**Suicide Recognition and Prevention**

Suicide is believed to be the third [leading cause of death](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_causes_of_death_by_rate) for [young people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth), especially teens, in the United States of America, though there are many more attempts than actual [suicide](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide) completions. There are usually significant signs in adolescents before an attempt is ever made. The ability of parents, teachers, youth directors, ministers, [Christian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian) Lay persons, and others to recognize the signs that show that a young person may be at risk for suicide or is considering suicide is essential in suicide prevention. Adults and others close to a young person may notice significant changes in that person’s behavior. These changes may continue for quite some time and may be obvious in several areas of functioning.

Stressful or traumatic life events can precipitate a [suicide attempt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Failed_suicide_attempt), especially if the precipitating event has not been properly dealt with or has been ignored, disbelieved, denied, or covered up by others close to the person who is suicidal. Helpers should be aware that some things that don’t seem stressful for you might be stressful for them. Some stressful events are sudden losses (death, divorce, separation, job, etc.) or life changes (sudden job loss or promotion, marriage, separation, or other relationship changes, having a child or losing a child through miscarriage or abortion), physical (health, accidents, natural disasters, or war related events) or sexual trauma ([childhood sexual abuse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_sexual_abuse), date rape, rape, etc.). Note that the trauma does not have to be experienced personally, but may be experience vicariously in a person close to the one who actually experienced the event. They may have personally experienced a [traumatic event](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_trauma), seen a traumatic event or graphic images of the event, or simply have heard a graphic portrayal of the traumatic event in person, or in the media.

A person who is suicidal for any reason needs to feel they have others in their life that love and care for them, and that there is hope for change in life circumstances. Family and friends should never keep this kind of secret. When there seems to be no other sources of help, as a Christian helper, you may be the last hope that person has. If family and friends have rejected them, or tried to keep it a secret, or denied the problem exists, then Christian professionals and lay persons need to be willing to step up and be the one who stands in the gap for that person, through spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical support, and through prayer. Suicide situations need to be handled openly and truthfully, while getting as much help and support for the person as possible. When several helpful people share the responsibility for the person in that person’s life, then the person will likely feel more loved and cared for by others. Helpful family members, close friends, doctors, teachers, employers, ministers, counselors, and other Christian Lay persons are all good resources for a person who is suicidal.

When deciding if a young person has a plan, think about how lethal the plan is. If a gun is involved the plan is likely to be lethal. Jumping from high places or hanging themselves, are more lethal plans than taking pills or [cutting wrists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-harm). Think about whether or not the plan is realistic and the means accessible. Think about if the plan has specific components such as time, place, method, etc. High-risk activities are writing notes, emails, texts, or letters stating suicidal intentions, or making a will and giving away personal items, collecting pills or other lethal substances, having access to a gun, or another potentially lethal weapon. If the plan is obviously unrealistic, or otherwise seems confusing, a mental or emotional disorder may be present, and professional help should be sought out. If a realistic plan or an attempt has been made, always seek professional help. Call 911 first, then others who are needed. A parent or other loved one should not be called first to the scene, without notifying proper authorities. If the suicide is successfully completed, they may come upon the scene with no one else there to support him or her in the time of crisis.

**Some warning signs to look for are:**

* Previous suicide attempts
* Prior history of sexual, physical, verbal, and/or emotional abuse
* Verbalized or written threats
* Knowledge of methods of suicide
* Feelings of hopelessness
* Feelings of helplessness
* Words of anger at self or others
* Themes of death and depression in verbal, written, or artistic form
* Giving away important possessions
* Talk of not being missed if gone
* Self-abusive behaviors (cutting, taking pills, excessive piercing, etc.)
* Recent loss by death or separation (parent or other loved one, pet)
* Personality changes (Withdrawal, aggressiveness, moodiness)
* High Risk behaviors (promiscuity, drugs, alcohol, reckless driving)
* Change in academic performance
* Truancy or chronic tardiness
* Running away
* Physical symptoms (chronic headaches, stomach aches, eating and sleeping disorders)
* Ignoring personal appearance (not bathing, combing hair, etc.)

**Suicide Prevention**

**What You Can Do to Help?**

There are some actions you can take to help someone you suspect is having suicidal thoughts:

1. Listen to them and be careful what you say.
2. Tell the person you are concerned about him or her.
3. Ask if he/she is taking medication, using alcohol or drugs, or seeing a counselor.
4. Let the person know you care, that he/she is not alone, and that the suicidal feelings may be temporary and can be treated with the help of the Lord and others.
5. Avoid saying, "You have so much to live for," or "Your suicide would hurt your family."
6. Encourage the person to see a counselor, mental health professional or doctor.
7. If needed, help the person find a counselor, mental health professional or reputable treatment center, and take him/her there.
8. Pray for them.

**What to Do If the Person is in Crisis**

If the person is talking about and making plans for suicide:

1. Do NOT leave him/her alone. Pray for them.
2. Remove any guns, drugs, sharp objects, and any other objects that could be used for suicide.
3. Take the person to the nearest hospital emergency room or clinic if needed.
4. If you cannot take the person to get help, call 911 or your local Mental Health Center's.

This information is taken from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.