

Validity of the Blue Whale Challenge is Disputed, but Social Media's Impact on Young People's Mental Health is Real

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, July 21, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Many media outlets are reporting on the "Blue Whale Challenge," a social media game that allegedly encourages young people to engage in self-harm and suicidal behavior. While we have no evidence the Blue Whale Challenge is a real phenomenon, we do know that social media—in all forms—can have a significant impact on mental health, especially for young people.

Youth are among the highest-risk groups for suicide: according to the CDC, 17% of grade 9-12 students reported seriously considering suicide in the past 12 months. We urge parents and educators to sit down with children and youth and talk about social media's potential impact. www.Kidshealth.org provides [useful guidelines](#) for having these conversations. It's essential to talk openly and honestly about mental health, depression, and thoughts of suicide—and whether social media use might be a contributing factor. While many discussions hinge on the negative effects of social media, its positive impact cannot be ignored: social media can be helpful for people who are suicidal and unable to reach out in person.

Youth struggling with thoughts of suicide usually [present with warning signs](#). In young people, these warning signs might be seen as talking about death or hopelessness, extreme irritability, pulling away from friends and family, and loss of enjoyment in their usual activities. If you notice warning signs, reaching out quickly and talking openly about suicide can help save a life.

AAS President Julie Cerel says, "Anytime a child dies by suicide, we search for the reason why. Suicide is complicated and never has a single cause. By implicating events like the Blue Whale Challenge as the cause of youth suicide, we risk minimizing someone's emotional pain and further discriminating against those who are suffering."

Suicide prevention resources:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (<http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>) - 800-273-8255

Crisis Text Line (<http://crisistextline.org>) - Text HOME to 741-741

The Trevor Project (<http://trevorproject.org>) - 866-488-7386

Trans Lifeline (<http://translifeline.org>) - 877-565-8860

For the media: We urge members of the media to be cautious in reporting on stories about the Blue Whale Challenge and similar events. These news items can become viral "urban legends" and contribute to a culture of fear and alarm that makes suicide and social media harder to talk about for youth, parents, and educators.

Responsible reporting on suicide, and the inclusion of stories of hope and resilience, can prevent more suicides. For more information on safe messaging around suicide, click here:

<http://bit.ly/2vHN46j>

About AAS: Founded in 1968 by Edwin S. Shneidman, PhD, AAS promotes suicide as a research discipline, public awareness programs, public education and training for professionals and volunteers. The membership of AAS includes mental health and public health professionals, researchers, suicide prevention and crisis intervention centers, school districts, crisis center volunteers, survivors of suicide loss, attempt survivors, and a variety of lay persons who have an interest in suicide prevention. You can learn more about AAS at www.suicidology.org.

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