



Navigating Suicide Situations

*The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
Proverbs 12:18*

When we learn that someone in our community is contemplating suicide, we have an important opportunity as the church to respond to their need and introduce them to the hope of Christ. Navigating a suicide situation can be intimidating, so we've created this guide to equip you as you serve. Read below to learn how to watch for warning signs of suicide, assess risk level, and take action. God can use you to save someone's life!

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 now."
- **Mood:** experiencing signs of depression, anxiety, apathy, or rage.
- **Behavioral:** bingeing (alcohol, drugs, or other destructive behaviors), giving away prized possessions, withdrawing socially, oversleeping, 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 (particularly sexual 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 (anniversaries of important events, holidays, etc.). 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.

Assess the Risk Level:

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 which indicate 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."

If two or more of these factors are in place, or if the person says they are in immediate danger of committing suicide, urge the guest to contact their emergency services, then notify Kathleen Ambroso at kathleen@thejourneynova.org.

Take Action:

In your interactions with a suicidal person, it's important to provide a listening ear, a caring prayer, and helpful resources. Follow these steps to guide the conversation:

Ask → Notify → Listen → Pray → Resource → Follow up

1. Ask:

If you suspect someone might be suicidal but you aren't sure, it's alright to talk 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. You can approach this topic sensitively by saying something like, "I'm worried about you. Have you ever thought about harming yourself or taking your life?"

2. Notify:

If you encounter a suicide situation, notify the Journey staff host immediately. Let your leader know if the person has expressed intent, a plan, access to means, and/or a timeline. If the person you're talking to is comfortable with it, invite your team leader into the conversation so you can talk to them together.

3. Listen:

Encourage the person to tell you as much or as little as they're comfortable sharing about their situation. 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.

4. Pray:

Let the person know that God cares about them and their situation, and that you'd love to pray with them to ask for His help. Here are some suggestions of things 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.
- That they would know that God is always in control, even if everything else in life seems out of their control.
- That today would be the first day of a brand new chapter in their life.
- 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. Here are some that you can encourage them to check out:

- Relevant Bible verses, such as 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.
- A YouVersion Bible Plan, such as [Overcoming Thoughts of Suicide and Self-Harm](#) or [21 Days to Beat Depression](#).
- [You Can Overcome Suicidal Thoughts](#) blog post and video on finds.life.church.
- Other websites, such as [To Write Love On Her Arms](#) and [Project Semicolon](#).
- Resources for U.S. only:
 - [Crisis Text Line](#): text 741741.
- [The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): call 1-800-273-8255 or click the blue “CHAT” button in the top right corner of their website.
- Contact [SafeHarbor Counseling](#)

As you provide resources, combine them with a few practical next steps and consider how you can partner with the person in achieving them. For example, if you recommend a Bible Plan, offer to go through it with them.

6. Follow Up:

People in crisis situations need continual support, so it's crucial for us to follow up with them after the service. 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 leader 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.

Final Thoughts:

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 serving time in prayer and know that The Journey staff is always here to support you!