

# Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in Construction

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# Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in Construction

The Next Dimension of Safety

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- Attend 90% of this presentation
- Fill out the online evaluation for this session



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## WESLEY L. WHEELER, SMS, CESP, MSP



### NECA Executive Director Safety



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## What is the Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention (CIASP)?

- Born out of necessity in response to a statistic released in a CDC study ranking construction and extraction as the #1 occupation for deaths by suicide
- CIASP was formed in 2018 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization
- **Vision:** A zero-suicide construction industry
- **Mission:** CIASP exists to save lives by eliminating suicide in the construction industry.
- **10-Year Goal:** The construction industry suicide rate will be no higher than the average of all other industries: approximately 18 deaths per 100K employees.



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## Multiple issues... same root cause?

- Lack of control
- Low perception of skill



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## Strength. Determination. Grit.

CHARACTER TRAITS THAT GET HARD WORK DONE.

The same traits can be a barrier to asking for help.

SPEAK UP FOR  
**STANDUP**



IT'S OK TO NOT BE OK. BE BRAVE - SPEAK UP FOR YOUR TEAM. SPEAK FOR YOURSELF.

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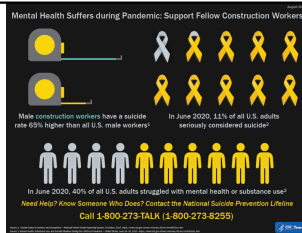
## Let's clear up some language

- Die by vs. Commit
- Has vs. Is
- Weak, selfish



## Why do we need to address mental health in the construction workplace

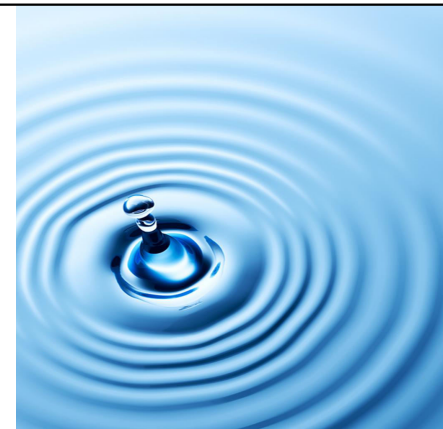
- In 2017, nearly 38,000 people of working age (16 – 64) died by suicide, a **40% rate increase in less than 20 years**
- The suicide rate in the U.S. is rising, but **construction workers are at a greater risk of suicide than the average worker**
- All levels: laborers, skilled trades, operators, management
- Male construction workers have a suicide rate **65% higher** than all U.S. male workers



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## It's not just construction

Suicide is a societal issue:  
45,979 deaths in 2020  
13.9/100,000  
1 death every 11 minutes



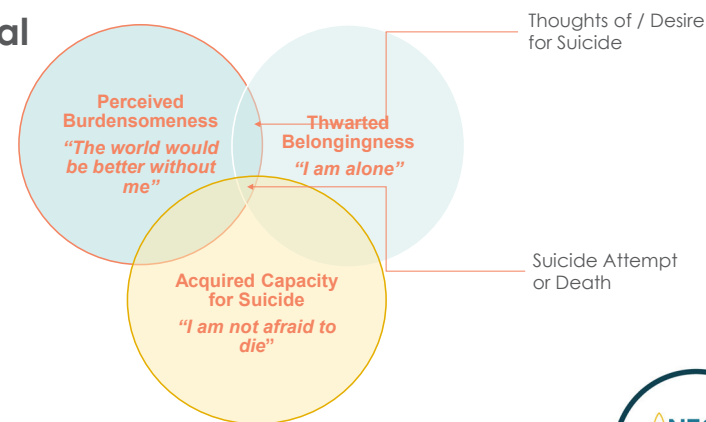
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## Rethink safety focus

- 2018:
- 1008 Construction Worker Fatalities (9.5/100,000)
- 5,242 Construction Worker Suicide (49.4/100,000)



## Joiner's Interpersonal Theory of Suicide



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## What are the Construction Risk Factors?



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## Ignoring is NOT an Answer



*"We don't have a mental health or suicide problem..."*



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## How can mental health and suicide prevention be woven into existing management practices?

### Getting Started...

#### Upstream:

- Caring Culture
- Preventative Factors
- Identify & Promote Resources
- Mental Health Literacy

#### Midstream:

- Education on warning signs
- Early Identification
- Mental Health Screenings
- Connection to care

#### Downstream:

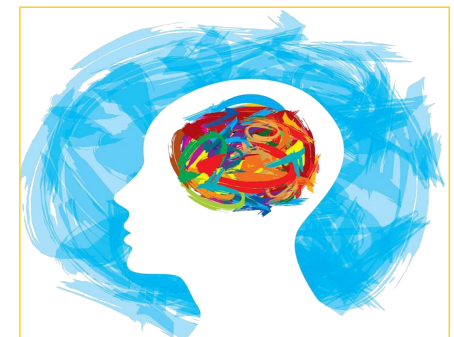
- Manage Crises
- Restrict Access to Lethal Means
- Provide Resources
- Crisis Response Management
- Offer Support

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## Recognize that mental health "IS" a workplace concern

- 1 in 5 Adults Will Experience Mental Illness
- 6.9% Depression
- 18.1% Anxiety
- Can lead to up to 27 lost workdays per year
- 52.9 Million People
- 60% are left untreated



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## Recognize that mental health "IS" a workplace concern

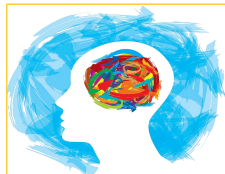
6.7% (17 million people) experienced a co-occurring substance use disorder and mental illness in 2020

Depression and anxiety disorders cost the global economy \$1 trillion each year in lost productivity

Depression is the **first leading cause of disability** & increases risk of other chronic medical conditions.

When employees are **depressed**, they **miss an average of 31.4 days per year** and lose another 27.9 to unproductivity

Mental and nervous conditions are ranked #3 of all disability claims



**A \$1 investment in mental health results in a \$4 Return on Investment**



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## Recognize the Signs to Speak Up

### WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?

- Talking about feeling trapped
- Saying they want to die
- Feeling like they are a burden to others
- Expressing hopelessness or helplessness
- Conflict or confrontations with co-workers

### WHAT ARE THEY DOING?

- Increased tardiness or absenteeism
- Decreased productivity and problem solving
- Near misses, hits or other safety incidents
- Misusing drugs or alcohol or reckless
- Acting anxious, agitated or restless
- Withdrawing from social groups and interactions
- Extreme mood swings

### WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THEIR LIVES?

- Relationship issues
- Major life changes
- Loss of a loved one
- Financial difficulties
- Illness or injury

**STANDUP**  
FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

CRISIS TEXT LINE |

TEXTHELPLINE TO 988  
Tues, 24/7. Confidential  
crisistextline.org

RESOURCES  
HELP IS WITHIN REACH

PREVENTION  
SUICIDE PREVENTION  
INFORMATION & RESOURCES AT  
preventconstructionssuicide.com

SUICIDE  
PREVENTION  
LIFELINE  
THE NATIONAL DEGREE  
PREVENTION LIFELINE AT  
1.800.273.TALK (8255) or  
suicidepreventionlifeline.org



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## Performance Issues That Can be Warning Signs

- Decreased problem solving ability
- Decreased self confidence
- Decreased productivity
- Increased tardiness & absenteeism
- Increased conflict among co-workers
- Increased near hits, incidents, injuries



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## Creating a Culture of Care

- Leadership support
- Injury management/return to work programs
- Flexibility with scheduling
- Setting reasonable expectations
- Peer-support groups & team-building activities
- Financial education
- Substance use education
- Reduce jobsite access to lethal means
- Train management in soft skills and communication
- Train and develop employees to reach their full potential
- Build in protective factors for veterans



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## Intangibles and Intuition

- Share your story
- Engagement
- Make a phone call
- Invite someone to lunch
- Schedule afterwork and weekend activities
- Include EVERYONE!
- Create a post on LinkedIn/Social Media letting people know they can reach out to you if they need someone to talk to.
- Who is that person you have not spoken with in weeks? In Months? In Years?



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## LIVINGWORKS Start

- What is it?
- Who is it for?
- Why do I need it?
- Why should I take
- High-quality content with a variety of simulation options, based on best-practices in online curriculum development
- Online and self-paced, allowing participants to pause, save progress and return at a later time
- Custom content to cater for people's differing experiences, location and needs
- Safe and effective for participants as young as 13 years old (with parental supervision), or 15+ for independent learning



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## Know How to Respond: TASC

### Tune in

**Tune in:** When you notice or sense that a person may need help, focus your attention on them for warning signs

### Ask

**Ask:** Ask if they are thinking about suicide clearly, directly & calmly - and without judgement

### State

**State:** State that suicide is serious and that connecting to help is important

### Connect

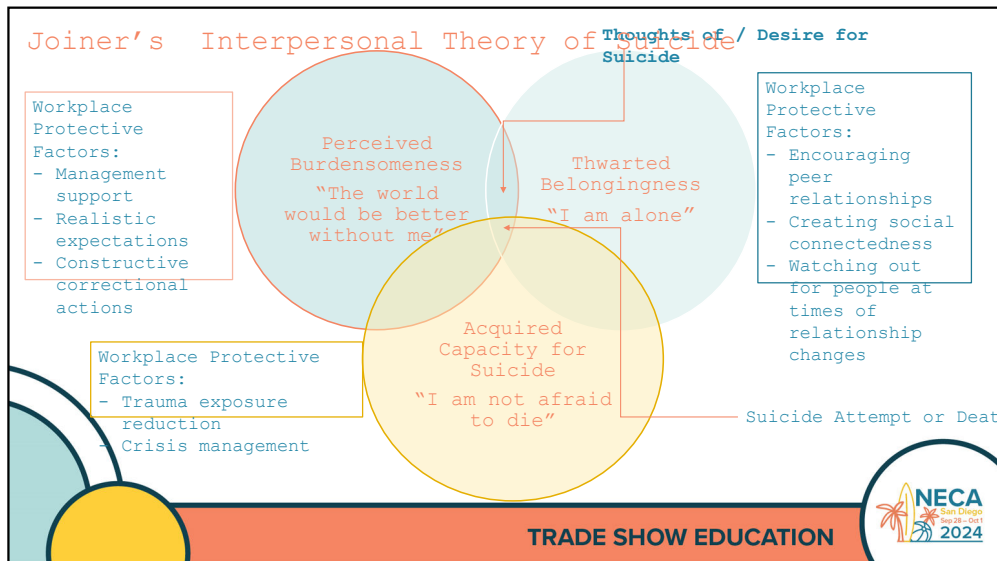
**Connect:** Connect the person to a helping resource who knows suicide first-aid skills



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## What role does the opioid epidemic play in all of this?

- Construction workers have one of the highest injury rates compared to other industries, making them more likely to be prescribed opioids.
- Construction workers also rely on their bodies and often feel the need to overcome pain in order to work and get paid.
- Injured workers in all industries often receive powerful prescription pain medication, including opioids. According to the CDC, 1 out of 4 people prescribed opioids for long-term pain become addicted.
- One study linked New Mexico workers' compensation data for workers injured in 1994 through 2000 with SSA earnings and mortality/cause of death data through 2013.
  - For men, a lost-time injury was associated with a **72% increased risk of suicide** and a **29% increase in the risk of drug-related death**.
  - Among women, lost-time injuries were associated with a **near tripling in the risk of drug-related deaths** and a **92% increase in the risk of deaths from suicide**.

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY ALLIANCE FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

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## Opioids Have No Place in the Workplace

16,416 Prescription Opioid Overdose Deaths

68,630 Opioid Overdose Deaths Overall

- **Illegitimate Use:**
  - Impairing
  - Probably a sign of an opioid misuse disorder
- **Legitimate Use (Prescribed):**
  - Impairing
  - Addicting
  - Increases risk of future disability
  - Delays recovery
  - Increases medical costs
  - Less effective than alternatives

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## Acute Rx Leads to Long Term Use

Duration of acute use:

- 1 Day = 6% chance of still using the drug a year later
- 7 Days = 13.5% chance
- 31 Days = 29.9% chance

Long term use leads to:

- Increased perception of pain
- Increases risk of depression
- Increases risk of suicide

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**NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE**  
1-800-273-TALK (8255)  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

**988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE**

**CRISIS TEXT LINE |**  
Text HELLO to 741741  
Free, 24/7, Confidential

**GET HELP**  
Know who to contact if you or someone you know is at risk of suicide

**GET INFORMED**  
Learn why construction is the most at-risk industry for suicide deaths

**GET STARTED**  
Pledge to STAND UP for suicide prevention and address it as a health and safety priority

**WE ALL STAND STRONGER TOGETHER**

**988**  
It's okay to not be okay

**988**  
CALL OR TEXT  
SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

**NECA San Diego Sep 24 - Oct 1 2024**

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**FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION**

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**FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION**

Take the pledge, download resources, order supplies, access free training and screening tool – all on our website

[preventconstruction suicide.com](http://preventconstruction suicide.com)

[@THE\\_CIASP](https://www.instagram.com/NECA_CIASP)

[NECA\\_CIASP](https://www.facebook.com/NECA_CIASP)

[NECA\\_CIASP](https://www.linkedin.com/company/NECA_CIASP)

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Please complete the Online Evaluation

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NECA2024SanDiegoConvention>

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