

# Suicide online: Facebook aims to save lives with new actions

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In this April 18, 2017 file photo, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg speaks at his company's annual F8 developer conference in San Jose, Calif. The company said it was implementing new methods of reaching out to people in real time when they go online and threaten to take their own lives, and will experiment with other ways of helping people. (AP Photo/Noah Berger, File)

The alarming video of a Georgia teenager livestreaming her own suicide attempt stayed up long enough on Facebook Live for sheriff's deputies to

find and save her—a repeat phenomenon that has prompted mental health experts and Facebook's CEO to further investigate how they can use social media as a possible platform to help save lives.

The 15-year-old girl took pills and put a plastic bag over her head during her suicide attempt May 2, officials from the Bibb County Sheriff's Office said. A sheriff's sergeant found the girl unresponsive - but with a pulse - and she's expected to recover.

In April, Facebook was alerted to another possible suicide and made the decision to keep the video up, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said in a conference call last week.

That allowed law enforcement "to use that live video to communicate with that person and help save their life," he said.

"So a lot of what we're trying to do is not just about taking the content down but also about helping people when they're in need on the platform."

In Georgia, a viewer watching the teen's livestream called 911. Only the teen's friends could view the video because of the girl's privacy settings, but Bibb County sheriff's Sgt. Linda Howard had a nephew who was friends with her on Facebook. She immediately called her nephew, who viewed the video and let his aunt know it wasn't a prank.

"It was very serious and we needed to get to it right away," she said.

Deputies got three possible addresses for the girl from her high school and sent officers speeding to all three homes. She was found in a bathtub at one of them.

"She was unresponsive, but one of our sergeants was able to find a

pulse," Howard said, adding that the girl is recovering.

"I'm just happy that we can give her back to her family," Howard said.



In this Tuesday, April 30, 2013, file photo, California Highway Patrol Sergeant Kevin Briggs poses by the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. When someone puts one leg over the railing of the Golden Gate Bridge and contemplates plunging into the San Francisco Bay, police officers can often persuade them to climb back onto the bridge. "What happens with these kids is they are so impulsive that they don't see into their future, they don't see a way out," said Briggs. Facebook said it was implementing new methods of reaching out to people in real time when they go online and threaten to take their own lives, and will experiment with other ways of helping people. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File)

Facebook spokeswoman Andrea Saul said she couldn't discuss details of

the Georgia case because of privacy reasons, but said the company in March unveiled a series of initiatives designed to help people who go online and contemplate suicide.

Facebook is testing how computers can quickly identify posts where it's likely someone is expressing thoughts of suicide, and provide resources to the person even if someone on Facebook has not reported it yet.

"It's new ground, new territory but really important," said Dan Reidenberg, a psychologist who is working with Facebook on the initiatives.

"Anytime we have an opportunity to intervene, we never know what the right thing that's going to be said by the right person at the right moment is going to be that saves someone's life," said Reidenberg, executive director of the Minnesota-based suicide prevention group SAVE.

Zuckerberg also announced that Facebook will hire 3,000 more people to review videos of crimes and suicides.

Whenever someone contemplates suicide, online or anywhere else, listening is key, said Kevin Briggs, a retired California Highway Patrol sergeant who often spoke with people as they stood on a small metal pipe outside the Golden Gate Bridge's railings, one step from falling into the Pacific Ocean.

"What happens with these kids is they are so impulsive that they don't see into their future, they don't see a way out," Briggs said.

More than 1,400 people have leaped to their deaths from the bridge since the famed California span opened in 1937. But scores of others have been saved when Briggs and other officers intervened.

Briggs wrote a book about his experiences, "Guardian of the Golden Gate: Protecting the Line Between Hope and Despair."

"We need to take in every word," he said. "When you get into one of these conversations, every word can mean something."

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