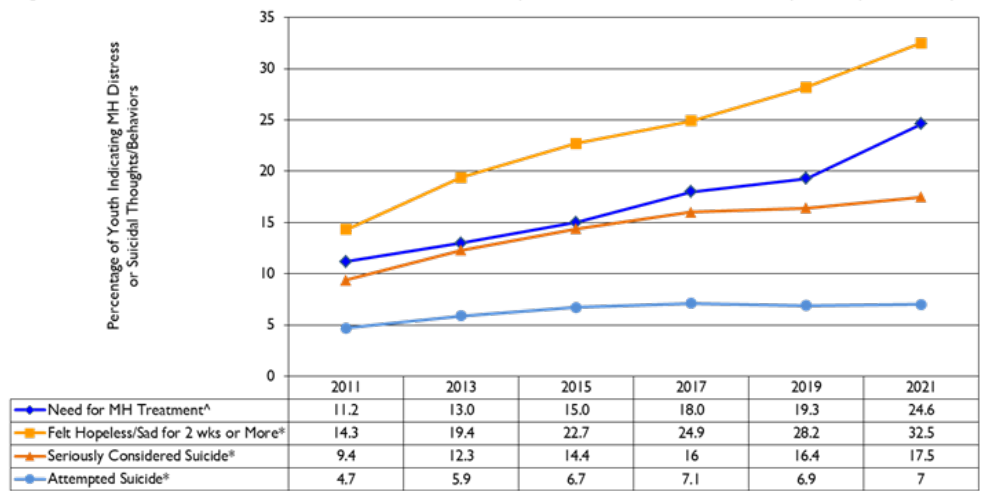


The Utah Student Health and Risk Prevention (SHARP) Survey¹ collects a variety of mental health (MH) and suicide related data which allow the Utah Department of Health and Human Services to monitor the well-being of the youth population across the state.

Over the past decade, there has been a troubling trend in the data related to mental health, depression, and suicidal ideation (thinking about ending your own life) among Utah youth. The SHARP data reveals a clear and steady upward trend in mental health distress and suicidal thoughts/behaviors across a variety of measures included on the survey (Figure 1). Rates of distress and suicidal ideation (SI) tend to increase with age, peaking in the 10th and 12th grades. However, worsening trends are seen across all grades included in the SHARP (6, 8, 10 and 12). In 2019, there was optimism that the trends of several indicators of MH and SI were beginning to steady (or even decrease), but unfortunately, most of the indicators moved in a negative direction in 2021. In fact, several of the indicators hit their highest levels in 2021. While discouraging, it is not overly surprising to see declines in MH and SI given the negative impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic between 2019 and 2021.

Figure 1. Youth Mental Health & Suicide Indicator Trends (Grades 6, 8, 10 & 12 Combined): Utah (2011-2021)

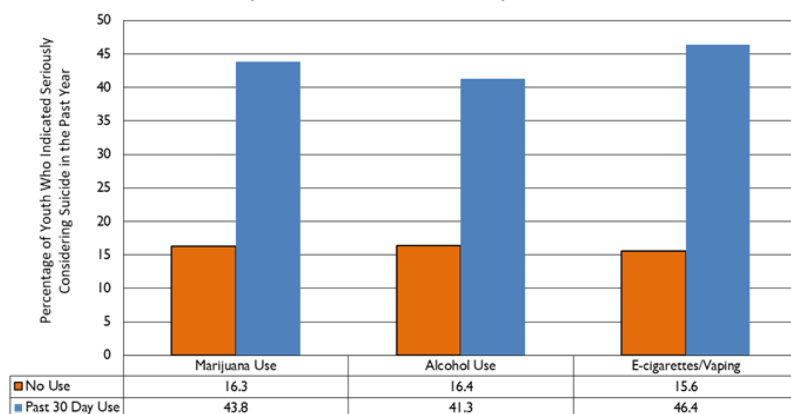


Source: Utah Student Health and Risk Prevention Survey
^aIn the past month
^bIn the past year

Mental Health & Substance Use

While the trends in data related to mental health distress and suicidal ideation are worrisome on their own, it is important to remember that MH and SI are strongly associated with other negative outcomes, including substance use, in particular. Utah youth are no exception. Figure 2 presents data showing the relationship between suicidal ideation and the use of alcohol, marijuana and e-cigarettes (vaping), the three most commonly used substances by youth. Youth who indicated using these substances during the 30 days prior to the survey were much more likely to also report having seriously considered suicide in the past year². Interestingly, the increased probability of suicidal ideation is similar regardless of substance type.

Figure 2. Percentage of Youth Who Reported Seriously Considering Suicide in the Past Year in Relation to Substance Use (Grades 6, 8, 10 & 12 Combined)



Source: Utah Student Health and Risk Prevention Survey (2021)

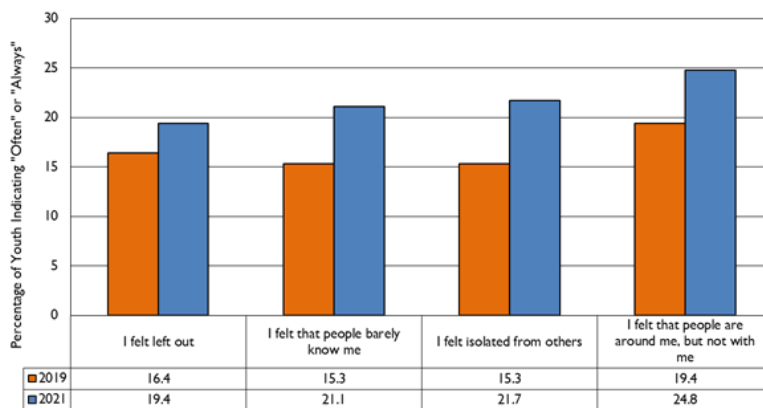
¹ The SHARP survey is administered every other year in Utah and measures youth substance use and other problem behaviors, as well as risk & protective factors. A typical survey includes approximately

² Of the youth who did not use marijuana, 16.3% indicated they seriously considered suicide in the past year (16.4% and 15.6% for alcohol and e-cigarettes, respectively). In contrast, 43.8% of youth who used marijuana reported seriously considering suicide (41.3% and 46.4% for alcohol and e-cigarettes).

Social Isolation, Mental Health, and Suicidal Ideation

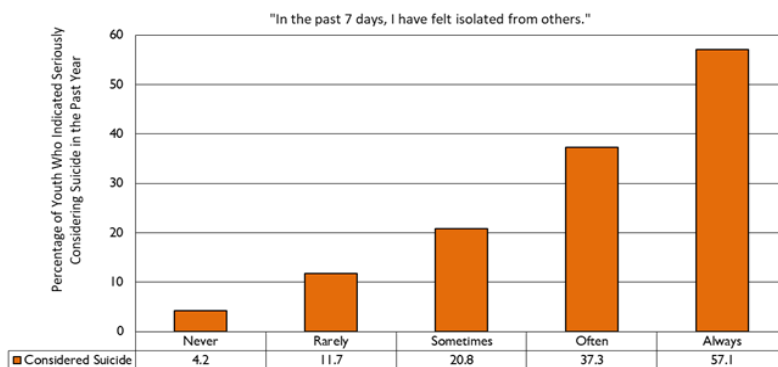
Even prior to the pandemic, prevention and health promotion professionals were concerned that a growing number of youth were becoming socially isolated, and about the impact of isolation on MH and SI outcomes. In 2019, the SHARP Survey began asking questions to measure social isolation among Utah youth (see Figure 3). While long term trends for these indicators are not yet available, two alarming conclusions are clear already: a) a significant proportion of youth report feeling isolated, and b) reports of isolation increased from 2019 to 2021. Moreover, when we look at the relationship between social isolation and MH and SI, we see a strong connection between these variables. Figure 4 shows that there is a strong relationship between feeling socially isolated and suicidal ideation for Utah youth in 2021. Youth who reported feeling isolated more often were much more likely to also report having seriously considered suicide in the past year³.

Figure 3. Percentage of Utah Youth Reporting Social Isolation "Often" or "Always" During the Past 7 Days (2019-2021)



Source: Utah Student Health and Risk Prevention Survey

Figure 4. Percentage of Youth Who Reported Seriously Considering Suicide in the Past Year in Relation to Social Isolation (Grades 6, 8, 10 & 12 Combined)

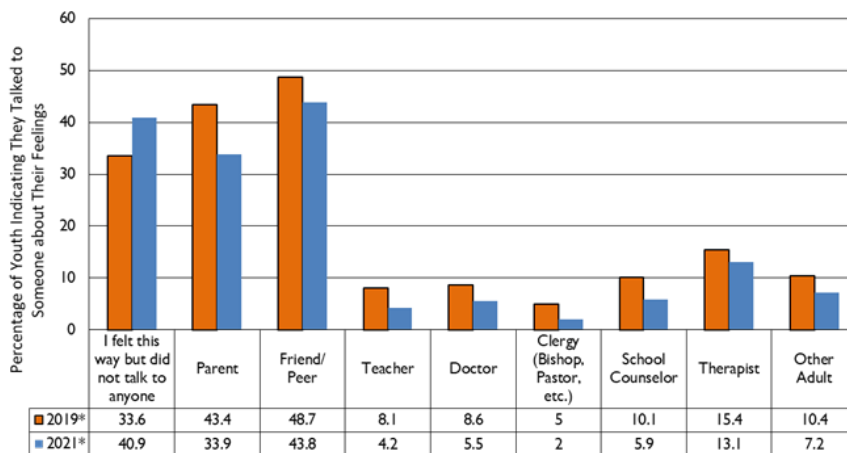


Source: Utah Student Health and Risk Prevention Survey (2021)

Support Seeking by Youth

Given the distress that many Utah youth experience, it is critical for youth not only to know that support is available, but also to utilize it when needed. In 2019, the SHARP Survey began asking youth who they talked to, if they had felt sad, hopeless, or suicidal in the 30 days leading up to the survey. Thankfully, it appears that many youth do reach out to others when they are experiencing mental distress or feeling suicidal (see Figure 5). Specifically, youth are most likely to reach out to a friend or parent when they feel sad, hopeless or suicidal. A smaller, but significant proportion of youth indicated talking to a therapist. On the other hand, it is troubling that there is a large proportion of youth who indicated they "felt this way, but did not talk to anyone." Additionally, the percentage of youth that indicated this choice increased substantially between 2019 to 2021. It is crucial to address any barriers to support seeking that youth may perceive, as well as ensure that adequate support resources are available through families, schools, and the larger community.

Figure 5. "If you have felt very sad, hopeless, or suicidal in the past 30 days, who did you talk to about it?" (Grades 6, 8, 10 & 12 Combined; 2019-2021)



Source: Utah Student Health and Risk Prevention Survey

*Includes only youth who indicated feeling sad, hopeless or suicidal in the past 30 days; mark all that apply

³Of the youth who said they "never" felt isolated from others, only 4.2% indicated they seriously considered suicide in the past year. In contrast, nearly 60% of youth who said they "always" felt isolated reported seriously considering suicide.