



Dealing with Suicidal Behavior
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1 Scenarios and Assessment

Scenarios/Case Studies

A. Scenario #1

1. John has struggled much of his life with holding down a job due to being a high school dropout and never learning a trade. He has filed bankruptcy and now feels so depressed that he cannot pay bills or take his family on a vacation. He frequently gets in heated arguments with his wife. He is feeling so low that he has even thought about suicide.

B. Scenario #2

1. Melissa is a twice-divorced woman and has had several other relationships with men, some sexual and some not. She has three children from the two previous husbands and is now single. She is next to poverty due to a low-paying job and because the fathers simply give little or no financial help. She cannot understand why she has experienced so much bad luck and trouble. She has talked to friends and family but does not feel any of them have been able to help her. She is contemplating suicide as an escape.

C. Scenario #3

1. Mark is responsible, works a job, and provides for his family. However, he cannot shake his feelings of depression. He experiences random and racing thoughts, has trouble sleeping, and simply has no peace. He believes in God and prays for deliverance, but does not understand why God has not delivered him. This sometimes creates questions about God's love for him, and even the existence of God. Taking his own life seems to be a possible escape from it all.

Definitions and Key Thoughts

A. Definitions

1. Suicide is the taking of one's own life.
2. Suicidal thoughts or suicidal ideation is thinking about, speaking about, or planning on committing suicide (medicalnewstoday.com).
3. A suicide attempt is actually trying to commit suicide, even if only for attention and without the intention to follow through.

B. Facts and Key Thoughts

1. Individuals who have these thoughts feel as though almost every other alternative has been considered. They have not found help and are feeling hopeless.
2. Psychological pain (*psychache*) is what a suicidal person is experiencing. It is caused by various things including shame or guilt, loneliness, depression, desire for revenge (toward one who has hurt them), and desire to end severe and chronic pain.
3. Suicide and suicidal thoughts (or ideation) affect all social and economic classes and all ethnicities, including people in the Apostolic faith.

4. People often think those who speak of suicide will not follow through. Though some may be only seeking attention, any comments about suicide should be taken seriously.
5. While suicide often seems to be an impulsive act, there is a chance it can be prevented if signs or hints are noticed and dealt with.
6. While there are many signs of suicide, the greatest is simply an individual manifesting out of the ordinary behavior including, but not limited to:
 - a) Lack of interest in everyday duties,
 - b) Giving away prized possessions,
 - c) Making comments such as, “I’m better off dead,” “I won’t be here then,” or “No one would notice if I was gone,”
 - d) Allowing school grades to slip repeatedly with no desire to do better and not caring about the consequences.

C. Varying Religious and Societal Views on Suicide

1. Some Christian groups do not consider suicide to be a sin that results in going to Hell. It is acknowledged that it is a sin, but not an unpardonable sin.
2. However, Apostolics recognize that an individual who commits suicide may not have the opportunity to seek forgiveness.
3. Keep in mind that non-Christians may not consider the eternal consequences of suicide.

Assessment (Interview)

A. Questions to Ask

1. How long have you been having these thoughts or contemplating the idea?
2. What would you consider to be the initial cause or main reason(s) for having these thoughts?
3. Has this situation or a similar one ever occurred before?
 - a) If the answer is yes, ask how they resolved the feelings/situation.
4. Have you ever attempted suicide?
 - a) If so, when was the last time?
 - b) This is to determine if the present situation or feelings have been acted upon.
5. Is there anyone in your family that has attempted or committed suicide?
 - a) If the answer is yes, ask, “How did/does that make you feel?”
6. Do you have someone you can talk to on a regular basis that seems to help you?
 - a) Have you discussed these thoughts with that person or anyone else?
7. Have you thought of a way you would follow through?
8. Do you have the means of following through?
 - a) This is to find out if the individual has access to a gun, pills for overdose, etc.
9. What kind of changes in your behavior have occurred since you have had these thoughts?
10. What would have to change for you to feel better?
11. If your situation or circumstances changed, would you still contemplate suicide?

12. Are there times when you do not have these feelings and thoughts about suicide?
 - a) If the answer is yes, attempt to determine when this is or what alleviates the ideas and determine if there is something that can be done to replicate these better times.
13. Where do you see yourself in two, five, or more years?
 - a) This is to try to get an idea if they still believe they have a future.
14. Do you think that if you followed through, it would affect someone other than yourself?
 - a) How does it make you feel when you consider how it will affect those people?
 - b) Do you believe in some kind of afterlife (the soul existing after physical death)?
 - c) What do you believe would happen to you after you had taken your own life?
15. Do you want to be admitted into a hospital, so someone can keep an eye on you?
 - a) If the answer is yes, ask them if they want to go immediately and if you can make arrangements and/or notify their family.
 - b) If the answer is no, continue the session.

2

Critique and Counsel

Biblical Insight

- A. Feeling as if death is the only or best option given one's situation is not uncommon, nor should it be considered abnormal. Even some of the highest regarded men of the Bible felt death would be better than life; yet they lived on to see great success. Others chose to commit the act and never experienced the virtue of triumph over self. The two groups are identified below:
1. Those who desired to die:
 - a) Moses felt that he was not able to carry the burden of leading Israel if they were going to continue to complain so much. He sought the Lord to take his life if this was how the Lord was going to allow it to be (Numbers 11:10–15).
 - b) Job and Jeremiah desired that they had never been born due to the burdens they were bearing (Jeremiah 20:14–18; Job 3:11).
 - c) Out of fear of being killed by Jezebel, Elijah desired that God would take his life instead (I Kings 19:1–4).
 - d) Jonah declared that it was better for him to die than live when he was displeased with God's choice to spare Nineveh (Jonah 4).
 - e) When in prison for preaching, Paul and Silas were freed by a miraculous earthquake. The prison guard was about to take his own life out of fear of his

superiors, but Paul stopped him crying, “We are all here!” The guard was then converted by hearing and obeying the gospel (Acts 16:25–34).

2. Those who committed suicide:
 - a) Abimelech had a large stone dropped on his head by a woman. Rather than to be known for dying at the hand of a woman, he told his armor-bearer to kill him with a sword (Judges 9:50–55).
 - b) Saul fell on his own sword after being wounded in battle. His armor-bearer did the same after witnessing Saul’s death (I Samuel 31:1–6).
 - c) When Ahithophel’s counsel for defeating David was not followed, he went home and “put his house in order and hanged himself.” (II Samuel 17:23).
 - d) Zimri, an evil king facing defeat, set the palace on fire with himself in it (I Kings 16:18).
 - e) After betraying Jesus and feeling extreme guilt, Judas hung himself (Matthew 27:3–5).
 - f) Though Samson did it as an act of revenge against the Philistines, he pushed over the supporting pillars of the building where they were gathered and came to his death as the building fell. This may be seen as “giving his life” since he prayed to God that He would allow this to happen (Judges 16:23–31).
3. Ask the individual how he/she sees the choices of those who did not take their life compared to those who did. What was the difference?

Wise Counsel

A. Do not take the following approaches:

1. Tell the individual to simply “snap out of it” or just “pray through.”
2. Suggest that things are not as bad as they seem.
3. Suggest that God is making this happen for their good (although we know that good can come out of adverse situations) or as punishment.

B. Remain calm and do not act shocked (even if you are)—they need stability!

1. Explain to the individual that he is not alone in his troubles. Though others may not be experiencing the same situations, their feelings can very well be the quite similar.
2. Empathize with him by attempting to put yourself in his shoes and understand his feelings.
3. Listen intently to what he is saying, at times repeating what you heard, allowing him to see you are concerned.

C. The initial objective is to prevent suicide and work to eliminate suicidal thoughts or ideation.

Assuming the person is Apostolic and/or has faith in God and the Bible, convey to her that we have the power of choice to serve God or not, along with other choices in life.

1. Without being preachy, suggest that
 - a) Our bodies are the temple of God and we are not to defile them (I Corinthians 3:16–17).
 - b) We are not our own; Jesus bought us and we are to glorify God in our bodies (I Corinthians 6:19–20).

2. Suggest the idea that for one to commit suicide due to life's problems seems to reject or deny God's power, ability, grace, and love.
 - a) Be mindful of the fact that the individual has most likely sought God for help—feeling God has not responded may be exacerbating the emotions.
3. Help them discover and identify alternative options.
 - a) These can include behavioral changes and positive steps forward. Many people need help considering and realizing they have other choices available.
 - b) Ask him what would make life better. Is the current situation due to his own actions (mistakes or bad choices)? Help find ways to work toward a healthier solution.
4. Promote the concept of being an overcomer—staying true to God, family, and friends.
 - a) Committing suicide would have a negative effect on many people who care and want to see the individual succeed.

3

Application and Prayer

Application

A. Review what has been discussed.

1. Reflect upon the feelings revealed.
2. Identify and discover if these feelings or the impasse have manifested anything that has not been previously realized.
3. Help the individual put into order the changes, modifications, and actions needed to begin to remedy the situation. Provide a pen and paper (or suggest using a note-taking app in a smartphone).
4. Suggest the individual create a “friends and family list” as a support group.
 - a) These individuals agree to receive calls or texts from the one experiencing suicidal thoughts to keep him accountable.
 - b) Suggest meeting with individuals from this group at least on a semi-regular basis to maintain accountability.
 - c) This group is not to act as a counselor in any manner; it is merely to offer support and encouragement.
5. Suggest the person begin keeping a journal only to write down good thoughts.
 - a) For instance, note when it has been a good day, and note what made it a good day
 - b) Try to re-create what made that day good in the days to come when possible

- c) Any negative thoughts should be recognized as not valid, temporary, and/or false especially when there is no current proof or history.
- B. Offer scriptural ideas that promote positivity and speak of life.
 - 1. Death and life are in the power of the tongue—speak life! (See Proverbs 18:21.)
 - 2. We have a choice of life or death. We should abide in God and walk in His ways—choose life! (See Deuteronomy 30:19; John 15:4–7.)
 - 3. We all experience distress, even the most severe kind—yet we can persist, and nothing can separate us from God! (See II Corinthians 4:7–10; Romans 8:35–39.)
 - 4. Hannah, rejoicing over having a son, expressed that only God is the giver and taker of life (I Samuel 2:6).
 - 5. Job declared that God gives and takes away, yet that he would continue to bless and serve the Lord (Job 1:21).
 - 6. God appoints the time of death. (See Ecclesiastes 7:17; Hebrews 9:27.)

Prayer

- A. Show congratulations, esteem, and respect, and acknowledge the courage it took for the individual to seek help.
 - 1. While offering other helps, stress the power of the Holy Ghost is available to us through prayer, seeking God's face, and reading and applying His Word.
- B. Be specific in prayer about the troubles, ideas, and principles discussed.
 - 1. "Lord, we thank You for allowing this connection to happen and for all that has been spoken of. We acknowledge that we are frail, fallen, and finite beings and that we need You, and in You we live, and move, and have our being. I pray that You will touch (the individual's) mind, emotions, and spirit and allow us to feel Your presence moving within us. Lord, (individual) is experiencing trials and having thoughts of harm, and we know that is contrary to Your will and Word. I ask for peace, perseverance, and stability, so that he can live the life You have for him and his family. I speak life; we choose life and believe You will give joy, laughter, and satisfaction—and we will give You all the glory.
In Jesus' name, Amen!

4 Recommended Resources

- Clark, C. & Clinton, T. (2010). *The quick reference guide to counseling teenagers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Haig, M. (2015). *Reasons to stay alive*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Hunt, J. (2013). *Suicide prevention: When life seems hopeless*. (E-book). Aspire Press.

- Keefe, R. (2018). *The lifesaving church: Faith communities and suicide prevention*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press.
- Stetzer, E. (2015). The church, mental health, and suicide. *Christian Counseling Today*, . 21(2). Suicide.org. Suicide prevention, awareness, and support.
- Wright, N. H. (2011). *The complete guide to crisis and trauma counseling: What to do and say when it matters most*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.

5 Taking it to the Church

Dealing with a Suicidal Individual

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Those who are having suicidal thoughts, ideation, or tendencies (and especially those who have attempted but failed) are likely at the lowest point of their lives. While there is no way to dispel these feelings immediately or offer quick remedies, we want to be able to offer hope and healing to one who has come to this impasse.

Suicide and suicidal thoughts and attempts affect all socioeconomic classes and all ethnicities, including people in the Apostolic faith. It is often thought that those who speak of suicide will not follow through. Though some may be only seeking attention, any comments about such action should be taken seriously.

While suicide often seems to be an impulsive act, there is a chance it can be prevented if signs or hints are noticed and dealt with. There are many signs of suicide, but perhaps the greatest is simply an individual manifesting out-of-the-ordinary behavior including, but not limited to, a lack of interest in everyday duties, giving away prized possessions, and making comments such as, “I’m better off dead,” “I won’t be here then,” or “No one would notice if I was gone.” It may also be a warning sign if a student allows grades to slip repeatedly without a desire to do better or avoid negative consequences.

Feeling as if death is the only or best option given one’s situation is not uncommon nor should it be considered abnormal. Even some of the great men of the Bible felt death would be better than life; yet they lived on to see great success. Consider Moses, who felt that he would not be able to carry the burden of leading Israel if they were going to continue to complain so much. He sought the Lord to take his life if that was how the Lord was going to allow it to be (Numbers 11:10–15). Job and Jeremiah desired that they had never been born due to the burdens they were bearing (Jeremiah 20:14–18; Job 3:11). Out of fear of being killed by Jezebel, Elijah desired that God would take his life instead (I Kings 19:1–4). Jonah declared that it would be better for him to die

than to live when he was so displeased with God's choice to spare Nineveh (Jonah 4). Imprisoned for preaching, Paul and Silas were freed by a miraculous earthquake. Consequently, the prison guard was about to take his own life out of fear of his superiors, but Paul stopped him crying, "We are all here!" The guard was then converted by hearing and obeying the gospel (Acts 16:25–34). These individuals experienced trials, fear, and more; however, they successfully overcame and experienced the virtue of triumph.

Sadly, some biblical figures determined that ending their own lives was the best solution. Abimelech had a large stone dropped on his head by a woman. Rather than to be known for dying at the hand of a woman, he told his armor-bearer to kill him with a sword (Judges 9:50–55). Saul fell on his own sword after being wounded in battle. His armor-bearer did the same after witnessing Saul's death (I Samuel 31:1–6). When Ahithophel's counsel for defeating David was not followed, he went home and "put his house in order and hanged himself." (II Samuel 17:23). Zimri, an evil king facing defeat, set the palace on fire with himself in it (I Kings 16:18). After betraying Jesus and feeling extreme guilt, Judas hung himself (Matthew 27:3–5). Though Samson did it as an act of revenge against the Philistines, he toppled the supporting pillars of the building where they were gathered, coming to his death as the building fell. This may be seen as "giving his life" since he prayed that God would allow this to happen (Judges 16:23–31).

In most biblical accounts, those who committed suicide did so to escape the consequences of their wrongful actions, to avoid social disgrace, or to escape overwhelming feelings of guilt or shame. These same things may cause people to contemplate or attempt suicide today, but the most common motivations are depression and hopelessness due to life struggles. We should extend compassion and empathy to individuals experiencing these things and take proactive steps to help them.

It is important not make absolute, broad judgments when speaking about individuals who committed suicide. An individual who commits suicide may have been suffering from a mental imbalance or may have had an unexpected reaction to a recent change in medication. After a person has died, that individual is in God's hands, and judgments about the individual's eternal destiny are not helpful. We can comfort friends and family members by reminding them to trust in God's goodness, justice, and love.

We should encourage anyone contemplating suicide to have faith in the Word of God and the power of the Holy Ghost. We know there is hope for anyone in any adversity! We should be faithful in prayer and fasting and remember that words are powerful. Death and life are in the power of the tongue—*speak life!* (Proverbs 18:21). Speak and think positively, declare that you are an overcomer, and quote or read positive Bible verses every day. Stay connected to the church—attend special events and offer your time as a volunteer. We all experience distress, even the most severe kind—yet we can persist, and nothing can separate us from God! (II Corinthians 4:7–10; Romans 8:35–39). Leave life's ups and downs to God—He knows all! Trust in his goodness and mercy believing that though He is not "making you go through this," He still has a plan and will not waste any situation in our lives.

Positive role models in Scripture sometimes sought death (as an act of God) as an escape from extreme trials or suffering, but they did not take it upon themselves to cause it. They

persevered through their emotions and troubles and rose to be successful in the eyes of God and men. We should be committed to guide troubled individuals in our churches to resolve any suicidal tendencies or ideations and experience the joyful life Christ intends.