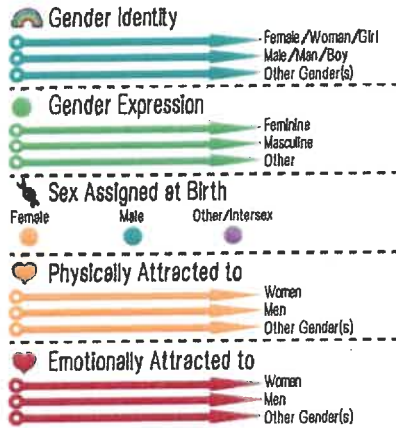
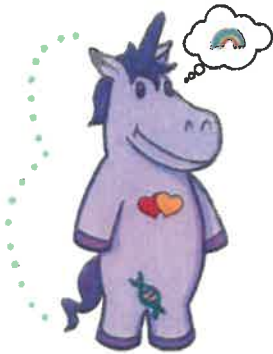
# GSA

## Genders & Sexualities Alliance



### The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by: **TSER**



To learn more, go to: [www.trans101ent.org/gender](http://www.trans101ent.org/gender)

Design by Landyn Pen and Anne Moore

Google Classroom code:

# g5sujrz

Questions? See Ms. Glorso-McCabe in Science

## THURSDAYS 3:31-4:30pm #3977

## ALL STUDENTS WELCOME







Meetings start Tuesday 8/30, room 3977, 3:31-4:30pm! See Ms. Glorso-McCabe in Science with questions!

Join our Google Classroom for connectedness [g5sujrz](#)

Want Remind updates from our GSA? text [@tolerance](#) to the number [81010](#)

New Support Group for Parents, thanks to PFLAG Highlands Ranch. Email [SusanPSPTeam@gmail.com](mailto:SusanPSPTeam@gmail.com) if you are interested. Thank you!

# Parents Supporting Parents

Contact: Susan  
[SusanPSPteam@Gmail.Com](mailto:SusanPSPteam@Gmail.Com)

PARENT SUPPORT Revised.pdf



**GSA**



**Genders & Sexualities Alliance**  
#3977 3:31-4:15pm  
Wednesdays  
**ALL STUDENTS ARE WELCOME**

The Gender Unicorn



TSER

See Ms. Giorso-McCabe in Science #3977 with questions



GSA Flyer 2019 Gender Unicorn



3SA

◀ ▶ Tuesday, October 17 ▼

Week Month Agenda

Showing events after 10/17. [Look for earlier events](#)

Showing events until 11/15. [Look for more](#)

Contact Ms. Glorso-McCabe if you're interested in attending Celebrating Trans Voices on Sunday, March 31st at DU! 4:00-5:30 PM, at Sturm Hall, 2000 E. Asbury Ave., Denver, CO 80208. Our GSA can pay for 4 student spots! Get a parent permission slip to Ms. Glorso ASAP if you want to go! LINK HERE:

[docs.google.com/document/d/1QrIw9HUyRP5STYLcq19GOx2SjPgeAVY2y3WtIRoPgoM/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QrIw9HUyRP5STYLcq19GOx2SjPgeAVY2y3WtIRoPgoM/edit?usp=sharing)



## Celebrating Trans Voices



× Want Remind updates from our GSA?  
text @tolerance to the number  
81010

You'll receive a welcome text from Remind.

If anyone has trouble with 81010, they can try texting @tolerance to (303) 351-5341.





Customize



Announce something to your class



Kelli Glorso-McCabe posted a new material: Fat Bear Week!



Posted Oct 4

Dear Students,

The most chonkerful time of the year is here—Katmai National Park's FAT BEAR WEEK!

The brown bears (grizzlies) of Katmai have been packing in the Calories all summer long to get ready for winter—who is the MOST ready for winter? We have a March Madness-style bracket so we can vote who is the fattest bear! You can vote every day from October 4 through the 10th (Fat Bear Tuesday!).

Visit the Explore.org/fat-bear-week site to vote! They do ask for an email when you vote, that is just for the voting process.



Fat Bear Week 2023 - Katmai National Pa...  
<https://www.nps.gov/katm/learn/fat-bear-week-20>



Fat Bear Week 2023 | VOTE  
<https://explore.org/fat-bear-week>



Add class comment...



Kelli Glorso-McCabe  
Oct 3



Dear GSA students,

I just found out that **YouthSeen.org** is hosting a **Queer Homecoming for youth 13-18!** I am looking into being a chaperone—I do not yet know where it is located (address upon registration).

The **YouthSeen Queer Homecoming** is Saturday, October 7th, 6:30-10:00pm.

The National Coming Out Day celebration is Wednesday, October 11th in the Cheesman Park Pavilion, 7-9pm.



A Night Under the Stars - Flyer .png  
Image



National Coming Out Day flyer .pdf  
PDF

1 class comment



Anne-Sophie Poullier Oct 4  
October 8th is INTERNATIONAL lesbian day



Add class comment...





Stream Classwork People Grades

we will get our trout eggs on the teacher in-service day Monday, October 23! I just found out and I'm so excited! Sincerely, Ms. Glorso-McCabe



Add class comment...



Kelli Glorso-McCabe  
Aug 31



My child's school called me at 3:15 to tell me that she had a severe headache and if I could please come pick her up. I hope you all can still have a chance to hang out, and to get ideas for the table at the Activities Fair on Friday 9/8! I will be at the table with you.



Add class comment...



Kelli Glorso-McCabe  
Aug 21



Starting this week, Thursday 8/24, our GSA will meet after school in #3977 from 3:35 to 4:35pm! Can't wait to see you all there—and as always, if you need to bounce between different club meetings, I totally understand. Sincerely, Ms. Glorso-McCabe



Add class comment...



Kelli Glorso-McCabe  
Aug 21



From the It Gets Better Project: Queerbook 2024!

We have a question we'd like to ask LGBTQ+ youth: What would your LGBTQ+ utopia look like?

But don't just tell us — show us. Now through September 15, queer youth ages 13-24 can submit your visual art, photography, poetry, short essays/stories and more, and they might end up in QUEERBOOK 2024: a powerful collection of queer youth voices capturing your thoughts, feelings, and hopes during this year. You know, like a yearbook, but make it queer!

<https://itgetsbetter.org/blog/queerbook-2024/>



It Gets Better Project contest 2024.png



Queerbook 2024 – It Gets Better  
<https://itgetsbetter.org/blog/queerbook-2024/>



Classroom > Heritage GSA



Stream Classwork People Grades



Jasmine Collins  
Aug 18



I'll hopefully get my license this year so hopefully I'll be able to come more this year, I miss yall have a great year

2 class comments



Kelli Glorso-McCabe Aug 21  
Love it, Tea!



Add class comment...



Kelli Glorso-McCabe  
Aug 10



Dear GSA students,

What do we think about Thursdays after school (3:35-4:35) for our meetings this year?



Add class comment...



Kelli Glorso-McCabe posted a new material: 9th, 10th, 11th graders: GSA Leadership Council opportunity!



Posted May 10

Dear students,

For next school year (Aug 2023-May 2024), there is an opportunity for a GSA Leadership position through ONE Colorado.



23-24 GSA Leadership Council Application  
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf1aI>



Add class comment...



Kelli Glorso-McCabe posted a new question: Dear students, please let me or Mr. Hofschire know if you would like a co...Due May 12



Posted May 8

You can let me know at [kglorso@lps.k12.co.us](mailto:kglorso@lps.k12.co.us) (or speak to me directly).

0

Turned in

18

Assigned

Mr. Hofschire will be sending out a confidential email (BCC, Blind Carbon Copy) with information for people who are interested. The single-occupant, gender neutral bathroom at Baldoria on the Water is tucked away, so they want to let interested parties know discreetly. Thank you!



Add class comment...



# NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY!

Join us for a **FREE** event to celebrate the joys of coming out with speakers, resources, music, voter registration stations and more!

.....  
Wednesday, October 11  
7 - 9 p.m.  
Cheesman Park Pavillion

**YouthSeen**



Register Here!

@youth\_seen   



YouthSeen  
Queer Homecoming Dance  
2023



# A NIGHT UNDER THE STARS

where *everyone's* a star

Saturday, October 7th  
6:30 - 10 p.m.  
For LGBTQIA+ Youth  
Ages 13-18  
Free Admission  
Formal Attire



Location available upon registration  
Link to nominations for a Royal Court included in registration!

[www.youthseen.org](http://www.youthseen.org)  



**Join us!**

**Wednesday, Sept. 9th**

(& every 2nd Wednesday of every month!)

**6PM TO 8PM**

**@ Lone Tree Library**

**SOULS**  
LGBTQ+ Youth Ages 11-21!

**Breathings**  
A Group for



Lynette Schweimler  
Program Engagement Coordinator, Rainbow Alley  
Contact: [lschweimler@glbtcolorado.org](mailto:lschweimler@glbtcolorado.org) | (303)951-0442

**the center**  
rainbow alley

WELCOMING THE SOUTH SUBURBAN AREA





## 50 States. 50 Grants. 5000 Voices. Overview + Guidelines

### 50 States. 50 Grants. 5000 Voices.

Grants of up to \$10k will be awarded from a \$500K fund to at least one middle and/or high school in every U.S. state, including U.S. territories. We want to support educators, administrators, and LGBTQ+ clubs that prioritize the empowerment and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ youth while at school. The grant opportunity is made possible with support from American Eagle Outfitters, Inc. (AEO) and the American Eagle and Aerie brands.

Below are examples of projects, and not limited to the following. Projects could include:

- *School-wide Projects*
  - Build an LGBTQ+ section for books and other resources in your school library (For example: [Build an Inclusive Library w/ Welcoming Schools](#))
  - Paint a mural or other art installation in your school highlighting local LGBTQ+ history (For example: [Install History Panels w/ ONE Archives Foundation](#))
  - Provide LGBTQ+ inclusive training for your entire school staff (For example: [Support Professional Development w/ GLSEN](#) or [Provide LGBTQ+ History Webinars for Educators w/ ONE Archives Foundation](#))
- *Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA) Projects*
  - Launch your school's first GSA
  - Install a school garden or gender affirming closet that supports the GSA
  - Provide leadership training for your GSA student leaders (For example: [Provide LGBTQ+ History Webinars for Students w/ ONE Archives Foundation](#))
- *Community Projects*
  - Organize a school float for your city's Pride Parade
  - Help establish a student-focused program with a local LGBTQ+ center or nonprofit
  - Establish a partnership between the LGBTQ+ students at your school with LGBTQ+ seniors in your area

Grant recipients have up to one year to utilize funding and to report back on impact. Grants do NOT fund research, political activities, scholarships, or individual needs. Grants can NOT benefit only one student.

### ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

All grant applicants **must** demonstrate the following criteria in their application:

- School is a public and/or charter secondary (middle/junior or high) school listed by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) that serves students between 13-18 years old.
- Clear demonstration that funding will effectively support the school's LGBTQ+ students and educators.
- Clear student/youth participation in the planning and execution of the proposed project; all applications must include at least one student leader and one faculty advisor as signatories.

- Unique project plan that must be executed within one school year, demonstrating a clear understanding of the needs of LGBTQ+ students at that school, as well as measurable objectives/impact.
- Limited to one application per school.

Grants will be **prioritized** to schools that demonstrate the following additional criteria:

- Established (1 yr+) Gender & Sexuality Alliance (GSA), or similar club.
- Diverse student population (ex. 50% or more of all students are students of color).
- Federally recognized Title I status (i.e. 40% or more of students come from low-income homes).
- Documented support of LGBTQ+ students (including trans students, queer students of color, queer students with disabilities, etc.) through policies, curriculum, and more.
- Project plan that incorporates broader community impact and involvement.

**APPLICATION TIMELINE**

Below is the estimated timeline for the entire grant process, from application through the final report:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
November 10, 2021	Application Portal Opens
November 2021 - February 2022	Community Webinars
March 15, 2022	Application Portal Closes
February - April 2022	Application Review
May - June 2022	Notify Grantees of Final Decisions
July - August 2022	Disbursement of Funds
October 2022	Q3 Check-in w/ Grantees
January 2023	Q4 Check-ins w/ Grantees
April 2023	Q1 Check-in w/ Grantees
July 2023	Final Reports Due



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Home ABOUT OUTREACH ADVOCACY SUPPORT YOUTH JOIN US



# SCHOLARSHIP

The PFLAG Denver Scholarship Program rewards outstanding LGBTQIA+ students and Straight Allies for service to the LGBTQIA+ community. We honor young adults who carry with them unique lived experience, a demonstration of advocacy, and a drive towards building a more just, inclusive world through action. In each annual scholarship cycle, we provide financial awards of up to \$2,500 per recipient.



PFLAG Denver's Scholarship Program is a unifying event for our Chapter. Each year we come together as individuals, members, community partners, and corporate sponsors to secure funding and to celebrate the Bright Future of our vibrant LGBTQIA+ community, as reflected in its youth. Our annual Scholarship and Award Ceremony is our most anticipated event of the year, a night of hope and joy that you won't want to miss.



***Our scholarship cycle is completed for 2023. Please return in January for details on our 2024 program!***



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Home ABOUT OUTREACH ADVOCACY SUPPORT YOUTH JOIN US



# JOIN US

## As we uplift & celebrate our LGBTQIA+ and Allied YOUTH

The PFLAG Denver Scholarship Program is funded by a diverse collection of individuals, members, and corporate partners. Without the generous contributions of many, our program would not exist.

Please join us in seeing and celebrating these students. Make a donation today. Together we can give these young adults the financial support they need to materialize the bright future that our community deserves.

All donations are tax deductible and eligible for corporate matches.

# Thank You!

*Checks may be mailed to  
Scholarship Program  
PFLAG Denver  
PO Box 6448  
Denver, CO 80206*



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## Contact Us

[pflagden@pflagdenver.org](mailto:pflagden@pflagdenver.org)

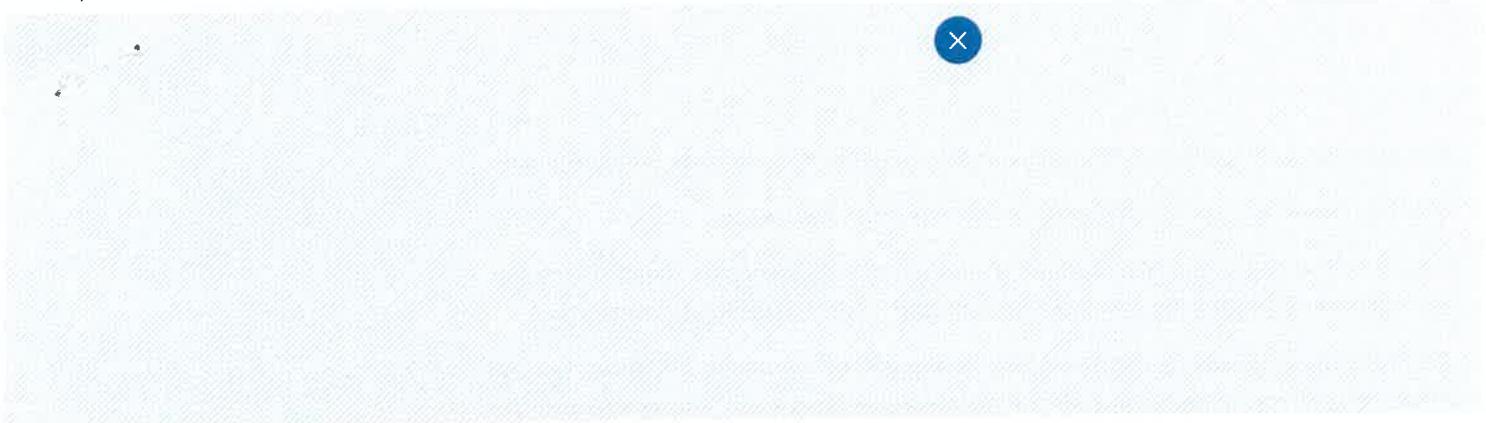
PO Box 6448  
Denver, CO 80206

303.573.5861  
CALL OR TEXT

EIN: 74-2196824

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LOCAL NEWS

# Dad educates parents about fentanyl after daughter's overdose

Ryan Christoff gives everyone who comes to his home a dose of naloxone to take with them.



Author: Kelly Reinke (9NEWS)  
Published: 10:24 PM MST December 5, 2022  
Updated: 10:44 PM MST December 5, 2022



LAFAYETTE, Colo. — One student went to the hospital after a [suspected drug overdose](#) at JFK High School in Denver last week. Four others were treated on campus.

Another [school nearby](#) is reporting fentanyl may have been involved.

It's a drug Ryan Christoff, a father in Boulder County, knows too well. Last year, Lafayette police responded to his 911 call after his 16-year-old daughter overdosed in her bedroom.

"He's running upstairs to find me doing chest compressions on my daughter," Christoff said.

She wasn't breathing until a police officer gave her a dose of naloxone.

"It turned out what she had taken was half of what she thought was a Percocet pill," Christoff said. "She did half of this one and overdosed because it had a lethal dose of fentanyl in it."

Christoff said she got the pill from her boyfriend, who got it from a friend. That friend bought the pill off someone on Snapchat. Christoff said his daughter's pill was the only one that had a lethal dose.

"She was the unlucky one in that sense, in that she got the one with the lethal dose in it," he said. "But of course we are both very lucky that I happened to check on her when I did."

After almost losing his daughter, Christoff feels obligated to show parents the body camera footage of his scariest moment.

"To not share, to not try and help other people, just feels like it would be a disservice," he said. "It would be wrong."



He wants to focus on prevention and educate parents about how to use naloxone.

Christoff has boxes of the overdose reversal drug in his home. He gives a dose to every person who visits, including his daughter's friends.

"Before this happened to me, I wasn't thinking about her dying from an overdose. I just wasn't thinking about it," Christoff said.

He wishes he didn't know so much about naloxone or fentanyl. Now he hopes more people will carry the drug that saved his daughter's life.

"I want other people to think about it, and not live their lives in fear, but be prepared," he said.

Christoff is helping to host two overdose prevention seminars with Boulder County Public Health. Parents are encouraged to come. Attendees will learn about risky behavior related to drugs and learn how to administer naloxone.



The sessions are:

- Dec. 12 from 6-7 p.m. at 515 Coffman Avenue in Longmont
- Dec. 19 from 5:30 - 6:30 p.m. at 3450 Broadway in Boulder

### Related Articles

[Families keep adding to map for loved ones lost to opioids and addiction](#)

[Nearly 30 school districts have received naloxone through state program](#)

**SUGGESTED VIDEOS:** [Fentanyl in Colorado](#)

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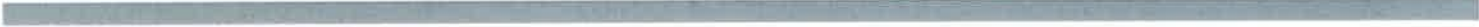
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### Regis University cancels classes Wednesday after deaths of 2 students

KUSA

### 10 years later, Jason Voorhees statue remains chained to the bottom of Crosby mine pit

KUSA



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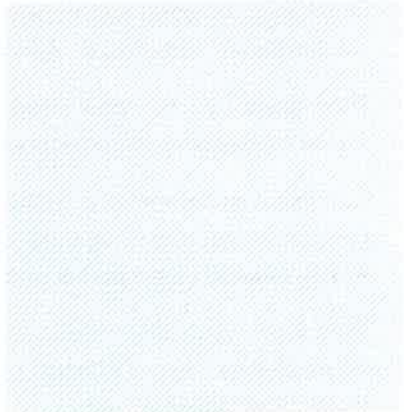
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HEALTH

# How to get Narcan in Colorado

People in Denver can now request Narcan and fentanyl testing strips for free, but Colorado doesn't offer a statewide program.



Author: Erin Powell  
 Published: 5:31 PM MST February 22, 2022  
 Updated: 5:46 PM MST February 22, 2022



DENVER — Denver is mailing Narcan and fentanyl testing strips to any resident who wants them, but the state of Colorado does not have a similar offer for people statewide.

In addition to providing easier access, [Denver's program](#) is free.

After five people died in Commerce City because of fentanyl, other Coloradans reached out to 9NEWS to ask if there is a way for them to access Narcan and testing strips for free, as well.

**RELATED:** [Denver to ship fentanyl testing strips and Narcan for free to anyone in the city](#)

**RELATED:** [5 found dead inside Commerce City apartment identified](#)

Residents in Colorado who would like to carry Narcan, a medication that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose, can start by checking with their insurance companies. Nasal Narcan, as well as other forms of the generic naloxone, is covered by many health insurance plans, but not all.

People may also be able to get these supplies from a community organization or their health department.

The Overdose Prevention Unit with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment said some local health departments, nonprofit organizations and community service providers are distributing naloxone and fentanyl testing strips in their communities.

State efforts, however, focus on supplying local community partners who best know the needs of their communities, the department said.

"Law enforcement agencies, harm reduction agencies, school districts and some units of local government can access naloxone through a state bulk purchasing agreement at no cost," Andrés Guerrero, the manager of the Overdose Prevention Unit, said via email to 9NEWS.

While it will not be free of charge, Coloradans can get naloxone from pharmacies without a prescription because of a [standing order from the state](#), though not every pharmacy may be aware of that standing order.

The Stop the Clock Colorado website has [a list of pharmacies that carry naloxone in cities](#) across the state.

**RELATED:** [School districts receiving free supplies from health department program](#)

**RELATED:** [What happens when naloxone expires](#)

**WATCH:** [Deciding to carry Narcan could be](#)



**SUGGESTED VIDEOS:** [Full Episodes of Next with Kyle Clark](#)

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### Regis University cancels classes Wednesday after deaths of 2 students

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# Olympic gymnast Mary Lou Retton in ICU 'fighting for her life'

KUSA

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FAMILY

## Parents, You Need Narcan

It's safe. Your town will probably give it to you for free. If you have a teenager, don't wait.

BY DAN KOIS

DEC 04, 2022 • 7:00 PM



"I figured he just needed to sleep it off," said Nichole Causey. Dan Kois

Last July, in a little house in Ashburn, Virginia, Nichole Causey's son told her he was going to take a shower. Causey, who owns a small business that does window tinting for homes, was working on her laptop in the living room; her son, Kyle, headed to the bathroom, which adjoined Nichole's first-floor bedroom. A few minutes later, Nichole heard a strange sound coming from the bedroom, a kind of guttural grunt. When she went into the bedroom, Kyle was lying on her bed, seemingly asleep, entirely naked.

AD



"I was embarrassed," Nichole said when I met her more than a year later, in the Shenandoah Valley town of Staunton, Virginia, where she now lives. "It's weird to see your grown child butt-naked. I hadn't seen him like that since he was 6, 7 years old."

Kyle was 23 that July day. Nichole covered him up with a blanket and went back to the living room. Kyle had struggled with drug addiction for several years, and she assumed he had passed out. "I figured he just needed to sleep it off," she said.

But after a minute, she returned to the bedroom. The noises he was making were disconcerting. And when she shook him, he didn't respond. Kyle was not asleep. He had overdosed, and the opioids in his bloodstream were blocking his brain's commands to his body to breathe. He was suffocating.

If you're a parent of a teen, you may have already read a number of stories like this, terrifying articles about parents discovering their children after an overdose. The articles feature grim photos of the survivors looking into the distance, and are full of dire warnings about how the opioid epidemic has struck families: the athletes who get hooked on medication, the students who buy what they think is one Adderall pill from a guy on Snapchat and drop dead in the front yard. Moms and dads I know pass these stories around helplessly, discuss them in person, turn over and over in their minds every parent's worst nightmare: a child dead in a moment, due to a single mistake.

This is not that kind of story. That's because Nichole Causey had, in her kitchen cabinet, a miracle medication called Narcan. She saved Kyle's life with Narcan, which is simple to administer and works nearly instantly to reverse an opioid overdose.

When I tell parents in my community about Narcan—the brand name given to the anti-overdose drug naloxone—they can't believe what they're hearing. Narcan nasal spray has no side effects, cannot harm anyone, contains no opioids. All it does is save lives.



Narcan is simple to administer and works nearly instantly to reverse an opioid overdose. Dan Kois

It's true that I, and many of my suburban friends and neighbors, have been sheltered from the worst of the opioid epidemic. What is eye-opening to us surely seems like eye-rollingly old news to people in other parts of the country, places that have seen the epidemic ravage their communities—places like Carter County, Tennessee, where children as young as 6 are taught to administer Narcan. But the combination of cheap fentanyl and social media is transforming America's opioid problem in ways that make it more dangerous than any drug epidemic the country's ever seen. In addition to still-growing numbers of overdoses killing people suffering from drug dependency, nonhabitual drug users are now dying in waves from single pills purchased on apps like Snapchat and TikTok. Stories like these begin to explain why the number of U.S. teenagers who died from fentanyl soared from 253 in 2019 to 884 in 2021.

"When people hear the words *fentanyl* and *overdose*, what they understand is the old war on drugs, and people suffering from addiction," Chris Didier, whose son died at 17 after taking a counterfeit Percocet he bought online, recently told the Washington Post. "And not to take away from those who struggle with substance abuse, but the new demographic is people who unwittingly consume fentanyl thinking they are taking a harmless product, and they don't really understand they are taking a huge risk." In 2021, the Drug Enforcement Administration issued a public warning about counterfeit pills. "The amounts are staggering," DEA Administrator Anne Milgram said. "The counterfeit pills are driving so much of it."

Parents reading these stories feel helpless and overwhelmed. Your child could die from a single pill, in your house, before you even know there's a problem. If you're one of those parents, I'm here to tell you that there's a simple, safe medication you can get that can protect your children and their friends. Narcan can save their lives. And there's a good chance your local government will give it to you for free.

\* \* \*

"Grab a person's earlobe and drive your fingernails together as hard as you can," Jim Dooley said. "If the person doesn't respond at all, there's no set of benign circumstances that would explain this behavior. This person is dying."

Dooley calls himself Jim the Narcan Trainer. A volunteer for Arlington County, Virginia, he sets up a table at street fairs, neighborhood parties, and county events to spread the gospel of Narcan to anyone who'll listen. On this fall afternoon, he was in his living room with Christal Platt, a counselor and mother of two teenagers, training her how to use Narcan.

Dooley has white hair and a soft, reedy voice. He lives in a modern, *Minecraft*-looking house in Arlington; on the wall of his living room is a certificate recognizing his work for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007. Dooley was a U.S. government climate scientist until he quit in 2014. "It's good for my soul," he said of the essentially full-time role as Narcan evangelist he's taken up since then. "Saved me from a bad heart attack, and bad bosses."

The one-hour training he was giving Platt was an extended version of the 10-minute spiel he'd given me that summer at a neighborhood yard sale. In both, he focused on a few crucial points. In Virginia, as in many states, you are not at any risk of a lawsuit or prosecution if you try to help someone suffering an overdose. Narcan should be used immediately on anyone who is totally unresponsive. All you do is open it, stick it in the person's nose, and squeeze the dispenser once. That's it. If they are suffering an opioid overdose, within a minute, they will be awake.

Platt met Dooley at the farmers market one Sunday morning. She was worried, she told me, about her kids throwing parties where pills might make an appearance: "If they want to find a way, they will." She said that her primary worry about Narcan was that she might hurt a child by giving them this medication, if it turned out they were not suffering from an overdose.

"So there's no danger from using it if it's something else?" she asked.

"The only thing this medication does is save lives," Dooley said. "No side effects. Any paramedic, the first thing they'll do if they come up on you and you're unresponsive, they're going to give you Narcan. Because there's no downside."

Jim Dooley demonstrates how to administer Narcan. Dan Kois

Dooley picked up a torso-sized dummy of the type you'd see in a CPR class. He acted out a scenario in which the dummy was an unresponsive person: talking to them, shouting at them, shaking them by the shoulders, pinching their earlobe. "So you call 911," he said. "What I really encourage you to do is instead of asking 911, 'What should I do?,' you just take action. You don't need to have a conversation about 'What's her respiration look like,' 'What's her skin color look like.'" Dooley made a *let's move things along* gesture with his hands. "You *know* this person is in trouble. You tell 911: 'I'm at the central library. There's a person here having a medical crisis. I have Narcan. I'm gonna give it to her.'"

He showed Platt the Narcan, a small plastic bottle with an applicator at one end. "This contains one dose, and only one dose," he said. "So if you squeeze it to check if it works?"

Now it contains *zero* doses.” He stuck the applicator up the dummy’s nostril and squeezed once. “That’s it. Now you stand back. When they come out of it, they are not going to feel good. All they need from you is for you to be kind.”

At the end of the training, Dooley handed Platt a box containing two doses of Narcan. She signed and dated the box. “I’m going to see if I can find, like, a cute little bag for my Narcan,” she said.

The leading edge of drug safety policy has long moved past the abstinence-only messages I recall from my high school days. The watchword now, sensibly, is “harm reduction”: policy and tools that make it more likely that people who take opioids, on purpose or accidentally, are less likely to die from them. Narcan is the most crucial tool in the harm reduction arsenal. Just in my county, Arlington, the police department counts 65 lives saved so far in 2022 by Narcan. The county will give you free Narcan after a short training performed by Jim the Narcan Guy or a number of other county employees and volunteers. Any pharmacy in Arlington will give you Narcan without a prescription, and your health insurance should pay for it, thanks to a standing order in the state of Virginia. Every library in Arlington has Narcan in a little box next to the defibrillator.

“It’s not some weird fringe medication,” said Ginny Lovitt, head of a Virginia harm-reduction foundation named after her brother, who died of an overdose in 2013. “It’s starting to be everywhere.”

Nichole Causey had gotten her bottle of Narcan at a local pharmacy in Ashburn. Last July, she ran to grab it from the kitchen cabinet while dialing 911. “It was very surreal,” she told me. “It’s a crisis, but it doesn’t feel like a crisis.” Kyle was still making the weird snoring-like noise, which Causey now understands was a well-known danger sign called the “death rattle” by Narcan trainers like Dooley. She checked Kyle’s blood-oxygen level with a pulse oximeter she’d bought at the beginning of COVID: 50. *That’s not good*, she thought.

The 911 dispatcher kept asking her questions. “Can you tell me how frequently he’s breathing?” “Can you tell me what he might have taken?” Causey says she remembers feeling unbelievably annoyed with the operator, even though she knew she was just doing her job. “She’s walking me through a protocol, but every second counts.” She kept telling the operator she wanted to give Kyle the Narcan, but the operator kept telling her to wait. “Finally, after two or three times, I just was like, *Fuck it. I’m giving it to him.*”

She remembers it took Kyle less than a minute to completely wake up. Coming out of an overdose with Narcan is not a comfortable situation, Kyle told me. Your body has essentially been forced into instant withdrawal. “That’s like the flu times a thousand,” he said. “Your *bones* hurt.” But by the time the ambulance arrived, he’d put on some clothes and was sitting in the living room.

“I don’t think they would’ve gotten there in time,” he told me. “It took them a while.”

The crew helped Kyle into the ambulance, and Nichole followed them to the hospital. In the ER, a doctor turned to her and said, “Nice save, Mom.”

\* \* \*

So you’re a parent of a teenager. Maybe your child has used drugs. Or maybe your kid just goes to parties sometimes; you think there’s probably some drinking; you hear stories of pills. How can you get trained in Narcan, and get a bottle to keep in *your* kitchen cabinet?

The first thing you should do is Google to see if your local health department offers free Narcan training and distribution, or can refer you to a community organization that does. You’re also almost certainly entitled to walk into your pharmacy and get Narcan without a prescription, although that may be news to your pharmacist. Even though every state in the country has waived the prescription requirement to get a box, not every pharmacy carries

the medication, and not every pharmacy clerk knows (or follows) the rules. As Jessie Singer points out in her book *There Are No Accidents*, a 2018 study of California pharmacies revealed that fewer than 1 in 4 were willing to distribute Narcan without a prescription; in Texas, half the surveyed pharmacies refused to bill insurance for Narcan. (Without insurance, Narcan typically costs more than \$100 a box, though an online service like [GoodRx](#) can cut that cost substantially.) Only half of Michigan pharmacies have signed on to the state Narcan distribution program, [according to a recent survey](#). A University of Michigan ER doctor noted that decisions like this come from “not prioritizing this population as being important” because of the stigma around drug use and drug treatment.

The SAFE Project, another nonprofit founded by the survivors of an overdose victim, has compiled a [useful state-by-state guide to rules and regulations](#), as well as links to many local community organizations. If a family member is at risk and you can't find affordable Narcan anywhere in your community, an organization like [NEXT Distro](#) can help; they mail free Narcan to at-risk people without insurance and without another way to get their hands on the medication. But many cities and towns have active and engaged health departments, filled with people like Jim Dooley who would love nothing more than to teach you about Narcan and hand you a box for free.

So: Get trained. Get a box. (You don't need to hoard doses. One box is enough.) Tell your kids what it is and what it's for, and encourage them to get trained. (Teens can, and should, get trained in Narcan.) Urge them to bring Narcan with them to parties, to concerts, on road trips. Make sure your local pharmacist knows that you want her to stock and supply Narcan to those who need it. Email and call local officials to make sure that Narcan is available in public buildings and in schools. Heck, why not bring a dose with you wherever you go, maybe in a cute little bag?

And tell the other parents in your neighborhood what you've done. Yes, you want them to know that this medication exists, medication that might save the lives of the kids you've known since they were little. But just as important as that is to spread the gospel of harm reduction, and to battle the stigma attached to the disease of drug dependency. “When drug use is stigmatized, the risk of overdose increases in myriad ways,” Singer writes, and so every step each of us takes to erase that stigma can help save lives.

Nichole and Kyle. Nichole Causey

It's important, most of all, to do away with the idea that having Narcan is some kind of endorsement of illegal behavior. “You're not inviting drugs into your house by getting Narcan,” Ginny Lovitt told me. “No one buckles their seat belt and thinks, ‘Finally, I can get in a car crash!’” There's no stigma around a car crash, she pointed out,

so everyone willingly engages in a practice to help them survive if something goes wrong. “That's what harm reduction is,” she said. “It's seat belts.”

I don't know that I'll ever need to use the box of Narcan in our kitchen cabinet, or the ones that I'll send to college with my kids. I sure hope not. But having them, and knowing how to use them, and knowing *they* know how to use them, is incredibly empowering. So much of being the parent of teens is feeling helpless about the many, many dangers that face them. “There's so many things we can't do anything about,” Lovitt said. “But Narcan is so simple. It's miraculous.”

Toward the end of our conversation, Nichole Causey echoed that sentiment. “The thing Narcan gives is hope,” she said. “Because otherwise I would've been standing there watching him die.”

In the end, Nichole Causey's story wasn't every parent's nightmare of a fatal overdose. It isn't the perfect happy ending you might hope for, either. Kyle is still an active drug user; he's years into an addiction that has taxed his mother's resources and upended her life. Nichole moved to Staunton because Ashburn, the house, her old life—they all held too many difficult memories.

And yet it is, also, a happy ending, even if a precarious one. "He's a good kid," Nichole told me. "Charming. Winsome. He knows how to make you smile, even when you don't want to smile." And, she added, he's alive. ■

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## How to Get Free Narcan to Keep at Home



Written by [Geoff Williams](#) | Reviewed by [Christina Aungst, PharmD](#)

Published on March 23, 2022

### Key takeaways:

- Narcan (naloxone) is a potentially lifesaving nasal spray medication that can revive someone who has overdosed on opioids.
- Narcan can be expensive, but states have been working to make it cheaper and easier to find. Three states — Ohio, Delaware, and Iowa — provide free Narcan. Cities such as Philadelphia and Chicago distribute free Narcan at public libraries.
- If you are revived with Narcan, you should still see a healthcare provider immediately. If you have saved someone's life with naloxone, call 911 right after administering the medication.

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## Save up to 47% on naloxone with GoodRx

Different pharmacies offer different prices for the same medication. GoodRx helps find the best price for you.



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Narcan ([naloxone](#)) nasal spray can quickly reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. It is so powerful that some states and cities give it away for free to help save lives.

When someone stops breathing after an opioid overdose, Narcan blocks the effects of opioids on the brain. That can result in the person quickly breathing again.

You can now get Narcan [without an individual prescription](#) in every U.S. state. But the average retail price is [about \\$120](#), which can be a dealbreaker if you have to pay for it out of pocket.

If you or someone you love takes [opioids](#) — whether it's prescription pain medication like oxycodone or a potent street drug like [fentanyl](#), there are ways to get free Narcan to keep at home in case of an emergency. You may even qualify to have a nonprofit group mail it to you for free.

### Is it a good idea to have Narcan at home?

Yes. If you or someone you care about takes opioids, it is a smart precaution to keep Narcan at home. It is a similar solution to having a fire extinguisher in a kitchen or an automated external defibrillator (AED) kit in a public place to help those who suffer [cardiac arrest](#). There's no downside to being prepared.

As with any medication, you'll want to keep Narcan away from children.

Drug overdose deaths have soared [during the COVID-19 pandemic](#). The U.S. saw an estimated 100,306 drug overdose deaths during the 12-month period ending in April 2021 — an increase of nearly 30% from the same period a year earlier, according to the CDC. Of those deaths, about [75% were overdose deaths from opioids](#).

Research suggests the pandemic has been especially hard on people with [substance use disorder](#). But opioid overdose deaths [dropped 14%](#) in states that enacted laws to make naloxone easier to get, according to a large national study.

### Where is Narcan available for free?

A few states have programs that send free Narcan to any resident who requests it. Some county public health organizations and state departments of health have partnerships with pharmacies or clinics that offer free Narcan to residents. Here are a few examples:

- Ohio has a program called [HarmReductionOhio](#). If you are an Ohio resident, you can order naloxone online and receive it in the mail.
- The Delaware Division of Public Health [will send Narcan to any resident for free](#) if they can't otherwise get it — provided they watch an online training video and pass a short test afterward.



- Iowa requires residents to have an [online video consultation](#) with a pharmacist before they can get free Narcan. The program is through the Iowa Department of Public Health and University of Iowa Health Care.
- [Nebraska has a website](#) that can direct its residents on which pharmacies around the state offer free [naloxone](#) nasal spray.
- [Minnesota has a website](#) that helps its residents find clinics that offer free naloxone, as well as pharmacies that sell it.

The [city or county you live in also may offer free Narcan](#). Examples include:

- The Denver Department of Public Health & Environment will mail Denver residents Narcan [if they request it using this online form](#).
- In Philadelphia, a program called Narcan Near Me provides [vending machine](#)-like dispensers at city library branches. You press a few buttons on the kiosk and receive a free Narcan kit. A grant from the CDC funds the program, touted as the first of its kind, [WHYY](#) reported.
- The [Chicago Department of Public Health](#) is partnering with the Chicago Public Library to provide library-based free Narcan distribution. The city is launching the program with wall-mounted boxes of Narcan kits in 14 library branches and aims to expand to 27 by the end of 2022. Chicago lost 1,303 people to opioid overdoses in 2020, the highest number on record.

If you are between the ages of 18 and 65 and live in an area where Narcan isn't available through a community-based distribution program like those above, [you can get a prescription online through GoodRx Care](#).

## How do you get Narcan for free?

If you have health insurance, check your plan first to see if and how you're covered. Your next best bet is to contact a public health organization, such as a state or county health department.

Nonprofit organizations are another option. [NEXT Distro's](#) mission, for instance, is to help at-risk people find ways to access free or low-cost Narcan. A map on its website can help direct you.

NEXT Distro is only set up to assist those without health insurance and who have limited resources, Jamie Favaro, the group's founder and executive director, tells GoodRx Health.

If you live in San Francisco, for example, NEXT Distro's policy would prohibit it from mailing you free Narcan. That's because the [San Francisco Department of Public Health has a partnership](#) with the National Harm Reduction Coalition to deliver free Narcan to city residents, Favaro says. But if you live in a remote part of California and need Narcan, NEXT Distro could mail you a supply.

You also could visit any major pharmacy and ask a pharmacist if Narcan is available for free. Some [pharmacy chains](#) — such as [Walgreens](#), [CVS](#) and [RiteAid](#) — are involved in state programs that give out free Narcan.

Your pharmacy also may have information about discounts or coupons. For instance, GoodRx currently has coupons at pharmacies that will [bring the price of Narcan down to about \\$47](#). Naloxone also comes as an injectable version and is cheaper this way. With a GoodRx coupon, two doses of injectable naloxone may be [less than \\$30](#) at some pharmacies.

## Does health insurance cover Narcan?

Generally, yes. Health insurance often [covers Narcan](#), but some health plans may have copays. Others [may have a \\$0 copay](#). Check your plan for details.

In all 50 states and the District of Columbia, [Medicaid](#) covers some form of naloxone. At last count, 23 state Medicaid programs [covered all 3 naloxone formulations](#), including Narcan, according to a 2018 study from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Some Medicaid programs cover Narcan for [family members or friends of a Medicaid enrollee](#) who could benefit from it.

[Medicare will usually pay for Narcan](#) under Part D prescription drug plans or a Medicare Advantage plan, but it depends on the plan you have.

## How is Narcan administered at home?

If someone is suffering an opioid overdose, you need to [use Narcan immediately](#) and then call 911 (or have somebody else call 911 while you administer the spray).

Fortunately, Narcan was designed to be easy to use. [As Narcan's instructions suggest](#), peel back the package to remove the device. It's a small white spray bottle, with a tiny red plunger.

Lay the person on their back before giving them Narcan. With one hand, you should tilt the person's head back and provide support under the neck with your hand. With your other hand, you place and hold the tip of the nozzle in a nostril until your fingers touch the base of the person's nose. When you press the plunger firmly, the dose will release into the person's nose.

Remove the spray bottle and turn the person on their side. Your work is (hopefully) done, but you may start chest compressions or [cardiopulmonary resuscitation](#) (CPR) while waiting for an ambulance to arrive. If you're not sure if you should start CPR or other rescue measures, ask the 911 operator. They can tell you whether it's appropriate to do so.

There's only one dose per bottle, so you only need to spray into one nostril. If you need to administer another dose after a few minutes because the person isn't responding, you'll have to use a new spray bottle. See the [instructions](#) for more details.

## What are the effects I should expect after administering Narcan?

If someone gives you a dose of Narcan, you may feel some [side effects](#), such as:

- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Nasal congestion or swelling
- Higher blood pressure
- Fast heartbeat

If a person is [physically dependent](#) on opioids, a dose of Narcan can cause them to begin to experience [withdrawal symptoms](#). Because of this, you should always see a healthcare provider after someone gives you Narcan.

## How quickly does it work?

Naloxone should work on the person you've given it to within 2 to 3 minutes. But it's not a substitute for emergency medical care.

While naloxone can seem to work miracles and bring people back to life, the danger is if it doesn't fully work the first time and the person needs a second dose. Narcan's manufacturer recommends that people who receive even one dose get checked out by a healthcare provider after being revived.

Narcan's effects can wear off in about 60 to 90 minutes, and that may cause a return of breathing problems. This is especially the case if a person took a [long-acting opioid](#) that can stay in their system for hours after taking a dose. A risk of overdose symptoms returning is why medical staff should monitor the person for about 2 hours after receiving Narcan.

## Does Narcan expire?

Yes. Narcan lasts for 36 months (3 years) before it expires, if stored properly. However, be sure to check your package of Narcan for an expiration date. The date may be shorter than 3 years, depending on when it was manufactured. If stored properly, Narcan can last up until the expiration date on the package.

## Can I use expired Narcan?

Yes. Studies suggest that you can use expired Narcan safely, and that it is often just as effective. That said, if you have expired Narcan, you should seek out a new supply, to be safe. But if someone needs Narcan and expired naloxone is all you have, you should use it.

## What are other forms of naloxone?

In 2021, the FDA approved Zimhi, an injectable form of naloxone. Zimhi has a higher dose of naloxone when compared with Narcan and may be especially helpful in cases of synthetic opioid overdoses, such as fentanyl. It is expected to be available in early 2022 and is part of the drug class called opioid antagonists.

Another option is an auto-injector called Evzio. It's an FDA-approved naloxone pen that caregivers can use to treat a person experiencing an opioid overdose. As mentioned earlier, naloxone also comes available in a generic injectable form.

### The bottom line

Narcan, a brand-name nasal spray version of naloxone, has been credited with saving many lives after opioid overdose. If you're at risk of an opioid overdose or are around someone who is, Narcan should be in your medicine cabinet or wherever it will most come in handy.

A growing number of cities are offering free Narcan through kiosks at public libraries, and a handful of states have free Narcan programs. Depending on where you live, it may not be as easy to get free or low-cost Narcan. But you may qualify to have a nonprofit group send it to you if you're uninsured or have low income. Check your health plan and ask your local public health department or a pharmacist where you might find free Narcan near you.

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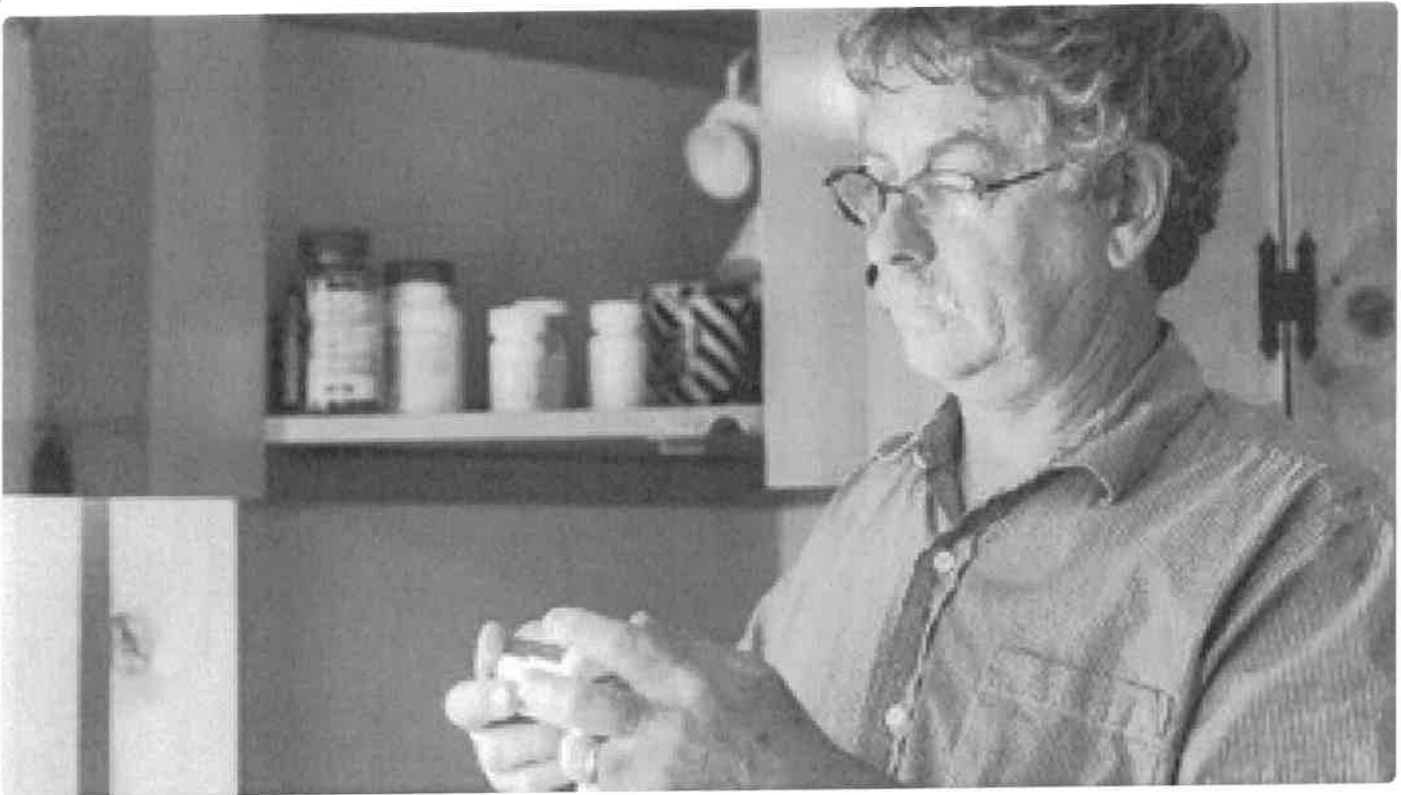
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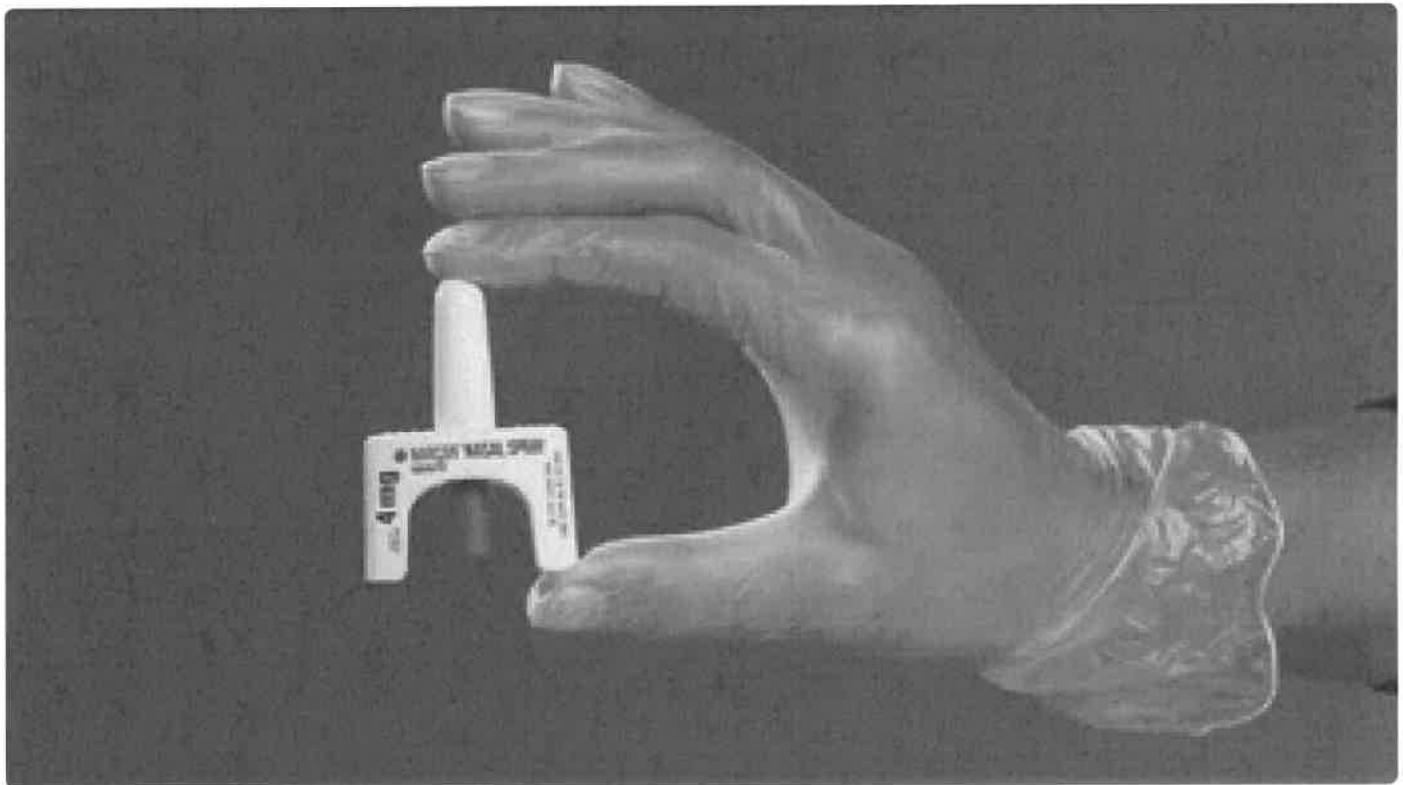
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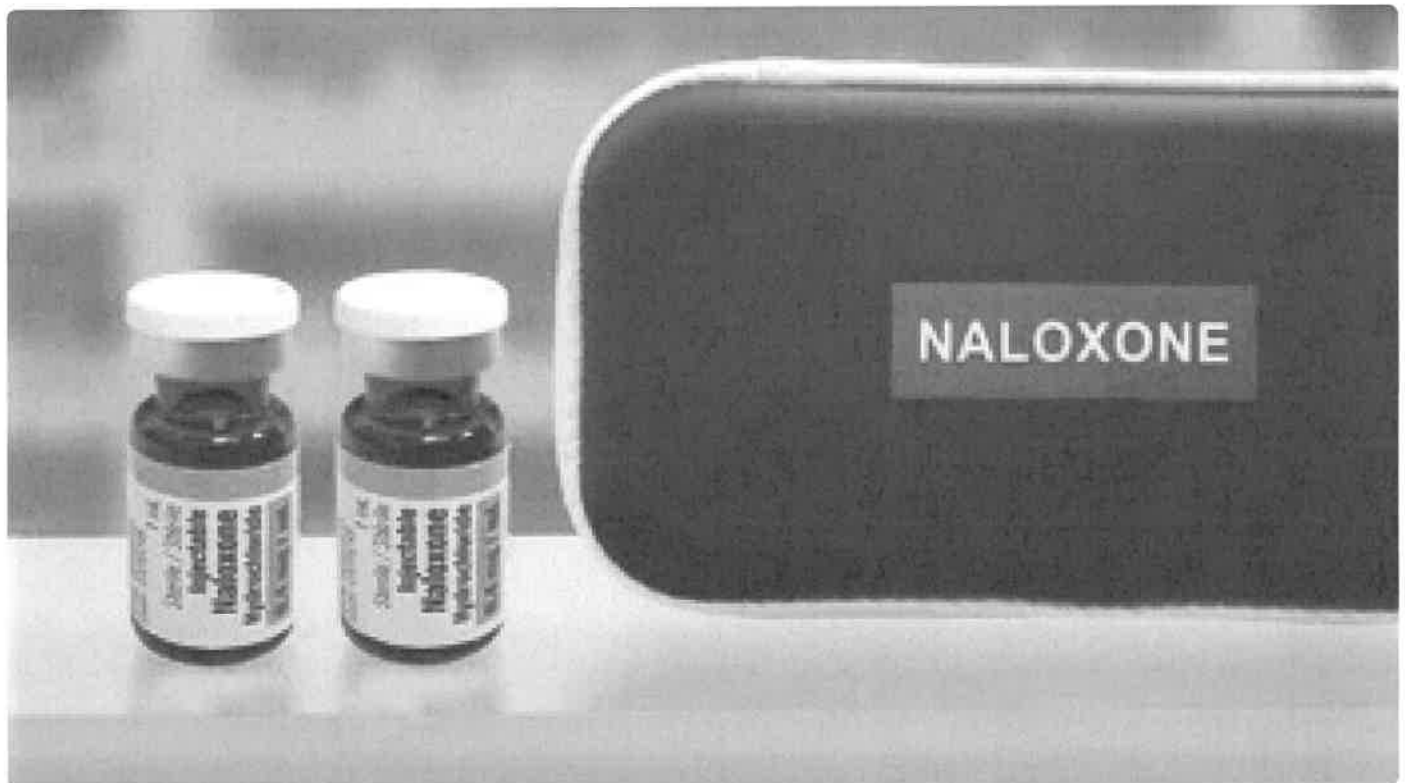
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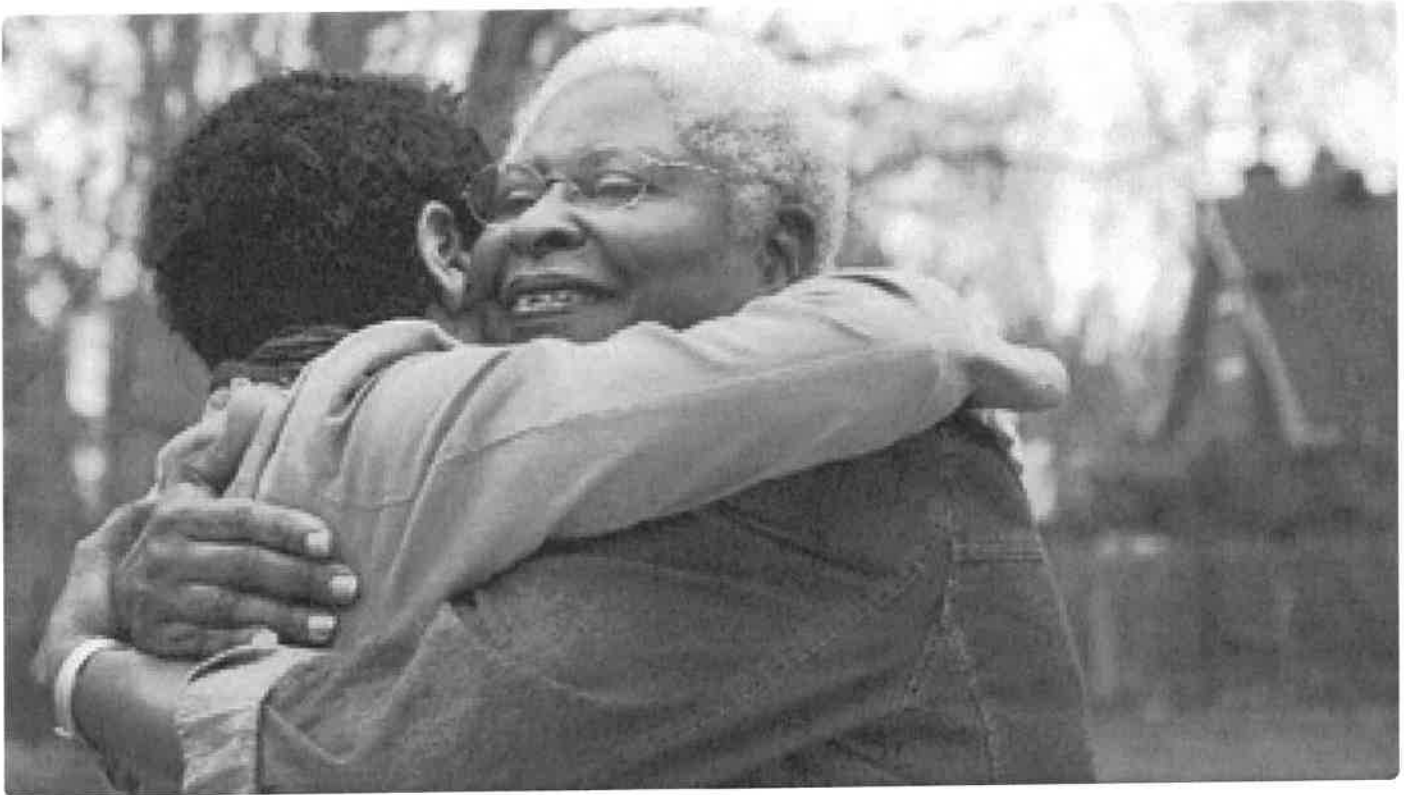
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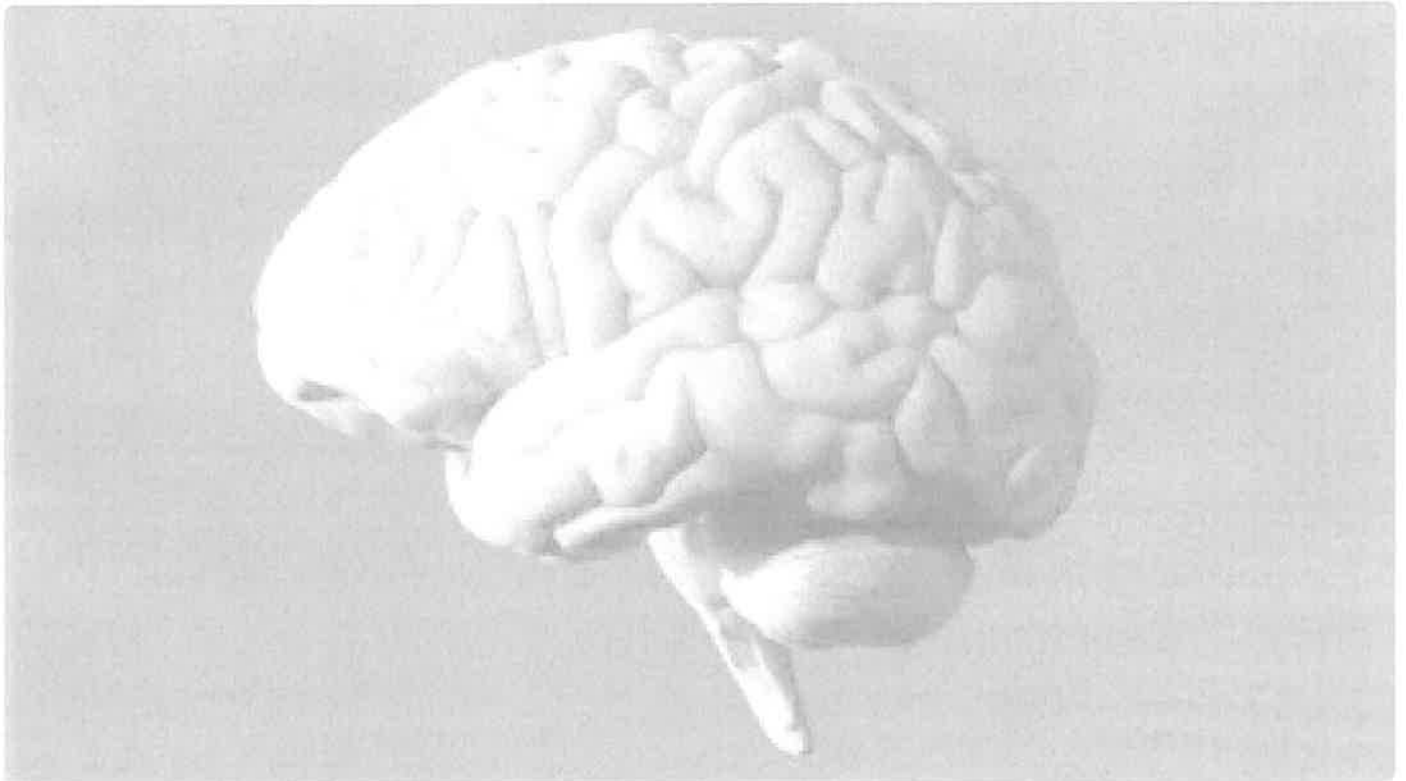
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NEWS

# Crisis Point: Teens increasingly turn to Safe2Tell for suicide, mental health emergencies. But Colorado doesn't track what happens next.

Suicide is the leading cause of death for young Coloradans. We examine how Safe2Tell's use of police can traumatize teens who need help.



ere dispatched twice to check Elizabeth for  
can include data following Safe2Tell reports.



By **JESSICA SEAMAN** | [jseaman@denverpost.com](mailto:jseaman@denverpost.com) | The Denver Post

PUBLISHED: September 26, 2020 at 2:20 a.m. | UPDATED: September 28, 2020 at 6:25 a.m.

The first time police came for her daughter, Jennifer had just finished a shower.

Dressed in a robe and with her soaked hair wrapped in a towel, she greeted the officers who arrived at her Denver home in search of 13-year-old Elizabeth.

On that same Saturday, a second set of officers pulled up to her former husband's home in a neighboring county. They, too, were looking for the teenager.

Upset after a breakup, Elizabeth — her middle name — had found a photo on social media that showed an arm with cuts on it, and sent it to a friend the night before. Someone with that friend, alarmed by the image, did what students across Colorado are told to do in such situations: They notified Safe2Tell.

"I thought she broke the law," said Jennifer, who agreed to speak to The Denver Post on the condition only her first name be used to protect her daughter. "I mean, when police come to your door that's kind of the natural response, right?"

Instead, the officers had come that morning in 2016 to search Elizabeth for self-inflicted cuts.

After finding her at home in Denver, police separated the mother and daughter into different rooms, then asked Elizabeth to roll up her sleeves.

\* \* \*

Colorado students have increasingly turned to the anonymous reporting program Safe2Tell to seek mental health help for themselves and their peers, especially since 2014, when suicide became the leading cause of death for young people in the state.

But Safe2Tell was never designed to operate as a crisis line, and The Denver Post found that a lack of data collection and a state law restricting the release of information mean there's little public accountability about what happens after authorities respond to tips.

The program, now run out of the Colorado Attorney General's Office, was created more than two decades ago to combat youth violence. In the aftermath of the 1999 Columbine High School shooting it became a crucial part of the state's efforts to prevent another such attack.

Now, though, reports of children and teens at risk of harming themselves — rather than others — make up the largest share of Safe2Tell's tips. Interviews with parents, current and former students, and state and local officials reveal that while students have changed how they use Safe2Tell, the program is still deeply rooted in law enforcement.

As a result, when someone makes a suicide or mental health report, police are among the first notified — and often the ones responding to medical crises. That can be traumatizing to young people, especially when they are struggling with their mental health.

"The overall issue is that we want to make sure there is an appropriate response depending on what the need of the caller is — and there's no way to know that right now," said Sarah Davidon, a Denver-area mental health policy consultant.

The attorney general's office is unable to say how often law enforcement officers — as opposed to school staff or medical professionals — respond to suicide and mental health reports made through Safe2Tell, because it doesn't track that data.

"What we know is that the tips we get are followed up on," Attorney General Phil Weiser said. "What is unknowable is did the follow-up end up saving someone's life or not. We know that it has constituted an intervention that has the potential of being life-saving."

He added, "I'm comfortable saying that we are saving people's lives because we're hearing from parents: 'My kid's getting the help they need because of Safe2Tell.'"

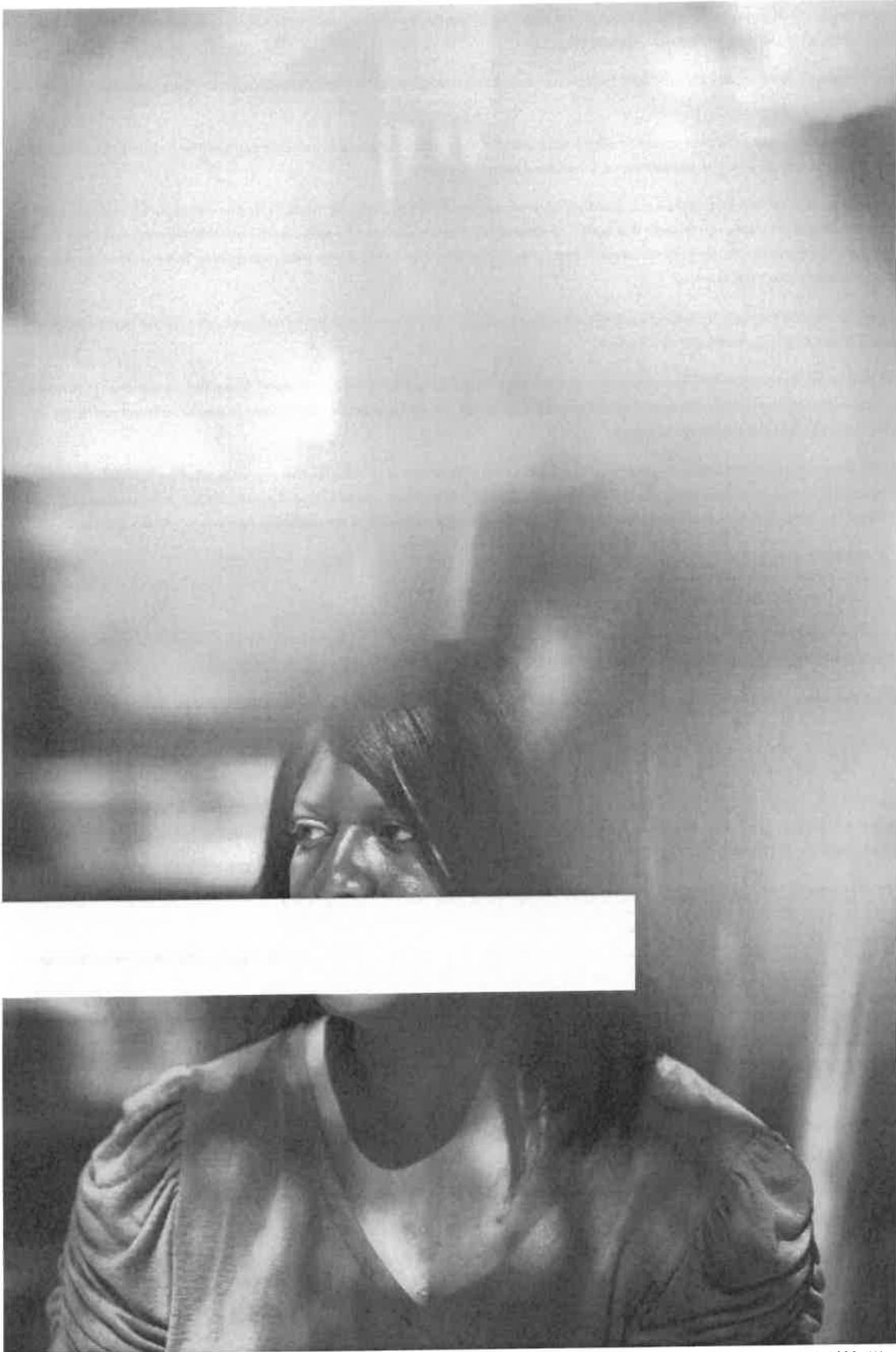
receives a report. It's up to local officials  
to respond to it, said Lawrence Pacheco,

State officials stressed that Safe2Tell is a "conduit" that connects children and teens with the resources available in their community.

"This is not a Safe2Tell issue," Weiser said of law enforcement responding to mental health crises. "There's clearly a greater need for services than we are providing."

\* \* \*





Apryl Alexander, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Denver, poses for a portrait on Thursday, Sept. 3, 2020. "We have to think about people's perception of police, whether it's children, kids of color. So having a police officer come to your door when you're already experiencing a crisis just elevates your system."

Families and mental health experts argue Safe2Tell's reliance on law enforcement traumatizes teenagers, particularly those of color, and can prevent them from seeking help in the future.

They said even when someone finds help, the presence of police during these situations appears to punish children and teens for mental health issues, which already are heavily stigmatized.

"It criminalizes it for them and sort of confirms that what they feel is wrong," said Michelle Simmons, a licensed professional counselor in the metro area.

And, in some cases, law enforcement intervention from suicide or mental health reports to Safe2Tell can result in a child handcuffed in the back of a police car, according to accounts from former and current students.

"I remember after the Safe2Tell experience, I really shut down and was like, 'I'm not going to talk to anyone else about my mental health issues because I don't want to go through that again,'" said Melanie, a former student who spoke on the condition that her last name not be published. "It's terrifying for any high schoolers to have, like, police officers in full uniforms with guns on their belt come to your door and talk to you about, like, your sadness."

The role of law enforcement, including in schools, has come under scrutiny in recent months following protests against police brutality and a national reckoning about systemic racism.

"We have to think about people's perceptions of police, whether it's children, kids of color," said Apryl Alexander, an associate professor in the University of Denver's Graduate School of Professional Psychology. "So having a police officer come to your door when you're already experiencing a crisis just elevates your system."

Mental health experts said that data on what type of help was offered in response to Safe2Tell tips — such as whether families were referred to counseling or how often police placed children on 72-hour holds — would help officials know if mental health care was ultimately provided to a child. Such data could also inform decisions on how money is directed to mental health services for youths, they said.

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"I would love to know what that response process would look like," Alexander said. "I want to know if there was a lack of intervention at a certain point and youth didn't get the care that they needed."

"What we can say is that Safe2Tell is working when people are worried," she said of the program's initial response. "Then what?"

\* \* \*

The 2014 Colorado law that placed Safe2Tell under the attorney general's office also makes any information not in the program's annual report confidential, including making it a crime for the program or others to release records on what happens when authorities act on a report, according to state officials.

"We want to make sure that we are truly protecting the confidentiality (of students) so we may be a little more conservative on what we feel

s requests with school districts in the

The responses varied greatly. Some agencies did not have data on what happened after they responded to a Safe2Tell report. Other local officials declined to release any data or provided incomplete information based on their interpretation of the state law. A small number of agencies and districts — potentially violating the law — released full Safe2Tell response data, including when 72-hour holds were implemented.

"What we don't know then is the effectiveness of the program and the deterrence," Simmons said. "Is there a deterrence because police are going to come and I don't ever want to get in trouble? And is it a good use of public safety funds?"

(Simmons works with Centura Health's mobile crisis unit and helped The Post facilitate a community discussion on youth suicide in 2019. Centura is a sponsor of The Post's Crisis Point project.)

In 2018, Safe2Tell received money to hire a data analyst because the program was aware it could improve how it measures its effectiveness, including further follow-up with local officials on how they acted on a report, said Susan Payne, the founder and former head of Safe2Tell.

"We knew this was a gap then," she said.

Before the pandemic, Weiser said Safe2Tell did not have enough money in its budget, which was just over \$855,000 during fiscal 2018-19, to monitor what type of help is offered to students. It would be "pretty burdensome" for his office to mandate schools and police compile the information, he said.

Now, significant changes to the program seem even less likely as the Department of Law's budget saw a 25% cut in general fund dollars as the financial fallout from COVID-19 forced officials to make sweeping cuts to the state's budget. For Safe2Tell this resulted in a reduction of \$56,000 and one full-time position.

"I'm concerned about continuing to do well what we have been doing, and building and expanding is on the back burner," Weiser said. "We're going to have to really think long and hard before expansions given the cutbacks that we've had."

Safe2Tell is expected to release a new annual report in the coming weeks, but it won't include data that shows how schools and law enforcement agencies responded to tips the system received, said Pacheco, spokesman for the attorney general's office.

"They are not required to report this information to Safe2Tell, and the limited information we have from those agencies that do report is general, incomplete and not useful to gain a broader understanding of outcomes," he said in an email.

\* \* \*

When students make Safe2Tell reports via phone, web or app, they go to one of seven analysts with the Safe2Tell Watch Center, which is housed in the Colorado Information Analysis Center, a hub in the Denver metro area that collects and shares information with federal, local and other officials on potential crimes and terrorism acts.

The Safe2Tell analysts then share the information with schools and law enforcement.

Police are called to respond to suicide or mental health reports when there is an "imminent risk" that a person is going to harm themselves or others, school and law enforcement officials said. However, the definition of "imminent risk" is subjective and can vary by school, agency and person.

And it doesn't explain why in Elizabeth's case, police were sent to her home after a Safe2Tell report about possible self-harm.

Behaviors such as cutting do not always signal someone is going to attempt suicide. Instead, they are used by individuals to cope, such as when they are feeling overwhelmed or out of control, mental health experts said.

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"Not everybody understands non-suicidal self-injury and suicide behaviors," said Simmons, the counselor in Denver. "They associate cutting with a suicide attempt because that's what their training lends them."

Elizabeth said she was not cutting nor injuring herself at the time police checked on her.

The transition from elementary to middle school was difficult for her. She was still adjusting to the emotional and social changes she faced as she went from having few friends to becoming the popular, new girl in school. It was her first boyfriend, and after the breakup, Elizabeth not only shared the photo of someone who'd cut themselves, but also posted a picture on Instagram of herself eating ice cream and watching Netflix.

"That part was definitely just like a dramatic attention response, which I feel like is understandable from a preteen, like, someone figuring out how middle school works," Elizabeth, now 17, said. "It was only the first semester of me ever being in middle school and me ever having new friends so it was just very different."

After police arrived, Elizabeth's parents said they didn't know whether they should punish her. Both parents said it would have helped had officers provided information on how to access mental health care.

They said neither the school nor a mental health professional followed up with the family after the officers' visit.

"They were not there to do that," Jennifer said. "They were there to enforce the law. They're not there to enforce love and support."

\*\*\*

Safe2Tell and local authorities can't wait to act on a tip when they hear of a potential crisis, Weiser repeatedly stressed.

He said if a report is made outside of school hours, Safe2Tell has to alert those who can immediately respond: police.

Most of the reports Safe2Tell receives arrive outside school hours, with 56% of the 22,332 tips made during the 2018-19 school year coming in between 4 p.m. and 6 a.m., according to the program's annual report.

Law enforcement officials said that even outside of Safe2Tell, they're increasingly called on to respond to mental health crises because they are often the only ones available 24/7.

"We've sort of become the last resort," said Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle. "We're not the best. It's not what any of us went to colleges for, got a degree in."



Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle is pictured at the Capitol in Denver on April 12, 2019.

Melissa Craven, director of emergency management at Denver Public Schools, said that when school is in session, a psychologist or social worker will check on a student who's the subject of a Safe2Tell tip. But if it's outside school hours and an "imminent threat" to someone's life or others, the district will send officers to a student's home.

Since the start of the pandemic, the school district has "moved our overnight protocols into our daytime protocols," Craven said, adding that school staff that normally would check on a student after a Safe2Tell report have had to do so remotely.

"If it's a life safety tip we still have to have eyes on that student," she said.

With many children and teens still not back in their classrooms, school psychologists, counselors and social workers have had to meet with students through phone and video calls. This has made it harder for staff to respond when students are believed to be at risk of harming themselves, said Jon Burke, mental health and crisis coordinator for Mesa County Valley School District 51.

The school district returned to in-person learning in August.

"Safe2Tell really saved our ass through this whole thing," he said. "It comes down to the fact that we were remote but our kids were still struggling."

\* \* \*

Susan Payne had an idea.

In 1995, a 14-year-old died in a shooting spree outside of Sierra High School in Colorado Springs. The death echoed the violence that had grown among children and teens in Colorado in previous years.

Payne, then a police detective, knew that students know or see warning signs before a shooting or other types of violence, but fear speaking up. She wanted to give them an anonymous and safe way to report what they see and hear.

Payne's idea: a "crime stoppers" program, such as those used by communities across the U.S., but for children.

The goal was to offer early intervention to troubling behaviors in students in hopes of preventing violence, and talk with students to understand the issues they were facing, said Payne, who led Safe2Tell until 2018 and is now a national school safety and violence prevention expert.

The pilot version of the program launched in Colorado Springs in the late 1990s. Then, two weeks after Payne traveled to Denver to discuss the program with state officials, two teens walked into Columbine High School and opened fire on their classmates, killing 12 students and a teacher before taking their own lives.



Susan Payne, founder of Safe2Tell, is pictured at her home on Sept. 3, 2020.

At the time, it was the deadliest shooting at a U.S. high school, and in the aftermath, state officials ordered a study focused on how to prevent another such attack, paving the way for Payne's program to be transformed into a statewide initiative — what's now known as Safe2Tell.

The events of the early 1990s, including Denver's Summer of Violence, left school and law enforcement officials with the need to take reports from students seriously and act on them quickly. But it's what gave rise to zero-tolerance policies, which set harsh punishments for disruptive behaviors, said Shelby Demby, managing director of Restorative Justice Education.

"(This) led to not only the creation of the school-to-prison pipeline but sort of this over-criminalization of normalized youth behavior or mental health issues or substance abuse," she said.

School shootings and mass shootings are still rare, but since Columbine, Coloradans have faced similar tragedies more often than most. Following the shooting at STEM School Highlands Ranch in 2019, Colorado had the fifth-highest rate of mass shootings, by population, in the nation, and the 10th-highest rate of school shootings, according to a 2019 analysis by The Post.

One of the effects of the Columbine shooting is that it altered how local and state officials thought about youth violence.

As one report on the history of Safe2Tell by The Colorado Trust put it, "(Officials) had always been cautious about potentially dangerous outsiders. Now, suicidal students might become vengeance killers."

\* \* \*

It's not unusual for mental health to come into focus after a mass shooting. But the intersection of suicidal behaviors and mass shootings is complicated.

A person's decision to carry out a violent act, such as a mass shooting, can imply suicidal intentions. But a 2019 study on school violence by the U.S. Secret Service found that suicidality was "rarely the sole or primary factor in an attacker's motivation for violence. Suicidal ideations were more typically found in combination with, and secondary to, other motives."

Mental health experts said rhetoric that a person with a mental illness or suicidal thoughts is violent increases stigma and can prevent people from seeking treatment that they need.

"Colorado has a very sad history of violence and mass violence in recent years, so I understand the fears and the need to act urgently when there's a report of someone suicidal," said Stacey Freedenthal, an associate professor at the University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work.

But, she said, "We need to be mindful of the young person's needs and not just of our own fears."

**RELATED:** *Youth suicide rates during the pandemic foreshadow what experts say will be a "tsunami of need"*

Most people with suicidal thoughts or with a mental illness do not harm themselves or others. Instead, they are more likely themselves to be targets of violence, mental health experts said.

Payne acknowledged this, but said, "When we look at violence prevention, your bottom line has to look at fluidity between suicide and homicide ideation."

That's why since its creation, suicide threats were among the reasons someone could call Safe2Tell, she said.

similar programs popping up in states

f reports flowing into the system via

phone calls, its website and mobile app surged to more than 22,300, according to the program's annual report.

As Safe2Tell grew over the years, students also began seeking help for another crisis. By the 2013-14 school year, suicide threats had surpassed bullying to become the most common reason students contacted the program.

At the same time, in 2014, suicide became the leading cause of death among those between the ages of 10 and 17 in Colorado. Before then, unintentional injuries, mostly from car crashes, caused the majority of deaths for that age group.

Overall, Colorado has one of the highest suicide rates in the nation. More than 1,280 people died by suicide in the state last year. Of those, 60 were children and teens, which is up from 41 deaths among those between 10 and 17 in 2014, according to the latest data from the state health department.

While the number of suicide deaths among adolescents is relatively small, health officials are concerned about how quickly they have increased in recent years.

If the state can reverse the trend, it would not only decrease suicides among children and teenagers but potentially such deaths among adults, too, said Andrea Wood, the zero suicide coordinator for UCHHealth in Colorado Springs.

Potential suicide threats remain the leading reason students contact Safe2Tell. More than 3,660 such tips came into the program last year. Another 1,207 tips were for self-harm. And almost 1,000 reports came in for depression.

Potential school attacks made up just 499 reports.

"Did I ever believe (suicide) would be the No. 1 reported concern?" Payne said. "No."

\* \* \*

Students don't always realize police are on the other end of Safe2Tell when they report friends they believe might harm themselves. Often, current and former students said, they are just trying to notify an adult, such as a school counselor, that they are worried about someone.

This was the case when Taylor Ogborn, a graduate of Arapahoe High School, sought help for her friend. She made a report with Safe2Tell because she felt it was a better option than calling 911 for a welfare check.

Ogborn thought maybe a paramedic or someone with medical training would respond.

"It's easier sometimes to deal with a paramedic and treat it like it is, a health problem, than have a police officer show up," she said. "Police officers aren't known for mental health training."

But as she later discovered, when help arrived for her friend, police officers were the ones sent to check on him. The officers handcuffed her friend to transport him to a hospital for a mental health evaluation.

Ogborn, who was in college at the time she made the report, remembers knowing about Safe2Tell by the time she was in middle school. She said she was told when students make a tip about a friend or classmate, "authorities" would check on them.

"Maybe I was just too young to understand that authorities meant police," she said.

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Law enforcement officials said it's protocol for officers to search and handcuff someone riding in a police car to a mental health facility. One alternative is an ambulance, but they are costly.

"I know it's pretty traumatic on the kid, but we also have to protect the cop," said Pelle, the Boulder County sheriff.

But mental health experts said handcuffs send a message to children and teens struggling with mental health issues that there is something wrong with what they are feeling.

Handcuffs, the experts said, also feed into the misconception that people with suicidal ideation or mental health illnesses are dangerous.

"There's a misunderstanding about things, like suicide and things, like shooting in schools," said Davidon, the consultant focused on children's mental health.

"Even though we're getting much better at, sort of, trying to describe the differences between mental health and these things that people are fearful of, like violence in schools and homicides and mass shootings... the public still makes a connection," she said.

\* \* \*

Colorado lawmakers have noticed the changes in how students use Safe2Tell, and this summer passed a bill that will no longer require the program to pass information to police or schools if the report is transferred to the state's crisis line.

The bill also requires the attorney general's office and other stakeholders to create protocols for referring mental health tips, including those made about another person, to mental health services by Feb. 1, 2021.

"I view this bill as basically capturing, codifying the directions we are working in," Weiser said.

On Sept. 17, Safe2Tell officials offered their first look at how the program could alter under the bill, although it's possible the plan could change as discussions are ongoing.

Ellis, the Safe2Tell director, proposed during a Zoom webinar that the program's analysts offer every person who calls in a report the option to be transferred directly to the Colorado Crisis Services.

Students who make a report through Safe2Tell's mobile app or website will receive an automated response with information on how to contact the crisis line if the individual or someone they know needs mental health or substance abuse services, Ellis said.

This is because Safe2Tell's platform does not allow analysts to transfer students to another agency if they make a report using the mobile app or webpage, she said.

Only 5,215 — or 23% — of the more than 22,300 Safe2Tell tips received last year were made by phone. Most reports are made through

themselves to Colorado Crisis Services,

Self-reporting calls are barely a fraction of the thousands of suicide and mental health tips Safe2Tell receives each year. The majority of those involve students making a report about a friend or classmate.

During the 2018-19 school year, just 75 of Safe2Tell's reports were from students seeking help for themselves. And of those, 30 were sent to specialists with Colorado Crisis Services. Another three were passed to a national suicide hotlines, according to the program's annual report.

When tips weren't transferred to mental health specialists, they were sent to schools and police, according to the report.

As they are called to respond to more mental health crises, a growing number of local law enforcement agencies have created co-responder programs that pair officers with mental health workers who can de-escalate potential crises and determine the type of treatment a person might need.

"The ideal situation is that law enforcement agencies are able to have multidisciplinary capabilities, including co-responder models," Weiser said, adding, "Not every community can manage that model."

\* \* \*

In 2017, just months after the first time police checked on Elizabeth, they were back.



Elizabeth's father, Mark was making tacos at his home in Jefferson County when he spotted a police cruiser parking in front of his house and a second car parking in the street behind it.

When the officers got out of their cars, two came and knocked on his front door. The second pair went to a back door.

"I would think, in that sense, what's going on in my mind is there's a serious danger that's in my house, around my house," said Mark, who also spoke on the condition that only his first name is used. "What should we do? And you have no idea."

Officers were there to check on Elizabeth after a new Safe2Tell report said she was harming herself.

"I was so angry," Elizabeth said. "Like, I felt completely, like, first violated that they didn't trust me when I said I hadn't. That my dad had to be there and then, I felt once again completely shameful that this had happened."

The officers asked to check Elizabeth's body for cuts, so, as she did months earlier, the teen rolled up her sleeves. But this time officers also wanted to see other parts of her body.

She showed them her ankles. Her legs. Her hips. Her stomach.

There were no cuts.

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