

Ways to Help a Suicidal Person

One of the most scary and dreaded moments of being a pastor is receiving a call from someone who is suicidal. Believe it or not, there are people you know and meet every day who battle severe discouragement and depression. Some may feel like the life they have isn't living. Others want to eliminate their pain. They often feel that their pain is more hurtful than killing themselves.

Given the opportunity, God can use each of us to help those who are discouraged find purpose and meaning that will create a future worth living. Here are some ways you can help a person who is thinking about suicide:

- Never treat talk or hints of suicide lightly. Whether they are actually serious or not, any discussion of ending life deserves serious and immediate attention.
- Do not leave the person alone. Stay with them until they are back in the care of their family or with others who care.
- Ask if they have a plan for their suicide and how many attempts have they made? Don't be afraid to talk to them about their plan because you need to know why they are contemplating suicide.
- Be aware of your surroundings. Look to see if there are any visible weapons and/or substances.
- Encourage them to look at others in their family they are close to. Try to get these people contacted so that they can also help this person.
- Encourage them from the Word of God. Jeremiah 29:11 promises them a future if they will put their trust in God.
- Pray with them for God to intervene. Allow the Holy Spirit to give you words to say at the end of your prayer.
- Lead them by calling the National Suicide Prevention hotline. These are professionals that may be able to relieve your inexperience.
- Help them to find a professional Christian counselor. They will need help to learn to cope and overcome depression.
- Be sure that they have no access to any weapons or opportunities to hurt themselves.
- If they are juveniles, recommend to the parents remove bedroom doors and have someone important to that person stay 24 hours with them.
- Connect them with a church close by.
- Provide regular follow-ups in your friendship, providing them with tapes, books, and other encouraging materials.

Suicide Warning Signs

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Suicide is a major public health problem, with more than 32,000 persons dying by suicide each year in the United States, or about 80 suicides per day. In addition to completed suicides, another 1,500 unsuccessful suicide attempts occur each day. In the 18- to 65-year age group, suicide is the fourth leading cause of death in the United States.

Suicide occurs in persons of all ages and backgrounds, but certain groups of people are at increased risk for suicide attempts. These include persons with a psychiatric illness and a past history of attempted suicide. Males are more likely than females to commit suicide, although attempts are more common among females. A family history of, or exposure to, suicide; altered levels of neurotransmitters in the brain; and impulsivity are other factors that may increase an individual's risk of suicide.

While suicide is not universally preventable, it is possible to recognize some warning signs and symptoms that may enable you or your loved ones to access treatment before a suicide attempt. It has been estimated that up to 75% of suicide victims display some warning signs or symptoms.

Warning signs of suicide are varied. They may include:

- Talk of, or preoccupation with, suicide or death; threatening suicide; writing about death or suicide
- Signs of serious [depression](#), including desperation; feelings of hopelessness; feeling no sense of purpose; loss of interest in things one used to care about; trouble [sleeping](#)
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Reckless behavior, increased risk-taking, irritability
- Making statements about life not being worth living, hating life, that the "world would be better off without me," and similar feelings
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Feelings of rage or uncontrolled anger
- Seeking access to firearms, pills, or other methods to commit suicide
- Changing wills, preoccupation with putting one's affairs in order
- Dramatic changes in personality

If you suspect suicidal thoughts in yourself or anyone, seek professional help immediately. Go to a clinic, emergency room, or psychiatric facility. Do not leave an individual alone who has expressed thoughts of suicide. In the United States, you can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK.