



Spotlight:

So Much More than Academics:
School-based Opportunities to
Address Self-Harm among Youth

NOVEMBER 2025

Common Ground
Health





Overview

"I didn't have the motivation to do anything... I didn't want to interact as much. It was really easy to just curl up and...let the world hit you. That's what happens with depression. It's like you just lose the energy to move... you let the car hit you instead of getting out of the way."¹

Self-harm occurs when a person intentionally injures their own body to provide a sense of relief from feelings such as loneliness, anger or hopelessness. If help for this behavior is not secured, it can lead to a higher risk of suicide attempt.¹

Within Monroe County:

- **1 out of 3** high school students surveyed² reported difficulty with concentrating or making decisions because of mental or emotional challenges.
- **1 out of 4** reported feeling so sad or hopeless that they stopped doing their usual activities.
- **1 out of 10** seriously considered attempting suicide within the past year.

In the Finger Lakes region,³ emergency department visits for youth self-harm surged over the past two decades. Prevention efforts are one solution to promoting positive mental health and well-being. These efforts provide tools that aid youth in managing their "emotions, thoughts and behaviors effectively in different situations"⁴ which are skills that can be used throughout a lifetime.

A triad of support shapes youth mental health: communities, families and schools. Educators and school staff are uniquely positioned to support

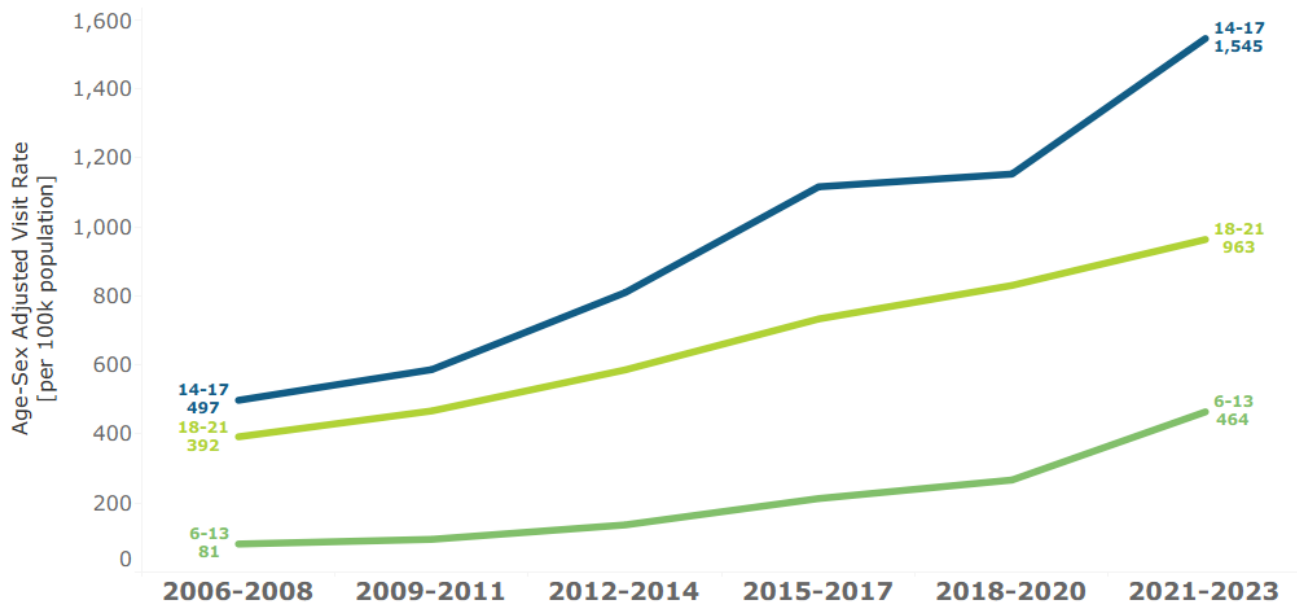
¹ SAMHSA. (2023, April 24). Self-Harm. Retrieved from SAMHSA Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/what-is-mental-health/conditions/self-harm>

² 2023-2024 Monroe County Youth Risk Behavior Survey

³ The Finger Lakes region includes Allegany, Cayuga, Chemung, Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates Counties.

⁴ CASEL. (2025). What Is the CASEL Framework? Retrieved from CASEL: <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/#self-management>

Intentional Self-Harm ED Visit Rate by Youth Age Group Finger Lakes Region



Source: NYSDOH Statewide Planning and Research Cooperative System (SPARCS)
Analysis Completed by Common Ground Health

Figure 1

prevention and early intervention efforts. Schools can foster environments that perpetuate trust, belonging, and emotional resilience – protective factors essential to mitigating mental health crises among student populations.

Certain evidence-based approaches can help create environments where students feel seen, valued, and supported. While the New York State Education Department (NYSED) supports several approaches, we highlight three of them here:

- **Community Schools:** Takes into account both the needs and assets of a school community to support the whole child by organizing in-school and out-of-school resources and opportunities for youth.
- **Social Emotional Learning (SEL):** Focuses on developing self-awareness, emotion-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making among youth.
- **Restorative practices:** Aims to build and restore relationships by having students address the impact of their actions through accountability, skill building, cooperation, and mutual understanding.

These approaches can be integrated within various

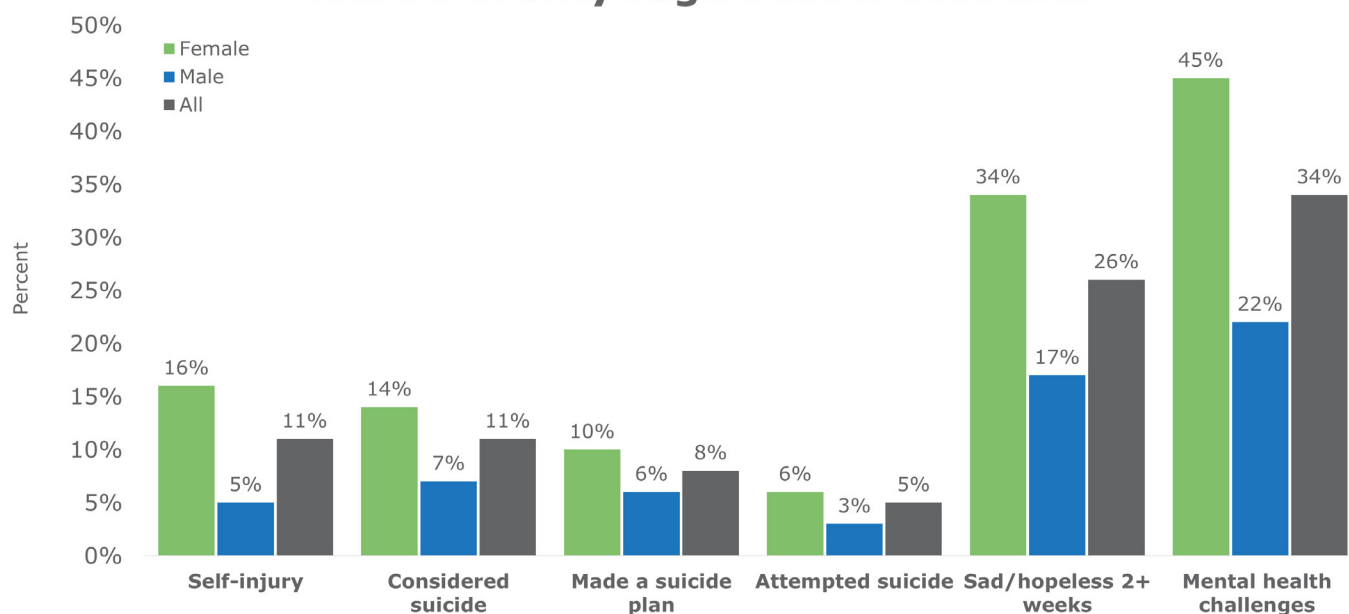
levels of the educational system and further reinforced at home and in community settings.

Concerning Trends

The rate at which youth in the Finger Lakes region are seen in emergency departments (ED) for intentional self-harm increased significantly over the past two decades. While rates are highest among youth aged 14-17, ED treatment for self-harm increased across all age groups, including younger children aged 6-13 whose rate in 2021-2023 was 5.7 times the rate in 2006-2008. Not only have rates increased over time but, between 2018 and 2023, the rise was notably more accelerated among the 6-13 and 14-17 year age groups (Figure 1).

Intentional self-harm was the top behavioral health-related reason for emergency department visits in 2023 among youth aged 6-21. Of the 1,903 youth in the Finger Lakes region who sought ED care for self-harm, 71% of them returned to the ED at least one more time that same year for additional behavioral health treatment.ⁱⁱ A local behavioral health professional noted, “[We need] levels of care that help avoid more intense levels of care...We need to invest in...other interventions (not just therapy) that might prevent the need for higher level of interventions.”

Mental Health Indicators by Sex Monroe County High School Students



Source: 2023-2024 School Year Monroe County Youth Risk Behavior Survey Report, Monroe County Department of Public Health

Figure 2

Communicating Needs

Youth communicate their mental health needs in various ways. The volume of calls to 211/LIFELINE pertaining to youth mental health in Monroe County more than doubled between 2020 and 2021, rising from 377 to 879 calls. Additionally, calls specifically related to self-harm and suicide nearly tripled, increasing from 77 to 208 during the same period. While there was a slight decline in 2023 with 724 mental health-related calls and 177 self-harm/suicide-related calls, these numbers remain substantially elevated compared to 2020, suggesting that mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are persistent in the impact they continue to have on youth.

Common Ground Health spoke with youth throughout Monroe County about the pandemic and how it affected their mental and emotional well-being. The quote below is a composite of their direct words and experiences:

“How do I manage my depression? I listen to music, draw, write...anything to keep my mind stable. I had done self-harm before and hadn’t shared that

with my mom, but she finally noticed. I promised her I would stop cutting. I want to go back to being my old self.”

Monroe County high school students complete a biannual Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) that asks about several areas of health, including mental health, self-harm, and suicide ideation. The 2023-2024 survey showed that:

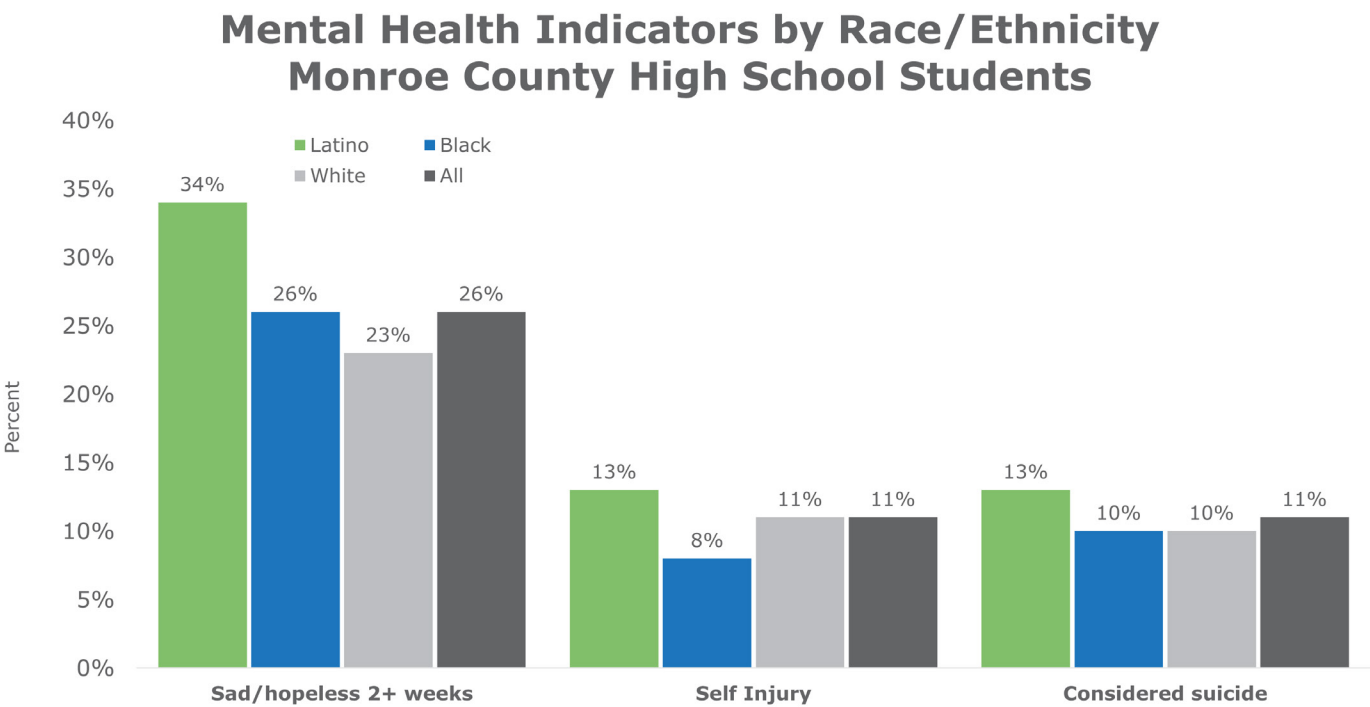
- **11%** of respondents had considered suicide.
- **8%** had made a suicide plan.
- **5%** had attempted suicide over the past 12 months.

These rates have remained consistent since 2015.

Disparities exist when looking at this information by certain demographics including sex, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation and gender identity. Approximately half of female students reported current mental health challenges. Female students were twice as likely to report suicidality (considered, planned, or attempted suicide) and three times as likely to report self-injury compared to male students (Figure 2).

The YRBS data below show self-injury and thoughts of suicide to be highest among Latino respondents (Figure 3), and ED visit rates⁵ for intentional self-harm are highest among Black non-Latino youth. These data indicate youth of color are experiencing significant challenges and could benefit from culturally relevant

supports. A local mental health professional noted that suicide can be so culturally stigmatized among the Black community that it is often not talked about, making it difficult for someone experiencing those feelings to know how to talk about it and with whom.



Source: 2023-2024 School Year Monroe County Youth Risk Behavior Survey Report, Monroe County Department of Public Health

Figure 3

⁵ NYSDOH Statewide Planning and Research Cooperative System (SPARCS), Finger Lakes region 2019-2023, Intentional Self-Harm ED Visit Rate for Youth (aged 0-17) by Race/Ethnicity and Sex.



Pronounced disparities exist among this data by sexual orientation and gender identity. Indicators related to self-injury or suicide were over three times higher for surveyed students who identified as LGBTQ compared to students who identified as straight and not Transgender (Figure 4). More than half of these students had felt sad or hopeless for two or more weeks, and two-thirds reported having mental health challenges.

Until recently, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline included an option for LGBTQ+ individuals to press 3 and be connected to a counselor trained to address their specific needs. However, beginning in August 2025, this option was removed by the current federal administration despite the growing need and number of calls: 2,000 contacts per month in September 2022 versus 70,000 contacts per month in July 2025.⁶

While this data examines several demographic characteristics, there are additional groups in need of mental health services who are not explicitly represented. Examples include youth with neurodevelopmental or general disabilities who are at increased risk of poor mental health, yet there is inadequate data to quantify this need.

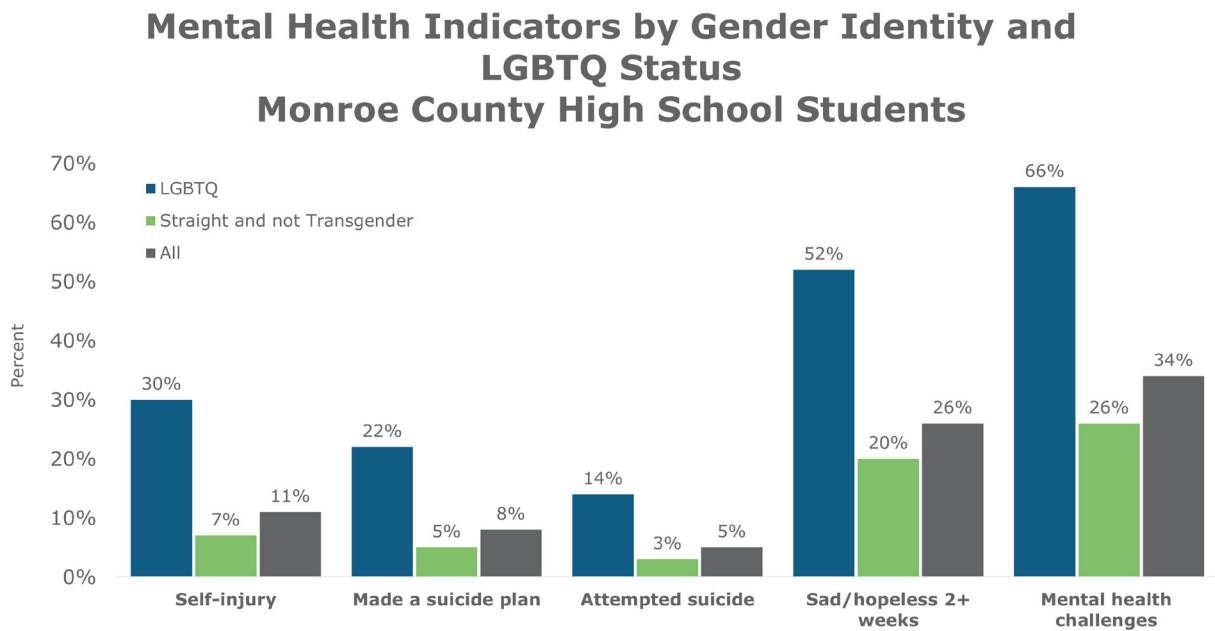
A Role for Educators

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) highlights school climate and culture as essential

foundations for student success. School climate reflects daily experiences of safety, supportive relationships, and a positive atmosphere, while culture encompasses the deeper sense of belonging, identity, and agency that sustain well-being. To strengthen these foundations, NYSED recognizes several evidence-based practices that foster safe, equitable, and socially engaging school environments, while helping mitigate risk factors associated with youth self-harm. Three such programs are highlighted below:

- The **Community Schools** strategy creates a hub of comprehensive support that reduces out-of-school stressors such as food insecurity, clothing needs, and difficulty finding mental health care.
- **Social Emotional Learning (SEL)** builds coping skills, resilience, and emotional regulation, all of which are protective factors for mental health challenges.
- **Restorative practices** replace exclusionary discipline with repair-focused approaches that emphasize accountability and community, strengthening students' sense of belonging and emotional well-being, which can help reduce risks associated with self-harm.⁷

Together, these practices can be implemented at different levels within the family, community, and educational system, strengthening networks of support that are critical to preventing self-harm and promoting youth well-being.



Source: 2023-2024 School Year Monroe County Youth Risk Behavior Survey Report, Monroe County Department of Public Health

Figure 4

⁶ Chatterjee, R. (2025, July 19). Trump administration ends 988 Lifeline's special service for LGBTQ+ young people. Retrieved from NPR: <https://www.npr.org/sections/shot-health-news/2025/07/19/nx-s1-5472593/988-suicide-crisis-lifeline-lgbtq>

⁷ Aldridge, J. M., & McChesney, K. (2018). The relationships between school climate and adolescent mental. *International Journal of Educational Research* , 121-145.

Strengthening Social Connectedness and Mental Health Through Community Schools

Robust evidence highlights social connection as one of the strongest protective factors against self-harm and suicidal ideation in youth, especially when support comes from school, family, and peer systems.⁸ When asked to comment on youth mental health, local behavioral health advisors noted that “[we need to] identify kids earlier, before they are in crisis mode” and that “the education system is an opportunity to really work with the child and the family to develop a life of wellness for the entire family.”

The Community Schools movement positions schools as a hub for school, family, and community partnerships by combining and organizing resources for students both within and outside of schools.^{9,10} Through strategic partnerships and both federal and grant funding, Community Schools bring essential services, such as food pantries, clothing closets, healthcare access, and mental health support to school campuses.¹¹ Following an evidence-based framework,¹² it addresses youth mental health concerns through counseling, social and emotional learning (SEL), and family and community engagement. The Learning Policy Institute, an independent organization focusing on research to improve education policy and practice, notes that when implemented well, Community Schools can “lead to improvements in student outcomes including attendance, academic achievement, high school graduation rates, and reduced racial and economic achievement gaps.”¹³

There is growing support for this model in the Finger Lakes region, including the Community Schools Thruway Coalition which acts as a regional alliance for member counties, encouraging the development of Community Schools in school districts along the I-90 Thruway. The Coalition has participation from Cayuga,

Monroe, Ontario, Seneca, Wayne, and Yates counties in the Finger Lakes region and aims to expand to over 100 school districts by the end of 2025. Leaders of both the Thruway and Monroe County Coalitions offer free events for schools looking to learn more.^{14, 15} Additionally, there are resources on the Coalition for Community Schools website.¹⁶

The Role of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) teaches young people to:

- Strengthen self-awareness.
- Nurture a strong sense of belonging by establishing, navigating, and maintaining relationships.
- Develop skills to make intentional decisions in their personal life, at school, and in their community.¹⁷

SEL has been shown to improve academic performance, attitudes, behavior, and emotional well-being, all while reducing negative behaviors and emotional distress.¹⁸ These outcomes serve as protective factors against self-harm and other mental health challenges. While SEL programs are most effective when implemented in their entirety using the tested frameworks, educators can still effectively incorporate individual SEL practices into their classrooms for students’ benefit. Even small, intentional efforts, when implemented in culturally responsive ways, can make a meaningful difference. A comprehensive list of resources and tools can be found at the Children’s Institute website.¹⁹ As an example, educators can incorporate the three signature practices developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL):²⁰

⁸ Marraccini, M., & Brier, Z. (2017, January 12). School connectedness and suicidal thoughts and behaviors: A systematic meta-analysis. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 5-21. Retrieved from <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5359058/>

⁹ Coalition for Community Schools. (2020). Building a Community Schools System Guide. Retrieved from Institute for Educational Leadership: <https://www.communityschools.org/building-a-community-schools-system/#:~:text=Overview,people%20and%20supporting%20thriving%20communities>

¹⁰ New York State Education Department. (2025). Community Schools. Retrieved from New York State Education Department: <https://www.nysed.gov/student-support-services/community-schools>

¹¹ NYS United Teachers. (2021, September 7). Fact Sheet 21-16: Community Schools in New York State. Retrieved from NYSUT A Union of Professionals: <https://www.nysut.org/resources/all-listing/research/fact-sheets/fact-sheet-community-schools-in-new-york-state>

¹² NYS Community Schools Thruway Coalition. (2025). Goals and Objectives of the Thruway Coalition. Retrieved from NYS Community Schools Thruway Coalition: <https://www.thruwaycoalition.org/goals>

¹³ Learning Policy Institute. (2025). Community Schools. Retrieved from Learning Policy Institute: Research. Action. Impact. : https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/topic/community-schools?utm_source=chatgpt.com

¹⁴ NYS Community Schools Thruway Coalition. (2025). Take Action: Become a Coalition Partner. Retrieved from NYS Community Schools Thruway Coalition: <https://www.thruwaycoalition.org/take-action>

¹⁵ Fantigrossi, J. (2025). Contact Joseph. Retrieved from Joseph Fantigrossi: Education with a Purpose: <https://www.josephfantigrossi.com/>

¹⁶ Coalition for Community Schools. (2020). Start a Community School. Retrieved from Institute for Educational Leadership: <https://www.communityschools.org/learn/start-a-community-school/>

¹⁷ New York State Education Department. (2022, November). NY Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks - Equity Revisions.

¹⁸ NYS Education Department. (2018, August). Social Emotional Learning: Essential for Learning, Essential for Life. Retrieved from New York State Education Department: <https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/student-support-services/sel-essentials-for-learning-and-life.pdf>

¹⁹ The Children’s Institute SEL Resources and Tools: <https://www.childrensinstitute.net/whole-child-connection/sel-resources-and-tools>

²⁰ Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (n.d.). SEL 3 Signature Practices Playbook. Retrieved from <https://signaturepractices.casel.org/>

1. **Inclusive Welcome** – Begin the day with a routine or activity that includes every student, helping them feel seen and valued.
2. **Engaging Strategies** – Use interactive and reflective group activities to build shared experiences and encourage connection.
3. **Intentional Close** – End lessons with a reflective activity that consolidates learning and prepares students for transitions.

Restorative Practices

Restorative practices focus on building relationships, resolving conflicts, and repairing harm through inclusive dialogue and mutual understanding. In schools, these practices may be used alongside efforts to reduce zero-tolerance and exclusionary discipline (i.e. suspension, indoor recess), punitive measures that research shows can amplify misbehavior.²¹ When challenges arise, students practice conflict resolution by taking responsibility for their actions and working to repair relationships, guided by a trusted adult who helps facilitate the conversation. Ultimately, this practice strengthens the feeling of community connectedness. Restorative practices are not limited to the classroom; parents and caregivers can apply these approaches as well to foster accountability and connection at home.

Summary

Reducing intentional self-harm among youth requires proactive, compassionate, and community-centered responses. Youth mental health thrives when key environments in a young person's life – school, home, and community – provide consistent care, connection, and support. Schools are a key setting where prevention and early intervention can take place, but educators cannot shoulder this responsibility in isolation. Community Schools, with their integrated services and whole-child approach, demonstrate how shared responsibility can be put into practice. When paired with robust SEL

programming, they strengthen protective factors such as resilience, belonging, and trust. Restorative practices further promote an inclusive, connected school culture that emphasizes healing over exclusion. By building strong partnerships with families and community organizations, educators can help create environments where emotional well-being is embedded into the fabric of daily life. Preventing youth self-harm is not the task of teachers alone, but the shared mission of an entire community committed to safeguarding its young people. ■

Appendix: Mental Health & Crisis Resources

There are many resources across the Finger Lakes region, beyond those listed here, that address youth mental health needs and concerns. The list below includes several types of resources, ranging from information and training for professionals to crisis hotlines for youth.

Crisis Text Line

- About: Confidential help from trained counselors for suicide and crisis support.
- How to Access: Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a live volunteer Crisis Counselor

988 Hotline

- About: Suicide and crisis lifeline offering help in English and Spanish, 24/7.
- How to Access: Call or Text 988. OR Visit the website by Googling "988 Hotline" for live chat with a counselor

The Trevor Project

- About: Crisis intervention and suicide prevention available 24/7 for LGBTQ young people (ages 13–24).
- How to Access: Visit www.thetrevorproject.org

²¹ Learning Policy Institute. (2025). *Fostering Belonging, Transforming Schools: The Impact of Restorative Practices*. Retrieved from Learning Policy Institute: Research. Action. Impact.: <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/impact-restorative-practices-report>

ⁱ Common Ground Health and Coordinated Care Services, Inc. (CCSI) brought together youth, caregivers, and organizational partners to study the impacts of the pandemic as a novel category of trauma for youth. They coined "Adverse COVID Events" to join the traditional "pair of ACEs" of "Adverse Childhood Experiences" and "Adverse Community Environments" when addressing youth mental health and wellness. The report "Unseen: Youth Mental Health and Wellness in the Pandemic Era" is the result of the workgroup's efforts. Through the direct quotations from predominantly youth of color in the report, the reader can start to see how the three ACEs overlap. The Third ACE Project was funded through generous support from the ESL Charitable Foundation and the Wilson Foundation. To learn more, read the full report at commongroundhealth.org/unseen.

ⁱⁱ The raw SPARCS data used to produce this publication was provided by the New York State Department of Health. However, the calculations, metrics, conclusions derived, and views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not reflect the work, conclusions, or views of New York State. The New York State Department of Health, its employees, officers, and agents make no representation, warranty or guarantee as to the accuracy, completeness, currency, or suitability of the information provided here.

Monroe County Mental Health App

- About: Provides mental and behavioral health information (not restricted to Monroe County residents).
- How to Access: Visit <https://www.monroecounty.gov/mh>

URMC EACH Youth Project ECHO

- About: "The goal of the EACH Youth Project ECHO® is to provide specialty training for school teams to help support youth behavioral health (BH) needs."
- How to Access: Visit: <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/institute-innovative-education/center-experiential-learning/urmc-project-echo/echo-programs/urmc-each-youth-project-echo>

Rochester Regional Health School-Based Health Centers

- About: "Meeting medical and mental health needs in convenient locations throughout the Rochester City School District."
- How to Access: Visit <https://forms.rochesterregional.org/232286268492970>

FLX Teens Are Alright

- About: Resources about mental health for teens and by teens in the Finger Lakes Region, in English and in Spanish
- How to Access: Visit healthikids.org/flxteensarealright

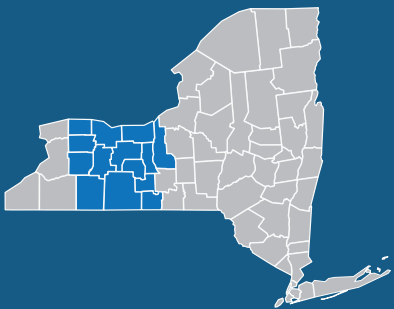
The Third ACE Project

- About: "As society adjusted to the COVID-19 pandemic's "new normal," a hidden crisis unfolded – the toll on youth mental health." Learn more in the report *Unseen: Youth Mental Health and Wellness in the Pandemic Era*.
- How to Access: Visit commongroundhealth.org/thirdace

Common Ground Health Mental Health and Wellness Resources

- About: Listing of local and national resources related to mental health maintained by Common Ground Health. Also includes links to current programming by our Mental Health and Wellness department.
- How to Access: Visit <https://commongroundhealth.org/work/community-health-and-engagement/mental-health-and-wellness>





About Common Ground Health

Founded in 1974, Common Ground Health is the health planning organization for the fourteen-county Finger Lakes and Southern Tier regions. We bring together health care, education, business, government and other sectors to find common ground on health issues. Learn more about our community tables, our data resources and our work improving population health at www.CommonGroundHealth.org.