

Suicide

People generally consider suicide for the same reasons they may feel depressed. The essence of the desire to commit suicide is to escape the feeling of hopelessness. Life is not considered to be worth living. It usually has an element of escape from a painful situation and often may include an element of revenge.

Whenever suicide is mentioned or even just alluded to, it must be addressed directly.

Immediate steps when suicide is mentioned or alluded to:

- 1) Bring out veiled threats into the open. Ask directly, *“Are you giving any consideration to suicide?”*

You will not be introducing the idea to him, only clarifying what he is or may be thinking. If he is not thinking about it, you can simply say you are glad and then go on with your conversation / counseling. If he is thinking about it, then continue.

- 2) Determine the level of seriousness. Is it just a passing thought, something he has given thought to, something he has fantasized about, something he has planned - and if so, what is his plan? If he has a plan, then determine the following:
 - A) What is his plan - specifically? Get the details.
 - B) Is it lethal?
 - C) Does he have the means to carry it out in the immediate future?
 - D) When is he planning to do it?

Other considerations in considering the seriousness of thoughts about suicide:

- a) Previous attempts (4 times more probable to act)
- b) Family or friends that have committed suicide (4 times more probable to act)
- c) No close relationships - The person does not feel needed, valued or wanted
- d) The person is dominated emotionally by the feeling of hopelessness
- e) The person has no strong religious or philosophical objection to suicide.

- 3) Taking action.

- A) Do not let your anxiety show. Be confident, directive and warmly firm.
- B) Get the person to tell you what has caused the immediate crises. Be empathetic, but not overly sympathetic (which would reinforce the hopelessness). Avoid entering into a power struggle with him.
- C) Be gentle, but firm. Give clear directions on what to do. Make it clear that suicide will not solve the problem - whatever it is - ultimately ending pain or seeking revenge
- D) Secure a commitment that he will not kill himself until after you can meet and talk with him (provides hope and relationship) - or 24 hours - or whatever you can secure.
- E) Make sure you know his definite plans for the next 12-24 hours. The crisis time is short. If he lives for 24 hours after the temptation is strongest, the risk is lessened
- F) Beware if he becomes suddenly calm. That may mean he is high risk because he has decided to kill himself. If you wonder why he is calm, ask directly.
- G) If you believe the risk could be serious, call the authorities - or better, get someone else to call the authorities so while you are talking. It is much better to have him mad at you than dead. Professionals at the scene can make a much better assessment than you can over the phone.

- 4) Future Action

The person needs to get counseling to help resolve the underlying issues.
He will also need close accountability to not fall back into the temptation.

Dealing with the aftermath of a suicide

There are many factors in our society that have resulted in increasing rates of suicide including, but not limited to: selfishness, low value of life, priority on escape from pain, nihilism, high rates of people on medication for depression, economic collapse, societal decline, destruction of previous way of life, war, invasion. The new reality is that you may have to deal with the suicide of someone you know, perhaps even a close friend or relative.

While each suicide may have different underlying specific causes, the general causes (as mentioned above) will be the same. Ultimately suicide is usually done out of a motivation to escape pain or an effort at revenge, or possibly both. A particular suicide may be successful in these endeavors to a limited degree, but is never ultimately successful.

For non-Christians, suicide to escape physical or emotional pain will end the present pain being experienced in this life, but it immediately puts them into suffering that will last for eternity in being separated from God and experiencing what is described in multiple scriptures as physical pain (See: Matthew 3:12; 13:17-50; 25:41; Luke 16:21-31; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; Revelation 20:12-15).

Suicide as an effort of revenge is short sighted. While it may or may not create emotional turmoil for others, those others continue to live which means there is hope for change and happiness for them, while the person who commits suicide begins their eternal suffering.

For Christians, suicide to escape physical or emotional pain will end the present pain being experienced in this life, but it removes from them the joys that could have been theirs if they had instead trusted God in life. A Christian will still enter heaven, but without the crowns that could have been earned. They will be forgiven, but there will be eternal regret about what should have been if they had been obedient to God and trusted him. Suicide does call into question the nature of the faith professed by the individual. That brings shame on Christ. Whether the person was or was not an actual Christian must be left in God's hands. Many people are self-deceived about their true relationship with Christ. At the same time, Christians can become so despondent that they lose proper focus and yield to the temptations offered in the present to escape present pain in an improper manner. Suicide is a sinful attempt to escape pain.

Suicide as a means of revenge is also opposite of Christian character and will also result in the losses as noted above. And though it may cause emotional turmoil for those left behind, since they are alive, there is hope for change and happiness for them.

In short, suicide cannot fulfill the ultimate goals of the one committing it.

Hope for those left behind.

- 1) The responsibility of suicide is always ultimately in the hands of that individual himself.
- 2) Any guilt felt towards a suicide must be explored as to any actual failure as opposed to perceived failure. Perceived failure is thinking that if you had done something differently, you could have kept the person alive, but it is actually unreasonable that you were or could have been aware, or could have actually done something to prevent it. In these cases, comfort is taken in God's sovereignty. Actual failure is being cognitively aware and purposely failing to take reasonable action to prevent it. In these cases, forgiveness can be found in Jesus Christ.
- 3) Pursue a vibrant life in Christ. Like any other tragedy, focus on the suicide is the wrong focus. The focus must be on Christ and how He wants you to respond and live life. The memory of the suicide will always be tragic and sad, but allowing it to change the focus and direction of your life is wrong. Learn what you can from it and use it to teach and warn others. Be honest, but do not become introspective about it. A person who takes his / her life at his / her own hands is a tragedy, not a hero or a martyr, so do not let the memory of him / her put him / her in such a position. Even if the suicide was done as a means of revenge, do not let yourself be a victim of it.

Suicide Counseling Situations

Read through all the situations below. Pick one of the situations below and write out how you would respond to the situation and counsel those involved. Include in your answer:

- *What test of their faith may be involved or what sin(s) to which he / she is yielding
- *The questions you might ask to uncover what might be going on in his / her Emotional; Volitional; Rational and Personal circles;
- *Relevant Bible verses that would expose sin and encourage him / her in the faith and a righteous response;
- *Advise you would give on how to handle the situation being faced.

Remember the basic counseling flow chart & basic stages of counseling handed out previously

Counseling Situation # 1

A man calls you on the phone and tells you his friend is threatening suicide. He manages to get his friend on the phone. You know him to be an upstanding man and not involved in any sin of which you are aware. You do learn that his business associate has cheated him and left him to file bankruptcy. What steps will you take to deal with his threat? What will you do if the threat appears to be trying to get attention? What will you do if it appears to be serious? How will you counsel him if you are able to get him to come see you face to face?

Counseling Situation #2

A woman comes to see you for help in dealing with the sudden suicide of her cousin. It is a problem for the whole extended family who are close to each other. He was a young man just out of college. He had made a profession of faith in high school, but he had changed a lot in college. He had become increasingly dark spending more and more of his time alone in his basement apartment. He had become involved in online fantasy games. As she looks back at the situation, there were clues that something serious was wrong, but either no one picked up how bad they were or acted upon them. This has left her and others in the family feeling guilty. She had talked with him briefly the week prior to his suicide but he / she did not show much interest in what she was telling him about the family, but was more interested in getting back to a game he / she was playing which sounded strange to her. He / she turned down her invitation to come to a family function that coming Sunday afternoon. She was shocked at the funeral when she saw his body in the casket and how much weight he / she had lost. He / she had left a brief note that was cryptic and confusing, but ended with a statement that he / she wanted to go see Jesus. How will you help her deal with this tragedy? What advice can you give her as she tries to comfort other family members, some of whom are saved, and some of whom are not saved?