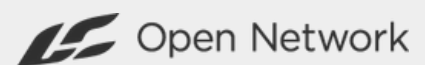


Navigating Suicide Situations



Equip your team to recognize warning signs and respond to someone in crisis.





Communication Guide

*The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but
the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

Proverbs 12:18 NIV

When we learn that someone in our community is contemplating suicide, we have an important opportunity to respond to their need and introduce them to the hope of Christ. While our support can't (and shouldn't) ever take the place of professional help from a licensed counselor, God can certainly use you to impact a person in crisis. Cover your time in prayer and know you are never alone! Navigating a suicide situation can be intimidating, so we've created this guide to equip you.

Important: The steps below reflect how Life.Church navigates these conversations internally, but every church context is different. Before implementing any crisis protocol at your church, we strongly encourage you to consult your leadership, legal counsel, and local authorities to ensure your plan aligns with your church's policies and any applicable laws in your area.





Watch for *Warning Signs*

There are several red flags that indicate someone may be considering suicide. As you serve, look out for the following warning signs:

- Verbal: saying things like, "I just want to end it all," "I feel trapped," "The pain is unbearable," "I don't have a reason to live," or "I'm just a burden on people."
- Mood: experiencing signs of depression, anxiety, apathy, or rage.
- Behavioral: bingeing (alcohol, drugs, or other destructive behaviors), giving away prized possessions, withdrawing socially, oversleeping, undersleeping, and self-harming (e.g., cutting).
- Emotional: feeling intense self-hatred, hopelessness, shame, bottled-up anger, or desire for revenge.
- Medical: being diagnosed with a mental health disorder or having a history of previous suicide attempts.

Other potential precursors to suicide include a history of abuse, lack of a strong support system, job stress, divorce, legal trouble, chronic illness, financial strain, the death of a loved one, and trigger dates. These factors don't necessarily cause suicide, but failing to cope with them in a healthy way can lead to thoughts that suicide is the only option to end the pain.





Navigating the Conversation

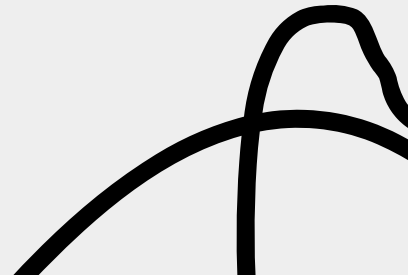
In your interactions with a suicidal person, it's important to provide a listening ear, a caring prayer, and helpful resources. **Here's how we approach these conversations at Life.Church:**

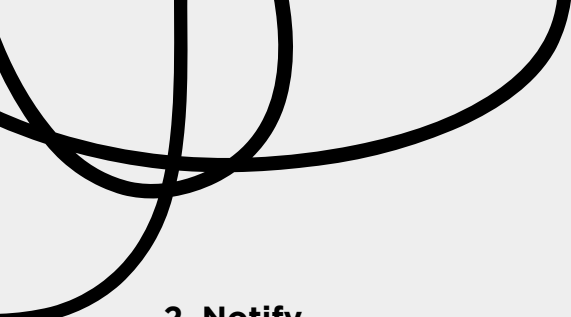
Ask & Assess → Notify → Listen → Pray → Resource → Follow Up

1. Ask & Assess

If you suspect someone might be suicidal but you aren't sure, it's good to talk directly and openly to them about your concerns. It's a myth that this will plant the idea in their mind—in fact, they're often hoping someone will ask, since it's a difficult subject to bring up. One approach is to sensitively open the conversation by saying something like: *"I'm worried about you. Have you ever thought about harming yourself or taking your life?"*

How do we know how serious a suicide threat really is? The truth is, we can't—so we should always take a suicide situation seriously, even if we suspect it might just be a cry for attention. Here are four factors Life.Church uses to determine if professional intervention is needed right away:

- Intent: "I want to end my life."
 - Plan: "Here's how I'm going to do it."
 - Means: "I have access to what I need to do this."
 - Timeline: "I have picked out a day and time for this to happen."
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2. Notify

At the Church:

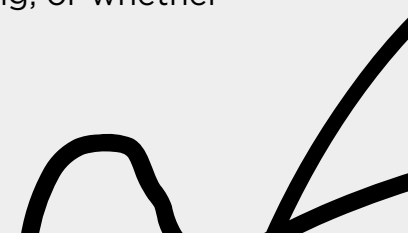
If two or more of these factors (intent • plan • means • time) are in place or you believe that the person is a danger to themselves or others, continue the conversation while notifying another staff member immediately. If your church has a security officer or team on site, notify them right away so they can assess the situation. Contact local police if you believe the person is in immediate danger or if your security team advises it. Work with your team to determine the best next steps to help the individual, and after the conversation, notify your lead pastor and complete an incident report according to your church's protocols.

Online or Phone Conversation:

If two or more of these factors (intent • plan • means • time) are in place or you believe that the person is a danger to themselves or others; discover the address of their current location. Contact local police in your area according to your church's protocol and local laws to conduct a welfare check. After you connect with the police, loop in your lead pastor and complete an incident report according to your church's protocols.

3. Listen

Be willing to listen and encourage the person to tell you as much or as little as they're comfortable sharing about their situation. As a general, avoid being sworn to secrecy. Show empathy by repeating what they say back to them and telling them how proud you are of them for opening up to you. Keep them talking by asking clarifying questions and questions about their life. Above all, show care and loving concern for the person and the difficulties they're facing. Be nonjudgmental and avoid debating whether suicide is right or wrong, or whether their feelings are good or bad.





4. Pray and Share Hope

In the middle of a hopeless situation, we get to share hope with them. Through the form of sharing the Gospel with them, praying with them, and reminding them that God cares about them and their situation.

Here are some suggestions of what to pray for:

- That they would know how much God loves and values them.
- That God would bring them healing, comfort, and hope for the future.
- That they would have the strength and courage to seek help when they feel overwhelmed.
- Anything else that God brings into your heart or mind as you're praying—let the Holy Spirit guide you!

5. Resource

Before ending your conversation, provide the person with some helpful resources to support them. Offer a few practical next steps and consider how you can partner with the person in achieving them.

Here are some resources you can encourage them to check out:

- Bible verses: Philippians 4:6-7, Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 11:28-30, Psalm 139:14, Jeremiah 17:14, 1 Peter 5:6-7, and Psalm 94:18-19
- YouVersion Bible Plans: Overcoming Thoughts of Suicide and Self-Harm or 21 Days to Beat Depression
- Join a small group and pray for community
- Crisis Text Line: www.crisistextline.org or text 741741
- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: call 988 or 1-800-273-8255, or visit their website

When recommending professional help, start with your church's preferred referral network if you have one, or find a licensed counselor at <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>.





6. Follow Up

People in crisis situations need continual support, so it's crucial for us to follow up with them after your initial conversation. Let them know that you'd love to continue the conversation, then ask if you can have their email address or any other contact information. Work with your church leadership to develop a follow-up plan so you can continue praying for the person and suggesting additional resources. Your continued support and friendship will mean more than you know.

Additional Resources

- Help Someone Else (resource guide)
 - The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988 or 1-800-273-8255
 - Axis: A Parent's Guide to Suicide & Self-Harm Prevention
 - Crisis Text Line: www.crisistextline.org or text 741741
 - SAMHSA Treatment Locator: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>
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Key Reminders

You are not alone in this.

Navigating suicide situations is difficult, but God can use you to bring hope to someone in crisis.

Always involve leadership.

Never handle a suicide situation alone. Notify your church leadership immediately, and follow your church's established protocols for crisis situations.

Professional help is essential.

Pastoral care is important, but it should always be paired with professional mental health support. Refer to your church's preferred counselors or trusted local resources whenever possible.

Know your church's protocols.

Every church context is different. Understand your church's specific policies for crises, incident reporting, and any applicable legal requirements in your area.

Prayer covers everything.

Pray before, during, and after these conversations. The Holy Spirit will guide you.

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If you or someone you know is in crisis, call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) or text "HELLO" to 741741 (Crisis Text Line).