

Suicide in the Time of COVID-19

Right now, we're undergoing a once-in-a-century (for most of us, a once-in-a-lifetime) pandemic, an international health crisis that has caused unprecedented fear and pain for many people and nations, has upended our norms, and is restructuring our current reality. In such uncertain times, it's imperative to listen to the experts and follow their instructions to ensure that we emerge safe, healthy, and alive—with our loved ones just as intact. Above all, it's important to face uncertainty and fear with the only thing that is guaranteed to make today and tomorrow better: loving kindness toward ourselves, our loved ones, and society as a whole.

This three-article series—examining **Child Abuse, Suicide, and Domestic Violence**—shares the expert insight of mental health professional Dr. Linda Miles, with content primarily drawn from an interview conducted by Francine Bianco Tax. These articles are directed to anyone is struggling with such issues that were initiated or amplified by COVID-19. These issues aren't exclusive to the pandemic, of course; the advice applies to any such current or future situation. These articles are meant to raise awareness of those issues, and to provide resources, hope, and guidance toward overcoming them.

There is always a way out. There is always the possibility of a better future. Look and reach for a helping hand. Help is only a phone call away.

[National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-8255](#)

How do you find help if you're suicidal?

Or perhaps someone you know—a family member, friend, neighbor, or person in your community—has suicidal tendencies. COVID-19, an unconventional virus that has caused unconventional challenges, is rampaging through our nation at an alarming rate. As the rates of infection and death increase, so does the mental health toll. And **while it may be too early to predict the full scale of impact, it's never too early to take proactive measures to mitigate the virus's negative effects.**

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One of the most important things that we can do at this time, individually and as a nation—in order to reduce the spread of the disease and flatten the curve so as to not overwhelm our healthcare system—is to stay home as much as possible and practice social distancing. This is necessary because it is effective. A quick lockdown policy helped some countries (like Iceland, Slovenia, Greece, and Vietnam) escape the worst and avoid major outbreaks.¹

Meanwhile, media campaigns around the world try to remind people that social distancing actually equals *physical* distancing, not *emotional* distancing. The message is: we're all in this together, even though we are apart. And while this temporary inconvenience is something many of us begrudgingly deal with—or even thrive during—**there are many for whom this imposed isolation is particularly scary, depressing, or lonely.**

Indeed, the worst punishment in the world is solitary confinement.

While suicide rates haven't been recorded in prior pandemic-related lockdowns throughout history, **experts know that social isolation is related to suicide.** Those most vulnerable, they warn, include people who have a history of self-destructive distress.² And isolation is just one of the many triggers. Due to COVID-19, many people are suddenly unemployed or uncertain of their job security, struggle to make ends meet, and feel disconnected from their usual support systems. They may feel trapped in negative thoughts and toxic patterns. Their prison is mental more than it is physical.

The good news is: there is a formidable weapon at hand.

If you're suffering from suicidal thoughts, here is the one thing you must know: **the mind that contains the thoughts that trap you is the same incredible mind that produces the thoughts that free you.** By following certain techniques and cultivating positive habits that train you to reframe your thoughts and reassess your reality, you have the full power to liberate yourself.

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It's understandable and reasonable that you may be feeling stir-crazy, lonely, stressful, and even victimized during this time. It's normal to have crazy dreams, since your mind is trying to organize and process all this new information. If you need help, reach out and you will find it. Help is only a phone call away. In the

¹ <https://www.vox.com/2020/5/5/21247837/coronavirus-vietnam-slovenia-jordan-iceland-greece>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/19/health/pandemic-coronavirus-suicide-health.html>

meantime, know that you have the power to change those labels, even a little, all by yourself.

Here are a few **practices that will enable you to survive—and perhaps even thrive—during this pandemic.** Give them a try. You are sure to feel their positive effects, mentally and physically, sooner rather than later.

- **Connect with nature.** Nature impacts us immensely, in far more ways than we could ever imagine. It soothes, restores, and connects us to ourselves and to the world at large. Get a daily dose of nature by going for a walk or run, riding a bike, skateboarding, flying a kite, or having a picnic in the yard or park. Take up gardening, hug a tree, or stop to smell the flowers.
- **Get moving.** Exercise is fundamental, because motion equals emotion. Moving changes the chemistry of the body, including the mind. It can be as successful as medication when it comes to alleviating anxiety and depression. You can score a two-in-one if you get moving outside, but indoor exercise certainly counts, too. Use makeshift gym equipment at home, invest in a treadmill or indoor bike, follow free exercise videos online, or break a sweat with an online dance tutorial.
- **Surround yourself with good vibes.** Whether it's music, a stand-up comedy sketch or funny movie, or an inspirational Ted Talk, what enters your ears can really influence what goes on in the brain that rests between them. Fill your ears, mind, and home with positive vibes and messages that motivate and cheer you.
- **Learn something new.** Growth is a major contributor to happiness. Experiment, be flexible, and try new things. Bake new recipes. Sign up for a new online class. Tackle a website or a freelancing gig. Learn about exciting places you plan to travel to in the future. Practice writing stories. Pursue the hobby you'd always postponed. Find your bliss in something you love doing!
- **Be mindful.** From the earliest moments, mindfulness minimizes anxiety and boosts happiness, helping to develop compassion, curiosity, empathy, focus, and clarity. There are many ways to be mindful, but often it comes to slowing down, focusing on your breathing and inner self, cultivating gratitude, and being attuned to your thoughts so you can direct them. This means mindful thinking (noticing and dismissing toxic thoughts), mindful eating (savoring food instead of scarfing it down), mindful listening (hearing what someone says instead of imagining your response), and so on. Use all your senses and stay *in the now*. Mindfulness takes practice, yet you can learn it and practice

it at any time. It brings peace, reduces stress, and allows you to learn inner direction instead of being in a constant reactive mode.

- **Lead with inner peace.** If you're home with your kids, you know you're their role model. One of the greatest gifts you can give them is to practice inner peace and leadership: to be able to go to a place of inner calm, understand how you feel, and not simply react to others' emotions. Emulate this, and your children will follow. By modeling joy amidst suffering, following your bliss, and offering a safe place for your family, your kids won't feel as shut down or afraid.
- **Connect with others.** Feeling lonely is as detrimental to your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Go for a walk with a friend who lives nearby, even if it means having to walk on opposite ends of the street. Even if you can't physically be with your loved ones, you can always connect through the phone or online. ***If you need help, don't hesitate to reach out.*** Contact a friend, therapist, church or community counselor, or online professional to gain support.

Here are some excellent resources³:

- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)
The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals. If you're thinking about suicide, are worried about a friend or loved one, or would like emotional support, the Lifeline network is available 24/7 across the United States. You can call **1-800-273-TALK (8255)** or chat.
- [Crisis Text Line](#)
Text Line is free, 24/7 support for those in crisis. **Text 741741** from anywhere in the U.S. to text with a trained Crisis Counselor. Crisis Text Line trains volunteers to support people in crisis.
- [Veterans Crisis Line](#)
The Veterans Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource that's available to anyone, even if you're not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care. If you're a veteran in crisis or concerned about one, there are caring, qualified VA responders standing by to help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. **Call 1-800-273-8255 and press 1 or text 838255.**
- [SAMHSA's Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)
SAMHSA's SPRC provides accurate data, up-to-date research, and knowledge of effective strategies and interventions that are essential to our ability to

³ <https://www.samhsa.gov/childrens-awareness-day/event/resources-suicide-prevention>

prevent suicide. Find programs, toolkits, fact sheets, and other resources to help you take effective action.

- [#BeThe1To](#)
#BeThe1To is the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's message for National Suicide Prevention Month and beyond, spreading the word about actions we can all take to prevent suicide. The Lifeline network and its partners are working to change the conversation from suicide to suicide prevention, to actions that can promote healing, help and give hope.
- [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#)
The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (Action Alliance) is the nation's public-private partnership for suicide prevention. The Action Alliance works with more than 250 national partners to advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. Current priority areas include: transforming health systems, transforming communities, and changing the conversation.

Is someone around you in danger? Maybe a family member or friend is suffering. Maybe a colleague or neighbor is struggling. Helping others is a win-win, as it can give both the giver and the recipient precious connection and support.

What can you do to help others during COVID-19?

Check in with people. If you're not physically with them, reach out via phone call, email, text, or video-calling via social media applications.

If someone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts:

- Calmly speak with them. Ask them if they're considering suicide, how they envision or plan it, and what would stop them.
- Remain calm and remove any dangerous weapons, medications, etc.
- Follow up with them and let them know that they are loved, that you are there for them, and provide them with additional resources to get support.

You might be all someone needs in order to know that they're not alone or unwanted. Often suicidal is not intentional. Usually, it's truly a cry for help. Listen!

If you need help, don't hesitate to reach out. This is the time for you to act—doing so could save your life or someone else's.

ABOUT DR. MILES

*Dr. Linda Miles is a leading psychotherapist, crisis therapist, award-winning author, and relationship expert. She has studied and worked in the field of counseling psychology for over 35 years and focuses on mindfulness, stress reduction, mental health, and relationships. She has published several books on relationships and mindfulness (the latest: *Change Your Story, Change Your Brain*) as well as articles in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, *Reuters* and *Miami Herald*, and has appeared as a guest expert on numerous national TV shows including *CNN*, *Fox News*, *ABC*, and *NBC*. You can find additional resources on Dr. Miles' Facebook page, *Mindfulness Rewrites*, or at www.DrLindaMiles.com.*

ABOUT FRANCINE BIANCO TAX

*Francine Bianco Tax is a professional film and television actress, singer, and member of SAG-AFTRA, as well as the proud mother of twins. With a B.F.A. in Theater from Adelphi University, Francine pursues her love of knowledge by currently studying Filmmaking and Journalism at De Sales University. She is a former QVC TV guest host, and radio-internet founder, producer, and host of her program *Parenting Matters*. She is most interested in sharing inspiring human interest stories and offering resources that improve the lives of others.*