



Start a Conversation about... **Suicide**

There is a killer running rampant, and we are called to battle against it. Suicide is not easy to talk about, but it is necessary. It is the second-leading cause of death among people ages 10-24, and the rate of suicide in that age group has increased by 60% since 2007. Generation Z has the highest levels of suicide since the beginning of formal tracking. The Covid-19 pandemic only increased suicidal thoughts and attempts among teenagers. We must equip teens to understand, discuss, and combat this deadly threat.

Young people today struggle with anxiety, stress, depression, and loneliness. The youth that we work with are going to encounter suicide in one way or another. They might know someone who considers or attempts it. They might have suicidal thoughts themselves. This is a topic that is incredibly serious, but it is critical to discuss openly. We need to instill in our teens hope and value in who they are in Christ. We can also provide them with tools to help others who may be struggling. Suicide is devastating, but with God's help we can save lives and prevent tragedy.

Potential Activities

- Hold workshops with youth to practice quality listening and conversation skills. Teens are very "connected" via technology or social media but have also become isolated. This disconnect from face-to-face relationships, especially with Christian peers and adults, can prevent youth from asking for help.
- Host specified opportunities where students, parents, and supportive adults can learn how to recognize warning signs for mental struggle and discuss how to handle it. You can find resources for this on NAMI.org as well as from places like Mental Health First Aid.
- Invite special guests to chat with students about suicide and depression. These could include mental health professionals who can answer important questions and help break down stigma. If available and comfortable in sharing, consider hosting a conversation with someone who has struggled with mental health or is close to someone who has.
- Teach youth about Psalms and prayers of lament. Take time to study them in scripture and then give youth opportunities to both lament and praise God in their own prayers.
- Provide parents with materials and information to further the conversations at home. If possible, invite parents to be part of the discussion and bring families together to talk about mental health. Parents are a critical component of teen mental health, but sometimes worry about how or what to say when addressing suicide.
- Take a look at some recent celebrities who have died from suicide, and discuss the sorrow and tragedy surrounding the deaths. Discuss statistics of how many teens and people daily die from suicide. Start a conversation about how we might prevent such heartache and devastation. Emphasize the importance of talking genuinely about feelings.

Continued on Back

Youth E-Source and LCMS Youth Ministry

Discussion Questions

For these questions, refer to the scriptures below for guidance and direction.

- Do you think it is hard to discuss issues of mental health? Is there a stigma or negative connotation associated with mental struggles?
- Do you think suicide is ever "glamorized" in media or TV shows? Why is this dangerous?
- What spiritual practices help us to stay rooted in our Baptismal identity when times are difficult?
- How do you know someone is a good listener? How can you be a good listener?
- What are some warning signs that someone is struggling with mental health or struggling with suicidal thoughts? How can you support them? What are signs you need to get adults or other professionals involved?
- Is it hard to be vulnerable and open about your feelings? What might make it easier?
- What do you do when you feel especially down or have a tough day? Can you recognize what you tend to do when facing a challenge? What impact can that have on your faith?
- What does the Bible have to say about how God values life and suicide?
- What are good reminders of God's love and promises to us? How do you know that you are loved and valued no matter what?
- What hope do we have when things seem like they cannot get any better?
- What does God promise to us in difficult times?

Foundational Scriptural Truth

Psalm 34:17-20

The Lord is near to the broken-hearted. He hears the deep cries of our hearts and promises to deliver us from hardship. Even people who love and follow God will go through times of great pain and sorrow. Experiencing anguish through those periods is natural. God knows and comforts us when we are crushed in spirit.

Psalm 139:13-18

We are fearfully and wonderfully made. Every person on Earth is designed and loved by God, knit together with care before even being born. God knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows the number of our days and holds our future in His hands. God also promises to be with us. We can sleep at night with the peaceful assurance that His presence will still be by our side in the morning.

2 Corinthians 12: 7-10

Paul experienced constant challenges throughout his life and ministry. Though we don't know the details of this "thorn in the flesh", it caused him deep agony. Yet he realizes that his weaknesses allow Christ's strength to shine through. When we are at our lowest, we are forced to rely solely and completely on God, which is actually a blessing! We recognize that all we have and who we are comes only from His power. We don't have to do it alone, because God works in and through us!

Philippians 4:6-13

It might seem easier said than done to say "do not be anxious..." but take a close look at the antidote for anxiety: pray! In everything, by thankful prayer, we can take our needs to God. He gives us the beautiful promise that His peace will guard our hearts as we rest in Christ Jesus. Our contentment and ability rest not in our strength, but His.

1 Peter 5:6-11

We are guaranteed hardship in this world. There is no getting around difficulty, and Satan will do his best to bring us down in soul and spirit. But we are called to cast our cares upon the one who cares for us. God knows and cares about our needs. He wants to take our burdens upon Himself and He will give us strength in the end, no matter what trials we face temporarily.

Other Resources

- Pastor Peter Preus shares his experience with suicide and how the Gospel can comfort us in this difficult circumstance. You can listen to a podcast interview of him (<https://www.kfuo.org/2021/09/24/friends-for-life-episode-13-grieving-suicide-rev-peter-preus/>) or read his eBook I will Grieve for the Suicide available for free here (<https://lcmslife.org/resource/i-will-grieve-for-the-suicide/>)
- LCMS Life Ministry offers a number of resource on suicide including an article on finding comfort in the suicide of a non-Christian (<https://lcmslife.org/resource/where-do-gods-people-find-comfort-in-the-suicide-of-a-non-christian/>) and a Bible study for those working with those who may be struggling (<https://lcmslife.org/resource/bible-study-gospel-relief-for-the-despairing/>)
- Training and resources for caring for those who are struggling with mental health can be found at Mental Health First Aid and Source of Strength (<https://sourcesofstrength.org/>). Both of these are secular, but they provide important training and information.
- Watch and discuss the music video "God Only Knows" (by King and Country).
- YouthESource.com has a helpful and informative Bible study called "How to Help Youth Cope After a Suicide." It includes excellent thoughts for answering questions surrounding suicide and how to comfort those suffering from loss.
- Explore apps designed to support and improve mental health. Some noteworthy options include "Moodfit," "Pause," "Calm", and "Abide".
- Examine facts and advice about suicide from reputable mental health organizations. Consider researching sites of programs such as NAMI, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and American Association of Suicidology.