

# Suicide Training

## Statistics

- CDC Report: Suicide has increased by 25% between 1999 and 2016.
- Rates have risen steadily in most age and ethnic groups, even as rates of psychiatric treatment and diagnosis have also greatly increased.
- In 2016, nearly 45,000 people committed suicide in the U.S. ...
- On average, there are 125 suicides a day... about 5 suicides across the US every hour.
- The group at highest risk of attempting suicide is White Female.
- The group at highest risk of succeeding is White Male.
- Suicide rates have increased across gender and geographic lines, but nearly 84 percent of people who kill themselves are white, and about 77 percent are men.
- The male suicide rate remains almost four times that for women
- Highest suicide rates are among adults between 45 and 54 years of age. The second highest rate was for those over 85.
  
- North Carolina
  - On average, one person commits suicide every 6 hours.
  - Age adjusted rate is 12.97/100k... just under the national average of 13.42
  - 1,373 deaths by suicide
  - 38<sup>th</sup> in the nation
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death for ages 15-34
  - 4<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death for ages 35-54
- South Carolina
  - On average, one person commits suicide every 11 hours.
  - Age adjusted rate is 15.65/100k
  - 815 deaths by suicide
  - 23<sup>rd</sup> in the nation
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death for ages 15-34
  - 4<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death for ages 35-54
  
- Methods:
  - Firearm (51%)
  - Suffocation (including hanging) (25.9%)
  - Poisoning (14.9%)
  - Other (8.2%)
  - Among males, the most common method of suicide was firearm (56.6%). Among females, the most common methods of suicide were poisoning (33.0%) and firearm (32.1%).

## Myths and Misperceptions<sup>1</sup>

- Suicide is always caused by a mental illness (usually depression)
- People who talk about suicide won't really do it—they just want attention
- Thinking about suicide means you will commit suicide.
- If you talk about suicide to a suicidal subject, you may encourage them to do it
- A true believer cannot commit suicide
- Suicide happens without warning
- Once suicidal, always suicidal
- The risk goes down when the mood goes up
- Suicidal people are intent on dying
- Suicide runs in families

## Reasons given for taking your own life.<sup>2</sup>

- Anger
  - Jealousy
  - Depression
  - Self-pity
  - Pride
  - Shame
  - Guilt
  - Revenge
  - To avoid greater pain
  - Loneliness and isolation
  - Rejection
  - Loss of Status/Income/Power
  - Bored
  - Ultimate act of autonomy
  - Divorce/death of a spouse
  - Bad relationships
  - Accidental (Drug Overdose, Sexual Asphyxia)
  - Stress
  - Bad Theology
  - A chronic or terminal disease diagnosis
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- The main thing to take away from this list is that all of these are reasons why people think about suicide. This means that suicide is not an irrational act.
  - Remember this when you talk to your suicidal friend. Always show respect.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Ray, Help! My Friend is Suicidal, (Shepherd Press, 2014), 11-15

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Ray, Help! My Friend is Suicidal, (Shepherd Press, 2014), 16-17

## How can you respond to Suicide?

- Prevention
- Intervention
- Postvention

## Suicide Prevention

- Four keys to suicide prevention:
  - Look
  - Listen
  - Ask
  - Pray!
- Some verbal signs:
  - I wish I were dead
  - I wish I had never been born
  - The world would be better off without me
  - I don't see any way to get out of this mess
  - Nobody cares if I live or die
  - I can't handle this
  - I can't live without \_\_\_\_\_
  - Life doesn't mean anything to me since...
  - You'll be sorry when I'm gone
  - Next time, I'll take enough pills to do the job right.
- Some behavioral signs
  - Dramatic mood swings
  - Loss of interest in normal activities; withdrawn
  - Declining performance at school or work
  - Giving away possessions, pets
  - Fixation on death/suicide in writing, pictures, music
  - Drug/alcohol abuse – recent increase?
  - Changes in personality
  - Getting affairs in order (writing a will, paying off debt)
  - Evidence of planning, such as buying a weapon
- To prevent a suicide:
  - Know the warning signs
  - Be willing to talk about suicide plainly
  - Show genuine care and concern
  - Take them seriously by not discounting their concerns.
  - Don't tell them what to do
- Threat Assessment Tool: SLAP DIRT
  - **S**pecific Plan
  - **L**ethality
  - **A**vailability (of means)
  - **P**roximity (of help)

- Dangerousness of the previous attempt
- Impression of the dangerousness of the previous attempt
- Rescue - How were they rescued? Who came by to discover them
- Timing of the last event such as time of day, or anniversary of a tragic event.
- Note, pointing out that suicide is sinful has limited value as a deterrent.
  - However, it is useful as a tool to explore the person's worldview.
  - Suicidal thoughts are a consequence of the pain and that pain could have physical causes;
  - The fact that a suicidal person often sees himself as a powerless victim, while the Bible calls suicide sin, reveals the shift that must occur in his thinking.
  - Help him see the connection between his pain and his felt need (not between his pain and his circumstance), without immediately challenging what he lives for.
    - Rephrase need language into a vocabulary of feared consequences. "I can't live without my wife" becomes "Life without my wife will be unbearable because \_\_\_\_\_." ...
  - Challenge constricted options and irrational thoughts. Help people identify ways in which their thinking is full of contradictions and falsehoods.
  - Our goal should be to undermine his pattern of sinfully self-centered rationalization.
- What one thing do all suicidal people lack? Hope (Rom 15:13-14; 2 Cor 4:4-7, 16-18;
  - Hopelessness is the failure to recognize the greatness of God.
  - Offer hope from God's Word – answer Satan's lies. 2 Cor. 4:16-18, 10:5; 1 Cor. 10:13; Psalm 23, 32; Rom. 15:4,13; Isa. 55:6-7; Jer. 29:11-13
    - *Jer. 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart*
  - God's grace is sufficient to help you through this. (Ps. 46:121-123; 2 Cor. 1:3-5, 12:9)
  - Paul, too, describes moments of anguish (2 Cor 4:7-9). In the end, however, he calls them "light and momentary afflictions" (4:17). Why?
    - First, because his whole life, even his greatest difficulties, is lived *purposely* (2 Cor 4:10-12, 15). He willingly endures hardship because of the fruit born out of his suffering.
    - Second, his whole life is lived in relation to *the future* (2 Cor 4:17-18). Affliction becomes light (bearable) and momentary (endurable) when actively contrasted with what is being stored up: an eternal weight of glory. (2 Cor 4:17-18).
    - Third, Paul lives his whole life by the daily renewing of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 4:16; cf. Eph 3:16; Col 1:11).
  - In Christ, you have the character and the knowledge to shepherd suicidal people for the purpose of bringing desirable change in their life (Rom 15:14)
  - Key is to point them back to God. (Is. 55:6)

## Suicide Intervention

- Intervention may place you in harm's way, between a suicidal subject and his/her goal
- Your priority in intervention must always be your own personal safety
- Don't try to be a hero
- Don't become a victim
- Call for appropriate help
- Do Not:
  - Leave the person alone
  - Overlook verbal and behavioral signs
  - Sound shocked
  - Interrupt while the person is still speaking
  - Make promises you can't keep
  - Argue
  - Debate morality
  - Remain the only person helping
  - Agree to keep it a secret or cover it up
- Do
  - Pray without ceasing
  - Remain Calm... Panic leads to mistakes
  - Be patient.
  - Help to define the problem accurately
  - Rephrase thoughts for clarity and context
  - Focus on the central issue
  - Stay physically close to the person and secure surroundings
  - Emphasize the temporary nature of the problem
  - Listen very carefully and respond appropriately
- If suicide is imminent or in progress... Call 911.

## Suicide Postvention

- The suicide survivor isn't the person who has survived an unsuccessful suicide attempt. The suicide survivor is the spouse, the child, the coworker of someone who decided to end their own life.
- The person who loses someone close to them is going through a variety of emotions...and each one is painful
  - The first reaction is most likely one of gut-wrenching shock and disbelief.
  - Then there is natural deep grief for your loss, as there might be in any death.
  - But suicide adds a dimension not found in other deaths...
  - Anger, Betrayal, Bitterness
  - Suicide is a selfish, loveless act. By definition, it cuts people off.
  - Guilt and Responsibility
  - It's normal to wonder, "Could I have done something?" Or "If Only I would have done ..." Or "Why didn't I notice the signs"
  - Fear
  - Shame and Embarrassment
  - You are trying to make sense of something that seems so senseless. You begin to ask many questions. Why? Where was God? Why did he allow this to happen?
  - God may seem very distant

## How can you help?

- God has put us in the body of Christ so that we can help one another. 2 Cor. 1:4; 1 Thess. 4:18
- Isolation is dangerous. 1 Cor. 12:20-21; Eph. 4:14-16
- Sympathize with those who are crushed and hurting – listen. Rom. 12:15
- Grieve and Mourn with them. It is right and normal to mourn, but not as those who have no hope. 1 Th. 4:13
- Point them to the hope that only God can give. Rom. 15:4,13, 5:8; Heb. 11:1-2, 7:25; Jer. 17:5-8; Phil. 4:13; 1 Tim. 1:1; 1 Pet. 3:15; Mt. 11:28-29
- Offer practical help. Gal. 6:2
- Things to say and things not to say.
  - Don't Say:
    - Let me know if you need anything. Rather, just show up with food.
    - It must have been God's will
    - At least you have another child. Place your attention on them
    - I understand..... unless you really do
    - Time heals all wounds.
  - Pray
  - Talk
  - Listen a whole lot.
- The Spirit will help you know what to say. Mark 13:11
- One issue to be aware of with suicide survivors is that they have a lot of questions. Deut 29:29.

- Another issue you need to be aware of is that they are fighting against Satan’s lies.<sup>3</sup>

**Lie #1:** My loved one’s suicide is my fault.

**Truth #1:** Each person bears the responsibility for his/her own choices. Rom 14:10-12

**Lie #2:** This is more pain than I can take

**Truth #2:** God comforts our pain and does not push us beyond our ability to obey him. Jn 16:33, Ps. 23:4, 1 Cor 10:13

**Lie #3:** The Bible doesn’t address my situation

**Truth #3:** God’s Word gives sufficient counsel for any situation. 2 Tim 3: 16-17; Heb. 4:12.

**Lie #4:** God didn’t have anything to do with this awful situation

**Truth #4:** God is sovereign; His plans and purposes are always accomplished. Ps. 139:16; Jer. 32:17

**Lie #5:** God was wrong to let my loved one die.

**Truth #5:** God’s supreme rule is always consistent with the beauty of his divine character. Is. 55:8; Ps 145:17

**Lie #6:** Suicide is a genetic trait or family curse, so there is no hope for my family

**Truth #6:** Suicide is a sinful choice. Ex. 20:13

**Lie #7:** People who commit suicide go to hell.

**Truth #7:** People who have received Jesus’ forgiveness of sin go to be with Him. 1 Jn 1:9

**Lie #8:** My loved one’s suicide has ruined my life!

**Truth #8:** God doesn’t waste a hurt; he uses suffering for our good. Rom 5:3

- In the end, You have to say, along with Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68-69, ESV). At a fundamental level you must be able to say, “I do not understand this and I must leave it with you, my God and my King.”

## Recommended Resources.

1. Bridges, Jerry, [Trusting God – Even When Life Hurts.](#)
2. Black, Jeffery S., [I Just Want to Die – Replacing Suicidal Thoughts with Hope.](#)
3. Gossak, Julie, [Hope Beyond Despair: Finding TRUTH after a Loved One’s Suicide.](#)
4. Guthrie, Nancy, [What Grieving People Wish You Knew.](#)
5. Powlison, David, [Grieving a Suicide – Help for the Aftershock.](#)
6. Ray, Bruce; [Help! My Friend is Suicidal](#)
7. Tripp, Paul; [Grief – Finding Hope Again.](#)
8. The Institute for Biblical Counseling and Discipleship — <https://ibcd.org/topics/suicide>

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<sup>3</sup> Julie Gossack, Hope Beyond Despair: Finding TRUTH After a Loved One’s Suicide (Focus Publishing, 2017), 19-39.