



Student Wellness Series

Holiday Blues

December 9, 2020





Dr. Lisa Strohma
Psychologist, Author, and Founder of Digital Citizen Academy
www.asklisa.com

A psychologist, attorney, author, and mother, Dr. Lisa Strohma established Digital Citizen Academy to help keep families safe from online dangers. Her background working as a visiting scholar with the profiling unit at the FBI during one of the most tragic school shootings in the U.S. helped create her passion to help proactively prevent and educate students, educators, and parents on issues related to technology.



Dr. Christine Burton
Superintendent of Schools
www.millburn.org

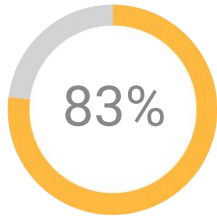
Christine began her career in education as a math teacher in Hillsborough Middle School, where she then went on to be the math content specialist. In 2001, she took on the role of director of Mathematics. In 2010, Dr. Burton became the assistant superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction in Millburn, where she began igniting the movement toward innovation and design thinking within the district. After becoming superintendent in 2015, two successful referendums allowed the district to develop innovative spaces in all of the district schools through design ideas gleaned through visits to Google. Dr. Burton is working to redefine the goals of education, the learning environment, and the role of the educator as orchestrator to foster students' engagement and empowerment in their education journey.



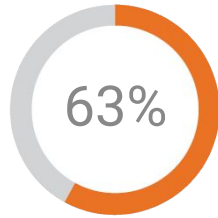
Heather Durkac
Vice President, Operations, Gaggle
www.gaggle.net

Heather Durkac oversees an award-winning Customer Service team, the vital Safety Management team, and the superb Implementation, Professional Development, and Account Management teams. Heather brings nearly 20 years of experience in management, customer relations, and training from both the corporate sector and the K-12 environment. Passionate about keeping students safe, she values the partnership with customers to ensure school leaders and staff are equipped with the means to effectively respond to student safety concerns.

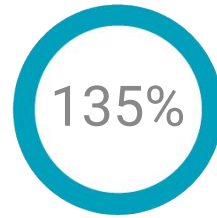
Increase in Incidents by Category



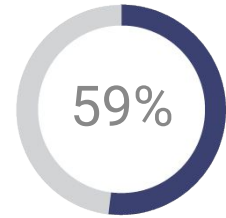
Increase in
Suicide & Self-Harm



Increase in Violence
Toward Others



Increase in Nudity &
Sexual Content

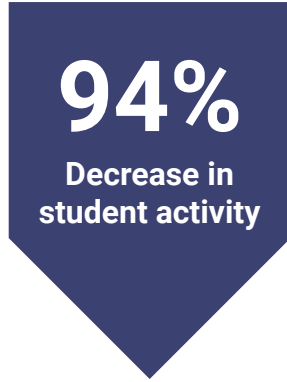


Increase in
Drugs & Alcohol



**INCREASE IN
OVERALL INCIDENTS**

During the week of December 23, 2019:



Student activity
decreased by 94%

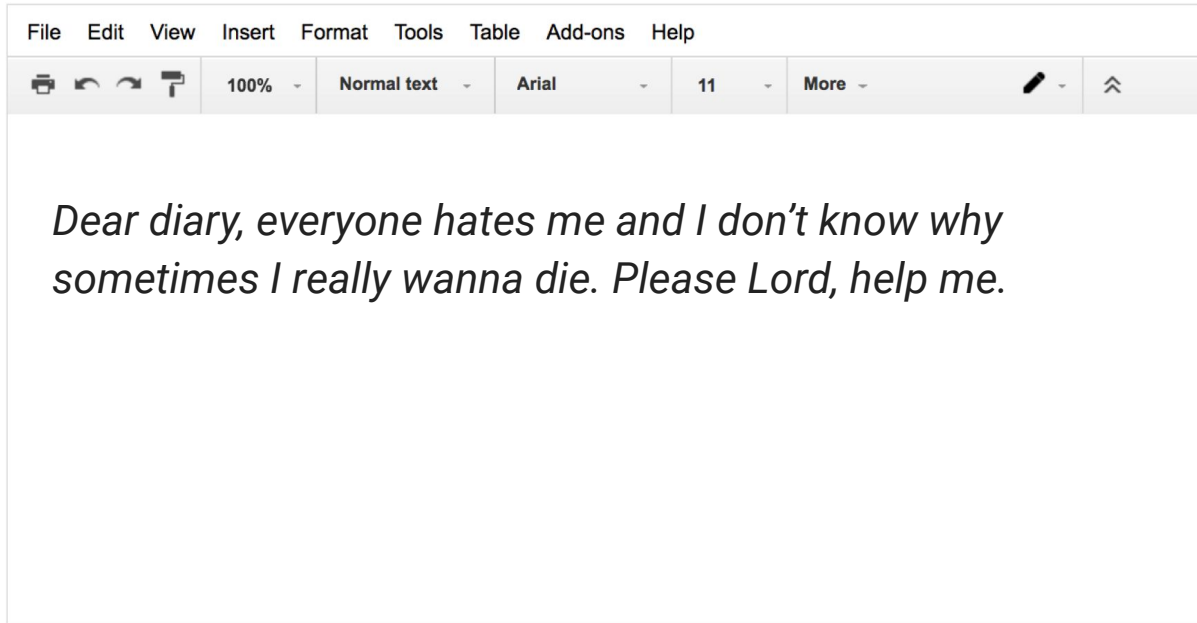


For every item reviewed, alerts
about depression, suicidal
ideation, and self-harm were more
than **2.6X more likely to occur**



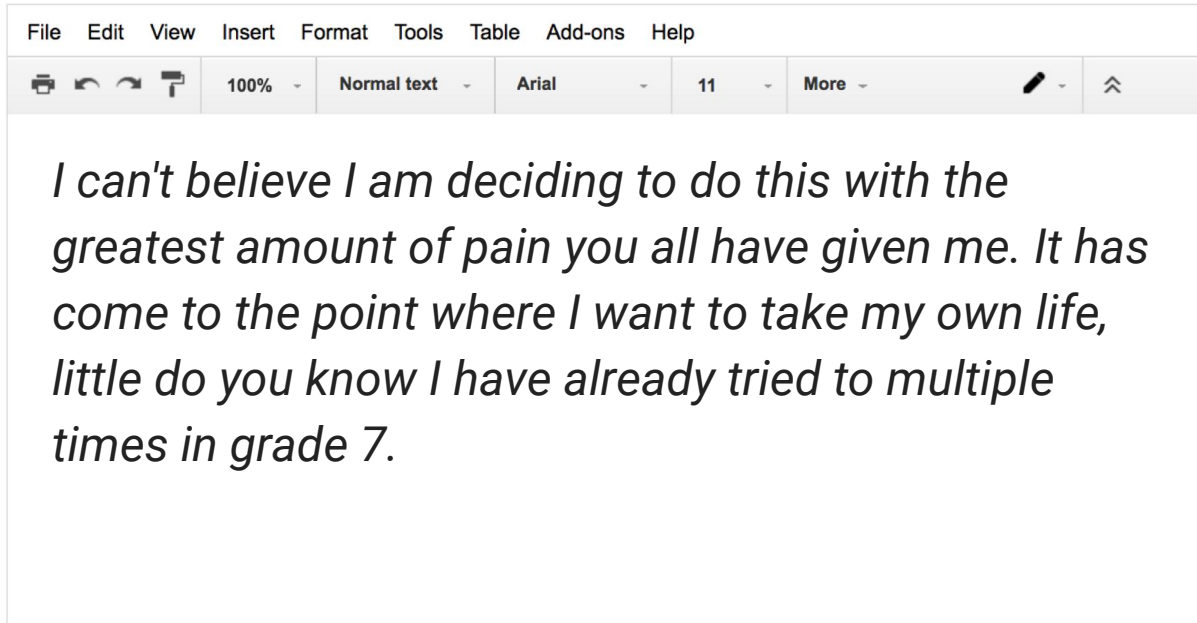
If this trend continues, Gaggle expects to discover ~2,000 incidents of Suicide & Self-Harm the week of December 21, 2020

Student Example



Written on Christmas evening by a middle school student

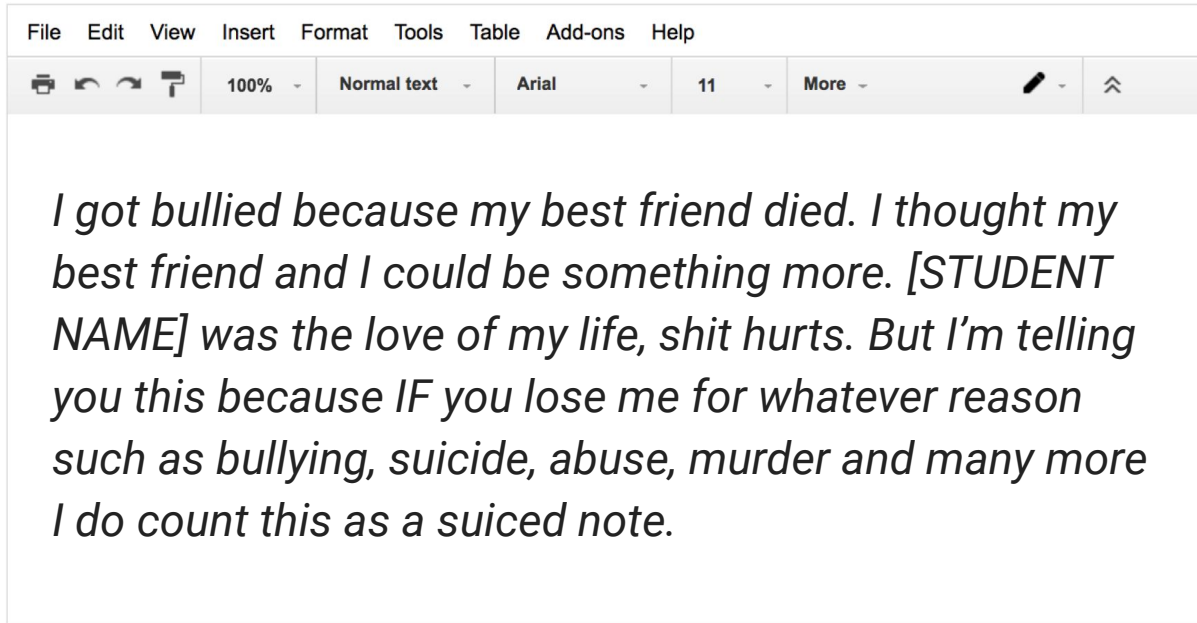
Student Example



The image shows a screenshot of a word processing application's interface. At the top, there is a menu bar with the following options: File, Edit, View, Insert, Format, Tools, Table, Add-ons, and Help. Below the menu bar is a toolbar with several icons: a printer, a redo arrow, a undo arrow, a text box icon, a zoom percentage of 100%, a text style dropdown set to 'Normal text', a font family dropdown set to 'Arial', a font size dropdown set to '11', a 'More' dropdown, a pencil icon, and an up arrow icon. The main content area of the application contains the following text, which is italicized: *I can't believe I am deciding to do this with the greatest amount of pain you all have given me. It has come to the point where I want to take my own life, little do you know I have already tried to multiple times in grade 7.*

From a high school student on 12/27/19

Student Example



The image shows a screenshot of a word processing application's interface. At the top, there is a menu bar with the following options: File, Edit, View, Insert, Format, Tools, Table, Add-ons, and Help. Below the menu bar is a toolbar containing several icons: a printer, a left arrow, a right arrow, a text box icon, a zoom percentage of 100%, a text style dropdown set to 'Normal text', a font family dropdown set to 'Arial', a font size dropdown set to '11', a 'More' dropdown, a pencil icon, and an up arrow icon. The main text area contains the following text, which is italicized: *I got bullied because my best friend died. I thought my best friend and I could be something more. [STUDENT NAME] was the love of my life, shit hurts. But I'm telling you this because IF you lose me for whatever reason such as bullying, suicide, abuse, murder and many more I do count this as a suiced note.*

Document uploaded by a middle school student on New Year's Eve



Dr. Christine Burton

Superintendent of Schools

Millburn Township Public Schools

www.millburn.org



Holiday Blues or SAD?

The holiday season can trigger depression for any number of reasons, and 2020 is a year we can all agree has been particularly hard. You may not be able to make it home for the holidays, you may be in a rough financial situation, or you may not know why you aren't feeling yourself.

Feeling sad during the winter and holiday months may also be a sign of a condition called seasonal affective disorder (SAD), currently officially known as major depressive disorder with a seasonal pattern.



What Causes Holiday Blues?

There are a number of reasons why people might experience the holiday blues. Because the holidays mark an impending new year, people may also begin to reflect on the past year and experience feelings of regret, failure, and isolation.

Seasonal depression is more common than you may think. **Approximately 14% of Americans report experiencing the “winter blues.”**

Some possible causes include:



Isolation

A pandemic with an obligatory quarantine led to poor social support and loneliness for both adults and children.



Exhaustion

Limitations on our typical physical activities in the winter months can exacerbate feelings of exhaustion.



Financial Stress

Overextending yourself financially or struggling to afford gifts for family and friends can create an added burden.



Not Going Home for the Holidays

Missing your family and friends can make the holidays seem especially lonely.



Nostalgia for Holidays of the Past

Traditions and cultural rites being disrupted are by far one of the most challenging stressors on our emotions.

The most common symptom of the holiday blues is a persistent or recurring feeling of sadness that begins during the holiday season—this feeling may vary in intensity and duration. Some people might feel down periodically, but experience brief periods of feeling more upbeat.



Some signs of the holiday blues might include:

- ✓ Difficulty concentrating
- ✓ Feeling irritable or angry
- ✓ Feelings of exhaustion and fatigue
- ✓ Feelings of loneliness
- ✓ Lack of pleasure in normal activities
- ✓ Losing interest in activities that you enjoy
- ✓ Sleeping much more or much less
- ✓ Trouble making decisions
- ✓ Withdrawing from friends and family



WARNING: Unfortunately, many people tend to make unhealthy choices when dealing with holiday sadness and stress. Overeating, excessive drinking, and reduced sleep can make symptoms of the holiday blues even more pronounced.

Labeling Rights

The holiday blues is not an officially recognized psychiatric condition in the DSM-5, the official manual that is often used to diagnose mental health conditions.

This does not mean that you should not talk to your doctor about any concerning symptoms. During your appointment, your doctor will ask questions about the types of symptoms you have been experiencing, including the duration and severity.

Your doctor can assess your symptoms and determine what they represent. Your doctor can also perform tests to check for any underlying medical conditions that might be contributing to your symptoms. For example, hypothyroidism can sometimes lead to fatigue and feelings of depression.

Unless you are diagnosed with a more serious case of depression, your doctor probably won't prescribe medications to treat your symptoms. In many cases, you can manage the holiday blues on your own with lifestyle changes and social support. Your doctor may also refer you to a mental health professional for therapy.



If you are struggling, in addition to talking to your doctor or a mental health professional, there are a number of things you can do on your own to make the holidays easier to deal with:



Exercise Regularly

While it may feel impossible to stick to a workout schedule when you are feeling down, research shows that regular physical activity plays an important role in preventing and reducing symptoms of depression. Just one hour a week of physical activity has been shown to prevent future cases of depression.

Even a casual, recreational activity like going for a short walk each day might be enough to help keep the blues at bay.



Set Limits

Sometimes the hardest thing we do in life is say “no” to people we care about. The holidays often mean that there are more people asking for help and making demands on your time and resources when you may not have any to give. Of course, that doesn’t mean that you should say “no” to everything, but make sure you leave enough time for yourself to relax and enjoy the season.

Even when you can’t turn something or someone down—find ways to practice self-care during the busy season.



Have Realistic Expectations

It’s fine to be excited about the holidays and make plans for the things you want to do, but it is important to keep your expectations sensible. We are in the middle of a pandemic—there are restrictions on gatherings, a virus to avoid, and constraints on shopping.

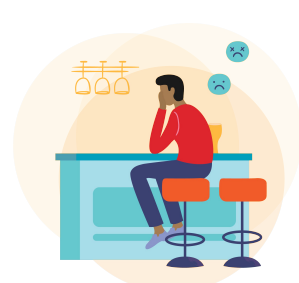
Holidays change just as people change. Focus on enjoying the experience and the time you get to spend with your loved ones rather than on achieving a picture-perfect end result.



Don’t Isolate Yourself

Social isolation can be a major risk factor for depression, but the issue is that sadness often makes you want to hide out and isolate. If you are on your own and away from family for the holidays, reaching out and finding social connections can be all the more difficult when you feel down. The gift of technology is the ability to reach out, even in a pandemic.

If you’re feeling lonely, call a friend for a heart-to-heart. If the feelings continue, consider setting up some therapy to talk through your feelings.



Avoid Excessive Alcohol

Unfortunately, all alcohol acts as a depressant and drinking too much can exacerbate any negative feelings that you might be having. This doesn’t mean you need to go cold turkey. Instead, limit your consumption and avoid using alcohol as a way to deal with or avoid difficult emotions.

Try to limit your alcohol consumption when you are out at social functions to one or two drinks maximum.

Questions & Answers



Find Out More

Dr. Lisa

www.drlisastrohman.com

Follow Dr. Lisa:



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[Holiday Blues Blog](#)

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Mental Health Resources

Crisis Text Line

[https://www.crisistextline.org/topics/self-harm/
#what-is-self-harm-1](https://www.crisistextline.org/topics/self-harm/#what-is-self-harm-1)

National Alliance Mental Illness

[https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Co
mmon-with-Mental-Illness/Self-harm](https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Common-with-Mental-Illness/Self-harm)

Thank you



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