

Suicide Information

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. **Printable Version of Word or PDF are at the bottom of this article.**

SUICIDE

Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death among children, teens, and young adults ages 10-24. Every year, about 125,000 young people are brought to the emergency rooms to receive treatment for injuries that were self-inflicted while attempting suicide. Other statistics include that 17% of all high school students have seriously considered attempting suicide and 16.5% planned for suicide. Males are 4-5 times more likely to commit suicide than females, but females are 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than males. Males are more violent and are usually more successful than females.

In dealing with suicide, it is best to be informed, recognize the warning signs, and responding adequately to these warning signs. Suicide and other self-destructive behaviors rarely occur without some type of "warning signs". Listed below is information that may help you in dealing with someone who is suicidal.

RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS

- Change in personality/sad, withdrawn, irritable, anxious, tired, indecisive, apathetic
- Change in behavior/inability to concentrate, loss of sleep patterns/oversleeping, insomnia, early waking, neglecting hygiene, fatigue, unprovoked episodes of crying
- Change in eating habits/loss of appetite & weight, increased appetite & weight
- Loss of interest of friends, sex, hobbies, activities once enjoyed
- Worry over money, illnesses, etc. either real or imagined
- Fear of losing control, going crazy, harming self or others
- Feeling helpless, worthless, like nobody cares, like everyone would be better off without them
- Feeling of overwhelming guilt, shame, self-hatred
- Lack of hope for the future/feeling like things will always be bad
- Recent loss/death, divorce, separation, broken relationship, employment, money, status, self-confidence, self-esteem, religious faith
- Recently giving away prize possessions
- Suicidal impulses, statements, plans, gestures

- Nightmares
- Drug & alcohol abuse
- Agitation, hyperactivity, restlessness
- Casual statements/" You'll be sorry when I am dead.", "I can't see any way out."

COMMUNICATION

Many people who have attempted suicide were trying to relieve "their pain". The pain was greater by living than with dying. Communication is very much needed to help the person who is going through suicidal ideation. Many people are afraid to mention the word "suicide" in thinking that it will help that individual to commit suicide. This is totally wrong. Listed below are some key communication points:

- The best way to know if someone is suicidal is to ask them
- Do not fear asking if they ever feel so bad that they contemplate suicide
- Display open communication, without showing shock or disapproval. It may relieve the depressed person
- Raising the question of suicide shows you are taking the person seriously, is interested in their well-being, and responding to their distress
- If a person admits to contemplating suicide, ask more questions:
 1. How will you do it/do you have a plan?
 2. Do they have the means?
 3. When will they do it?
 4. Have they ever tried it before?

RESPONDING TO THE WARNING SIGNS

Ask tough questions. Never treat suicide lightly! By asking questions, it does not increase the risk of suicide, rather people seemed relieved from distress when someone cares. Ask questions, such as, "I've noticed that you are going through some rough times. Do you ever wish you would go to sleep and never wake up?" "Sometimes when people feel sad, they have thoughts of harming or killing themselves. Have you had such thoughts?" "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"

Be persistent. A person could deny they are having a problem or suicidal ideation. Be consistent, firm, and make sure that they get the help they need.

Be prepared to act. If someone is in danger of harming themselves, know the appropriate numbers to call for help. Call 911 or (800) 273-TALK (8255). Tell the dispatcher that you are concerned that the person with you is in danger of harming themselves.

Do not leave them alone. If someone is contemplating suicide, wait until someone arrives to help them. Let them know they are not alone and that you are there to help them.

Encourage other support groups. Have relatives stay with the person that is suicidal. If the person is a child/teenager, one may make steps of sleeping in the same room, removing the door from the hinges, removing any dangerous items they have mentioned in the plan of action, and include close friends.

Encourage them through the Word of God. Jeremiah 29:11 promises them a future if they will put their trust in God.

Pray with them. Encourage with prayer that God will intervene, allowing Him to give you the words to say that will bring help and healing.

Communicate well with parents or guardians if a minor. It is not breaking confidentiality to tell their parents when they are thinking about suicide. It is state law to inform others when there is treat or danger to others or themselves. Let them all know that you are genuinely concerned about the minor's safety and suggest professional help.

Suggest professional help. Encourage the person that ending their problem through suicide is not the answer and that there are people who can help them get through these tough times. Suicidal, even planned, is often impulsive. Getting the help, they need to cope or deal with life's issues can prevent future attempts.

Follow-up. Check back with the individual, showing concern for the heal and well-being of them, supplying them with books, CD's, or other encouraging materials.

ASSESSING THE DEGREES OF RISK

LOW RISK OF SUICIDE:

- Mild anxiety
- Mild depression
- No withdrawal
- Fairly good daily functioning/good at most activities
- Several resources
- Generally constructive on coping strategies
- Several significant others
- No psychiatric help in the past
- Positive attitude towards psychiatric help
- Stable lifestyle
- No previous attempts
- No alcohol or substance abuse

- Vague, fleeting thoughts of suicide/no actual plan

MODERATE RISK OF SUICIDE:

- Moderate anxiety
- Moderate depression
- Some feelings of helplessness & hopelessness
- Some withdrawal
- Moderate good daily functioning/good in some activities
- Some resources
- Some constructive coping strategies
- Few available significant others
- Moderately satisfied with psychiatric help in the past
- Moderately stable or unstable lifestyle
- Frequently excessive use of alcohol or drugs
- None or possibly one prior suicide attempt or moderate lethality
- Some disorientation or disorganization
- Some hostility
- Frequent thoughts of & occasional planning of suicide

HIGH RISK OF SUICIDE:

- High anxiety or panic state
- Severe depression
- Feeling of hopelessness & helplessness
- Withdrawn & self-deprecating
- Poor daily functioning/not good in any activities
- Few or no resources
- Predominately destructive coping strategies
- One or no significant available others
- Negative view of psychiatric help received in the past
- Unstable lifestyle
- Continual drug and alcohol abuse
- None to multiple suicidal attempts of high lethality
- Marked disorientation or disorganization
- Marked hostility
- Frequent or constant thoughts of suicide
- Having a specific suicide plan

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.