Healthy Hearts & Minds

CCYSB YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION

APRIL 2026

What's Inside:

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Feeling Left Out or Replaced: Navigating Shifting Friendships

Why Your Brain Loves Dopamine (Phones, Gaming, and Motivation Explained)

What Do You Want to Grow This Season?

Spring is a season of growth, a time when things begin to change, slowly but surely. It can also be a chance to pause and ask yourself: "What do I want to grow in my life right now?"
Not in a pressure-filled way, but with curiosity. Growth doesn't have to be big or dramatic to matter.

Growth Isn't About Becoming Someone New
It's easy to think growth means fixing yourself or becoming someone totally different. But real growth is often quiet and steady:

- Trying again after a hard day
- Speaking a little kinder to yourself
- Making small changes and sticking with them

You're not starting over—you're building on who you already are.

What Could You Grow?

- Habits: What small actions could support you?
  - Getting a little more rest
  - Taking breaks before burnout
  - Spending less time on what drains you

  Start small—consistency matters more than perfection.

- Mindset: How you think shapes how you feel.
  - Can you practice self-kindness?
  - Let go of "all or nothing" thinking?
  - Allow yourself to be learning, not perfect?

- Friendships: Relationships grow and change, too.
  - Who makes you feel seen and supported?
  - Where might you need boundaries?
  - Who do you want to invest more energy in?

Growth Isn't Always Comfortable
Growth can come with awkward moments, doubt, or setbacks. That doesn't mean you're doing it wrong—it often means you're stretching into something new.

Keep It Realistic
You don't need a long list of goals. In fact, it's better if you don't.
Try choosing:

- One habit
- One mindset shift
- One relationship focus

Try This
Finish these sentences:

- This season, I want to grow in...
- A small step I can take is...
- Something I want to let go of is...
- Someone I want to feel more connected to is...

You don't have to change everything at once.
Small, steady shifts can turn into something meaningful over time.
You're already growing—even if you can't always see it.

APR 18 2026 SAT

Westminster Large Meeting Room (Staff Use Only)
Saturday, April 18, 2026
2:30pm–3:30pm

Unwind and express your creativity in a calming environment with the support of our friendly therapy dogs! Explore hands-on art activities like coloring, sculpting with playdough, and playing with kinetic sand—all designed to reduce stress and spark joy. Perfect for anyone looking to relax, connect, and create in a soothing space.

Feeling Left Out or Replaced: Navigating Shifting Friendships

Friendships are great things to have. They're where you laugh, feel understood, and belong. So when something changes (like when a friend starts hanging out with someone new, stops texting as much, or seems different) it can really hurt. You might find yourself wondering: Did I do something wrong? Am I being replaced? If you've felt this way, you're not alone. And you're not "too sensitive" for feeling it.

Why This Hurts So Much

We are wired for connection. Feeling included and valued in friendships isn't just nice, it's a core emotional need. So when a friendship shifts, your brain can interpret it as a kind of loss or rejection, even if no one meant to hurt you.

That's why you might notice:

- Overthinking small interactions
- Comparing yourself to others
- Feeling anxious, sad, or even a little angry
- Wanting to pull away or hold on tighter

All of these reactions make sense. They're your mind trying to protect you.

The Truth About Changing Friendships

One of the hardest (but most important) things to understand is this:

Friendships change. ***A lot.***

Especially during school years, people are constantly growing, trying new things, meeting new people, and figuring out who they are. That means friend groups can shift, even when no one did anything "wrong."

Being "replaced" often feels real, but many times what's actually happening is:

- Your friend is expanding their circle
- Their interests or schedule are changing
- The friendship dynamic is evolving

That doesn't automatically mean you don't matter.

What Your Mind Might Be Telling You (And a Gentle Reality Check)

When you feel left out, your thoughts can get pretty loud:

- "They like them more than me."
- "I'm not interesting enough."
- "I always get replaced."

These thoughts feel true, *but feelings aren't always facts.*

A more balanced way to look at it might be:

- "Something in this friendship is changing, and that's hard."
- "I don't have all the information."
- "This doesn't define my worth."

What Can Actually Help

1. Pause before reacting- It's tempting to immediately text, confront, or withdraw. Give yourself a little space to feel what you're feeling first.

2. Check the story you're telling yourself- Ask: What do I know for sure, and what am I assuming?

3. Communicate (when it feels safe to do so)- Sometimes a simple, honest statement can go a long way: "Hey, I've been feeling a little left out lately. Can we hang out soon?" You don't have to accuse—just share.

4. Widen your world- It might not feel natural at first, but investing in other friendships, activities, or groups can help you feel less stuck and more supported.

5. Let friendships evolve- Some friendships stay exactly the same. Most don't. That doesn't make them failures—it just means they're changing.

A Gentle Reminder

You are not replaceable. Even if a friendship shifts, even if someone grows closer to someone else, your value doesn't decrease. The right people won't make you feel like you have to compete for a place in their life.

Try This

Take a few minutes to reflect:

- What do I need most in a friendship right now?
- Who makes me feel safe, seen, and valued?
- How can I show up for myself when I'm feeling left out?

Feeling left out is painful—but it can also be a moment that helps you learn more about what you need, what you deserve, and what kinds of connections truly support you. And those kinds of friendships? They're still out there.

Why Your Brain Loves Dopamine

Have you ever told yourself, "I'll just check my phone for a minute," and suddenly 30 minutes are gone? Or found it way easier to play a game than start homework—even when you know you should? That's not because you're lazy or lack willpower.

It's because your brain is doing exactly what it was designed to do.

What Is Dopamine?

Dopamine is a chemical in your brain that helps drive motivation, reward, and learning. A lot of people think dopamine is the "pleasure chemical," but that's not quite right. It's more like the "pay attention to this—it matters!" signal.

Dopamine is released when:

- Something feels rewarding
- You're anticipating something fun
- You get something new, exciting, or surprising

It's what pushes you to repeat behaviors your brain thinks are important.

Why Phones & Games Are So Hard to Put Down

Apps, games, and social media are designed to work with your dopamine system.

They give you:

- Quick rewards (likes, messages, points, levels)
- Unpredictable rewards (you don't know when something exciting will happen)
- Constant novelty (scrolling = always something new)

This combination is powerful. Your brain learns: "This is fun, easy, and rewarding—let's keep doing it." So you keep tapping, scrolling, and playing—not because you're weak, but because your brain is getting a steady stream of "this matters!" signals.

Why Motivation for "Boring" Things Feels So Hard

Now compare that to things like: Homework, Studying, & Chores

These activities:

- Take longer to feel rewarding
- Don't give instant feedback
- Can feel repetitive or stressful

Your brain doesn't get that same quick dopamine boost, so it says: "Why would we do this when we could do something easier and more fun?" That's why it can feel almost physically hard to start.

The Dopamine Trap (That Everyone Falls Into Sometimes)

The more time you spend on high-reward activities (like gaming or scrolling), the more your brain starts to expect that level of stimulation. So regular tasks can feel more boring than they used to, harder to focus on, and less satisfying.

This doesn't mean you've "ruined" your brain—it just means it's adapted. And the good news? It can adapt back.

How to Work With Your Brain (Not Against It)

Instead of trying to completely cut out things like phones or games, it helps to understand your brain and use that knowledge.

1. Make tasks more rewarding

- Listen to music while working
- Turn it into a challenge or timer ("just 10 minutes")
- Reward yourself after finishing a task

2. Break things into smaller pieces

Your brain is more likely to start something that feels doable:

- "Do the whole assignment" (no) *vs.* "Answer 2 questions" (yes)

3. Use dopamine on purpose

- Do a less fun task → then check your phone
- Stack rewards instead of mixing everything at once

4. Change your environment

- Put your phone out of reach while working
- Use apps or settings that limit distractions

5. Be patient with your brain

Motivation doesn't always come first.

Often, action comes first and motivation follows.

A Reality Check

If you struggle with focus or feel "addicted" to your phone sometimes, you're not broken. You're living in a world where technology is built to capture your attention—and your brain is responding exactly how brains do.

Next time you reach for your phone, pause and ask:

- What am I hoping to feel right now?
- Is there another way I could get even a small version of that?

Safety Plans Work

There is hope.

1. Write 3 warning signs that a crisis may be developing.

2. Write 3 internal coping strategies that can take your mind off your problems.

3. Who/What are 3 people or places that provide distraction?
(Write name/place and phone numbers)

Phone
Phone
Phone

4. Who can you ask for help? (Write names and phone numbers)

Phone
Phone
Phone

5. Professionals or agencies you can contact during a crisis:

Clinician: Phone

Local Urgent Care or Emergency Department:
Address Phone

Call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org

6. Write out a plan to make your environment safer.
(Write 2 things)

988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

Modified from Stanley & Brown (2021)

PEP22-08-03-007

Crisis Resources

National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:
9-8-8 (Call or Text)
Chat: https://988lifeline.org/chat

The Trevor Project
thetrevorproject.org
1-866-488-7386
text 678-678

Carroll County Mobile Crisis:
410-952-9552

To access assessment and treatment services at CCYSB call
410-848-2500 x 1
or
Walk-in Assessment Hours:
Tuesday: 8:30am-11 am & 2-5pm
Wednesday: 11:30am-2pm
(We have a limited number of assessment slots available each day. See our website for arrival and check-in details)

CARROLL COUNTY YOUTH SERVICE BUREAU
"It Starts With the Heart."

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HELP YOUR BRAIN GROW BY TAKING A BREAK!

Roll a die and perform the brain break in the 1st column. For example, if you rolled a 1 for your 1st roll, do 10 jumping jacks. Roll again to perform the 2nd brain break, then the 3rd. For extra fun, print out the affirmations die on page 2 and roll both dice. Say the affirmations during or after you perform the activity!

	1st Roll	2nd Roll	3rd Roll
	Do 10 jumping jacks	Dance to your favorite song	Balance on one foot as long as you can
	Imaginary jump rope for 20 seconds	Snake pose for 10 seconds	Do a triangle Pose
	Run in place for 20 seconds	Dog pose for 10 seconds	Do a bear walk for 1 minute
	Waterfall pose for 10 seconds	Hop like a frog 5 times	Run in place for 20 seconds
	Flamingo pose for 5 seconds	Skip for 1 minute	Tiptoe for 10 seconds
	Pretend you are walking on a tightrope	Walk like a robot	Air guitar to your favorite song

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