



# SUICIDE

Detect suicidal signs & provide potential solutions

## How the Church can Detect Suicidal Signs and Provide Potential Solutions

World Suicide Prevention Month is in September, but hurting people from diverse backgrounds confront this epidemic each day. Self-violence is without prejudice and affects people from every race, ethnicity, economic status and gender. Movies stars, actors, singers, blue/white collar workers have all fallen victim. No one is immune, including those sitting in the church pews each week.

Suicide is the [10<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in the U.S.](#) with more than 44,000 dying each year, and the pandemic is growing. In 2015, the suicide rate among girls between the ages of 15 and 19 reached a 40-year high, according to [the National Center for Health Statistics](#).

It is more important than ever to understand and recognize the warning signs of a person who is in potential danger and find ways to minister to them before it is too late. Here are the most common indicators:

### 1. Depression

Depression is often fought in silence and is one of the leading causes of feelings of hopelessness and despair. Uncharacteristic sleep patterns and bouts of moodiness often accompany depression.

Action Step: For too long, many in church have thought or told individuals to “pray it away” when it comes to depression. While every plague of mankind should be immersed in prayer, there are times God chooses to use physicians or medicine.

Encourage individuals exhibiting signs of depression to seek professional medical and spiritual help through a physician, minister or licensed counselor. Have a list of trusted people whom you can recommend and offer to have a minister, lay leader or friend accompany him or her to the first appointment for support. Oftentimes, depression is linked to chemical imbalances that can easily be remedied through medications.

### 2. Aggression

A person who becomes easily provoked and begins to verbally or physically attack others may be exhibiting a cry for help. Often this secretive plea for help leads to others rejecting or isolating them rather than recognizing the deeper issue.

Action Step: When a fight is provoked, avoid debates or attacks regarding behavior or actions. These can be addressed later once the storms have calmed. Facilitate patience and understanding. Scripture teaches us to not let the sun go down on our anger, yet we see in the life of Jesus there is an anger that is



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righteous. Careful consideration must be taken with individuals who are struggling with a madness they don't know how to control and don't understand from where it originates. Create a list of music, Scripture or books that can help to calm and center the individual on God's goodness and mercy.

### 3. Drug/Alcohol/Prescription Medication Abuse

Increased abusing is a strong indicator of a potential tipping point or desire to escape, especially from a person who previously didn't partake in such activities or did so only sparingly.

Action Step: Calmly confront the sudden abuse or use. Most abusers or addicts sincerely believe they can handle their usage or quit whenever they desire. Numerous facilities are often available, many without charge. Many churches have support or recovery groups. Have a list of trusted professionals and support groups so you are ready with a recommendation.

If your church does not have a recovery group, pray about starting one as a place of refuge, hope and a connection to the Gospel. CelebrateRecovery.com is a great place to start.

### 4. Isolation/Withdrawal

People who suddenly disconnect from family and friends are showing a propensity to unplug from the reality of life. Giving away possessions to friends or loved ones is often associated with this characteristic.

Action Step: Connectivity has never been more crucial, as proven by social media. Intentional interactions and carved out time that is NOT focused around the "we need to talk" method are paramount. Never is the Church more like Jesus than when caring believers/life groups strategically work to establish loving relationships with hurting people. Find people in the individual's life stage who can reach out with an invitation to attend a church event or grab a cup of coffee. Look for ways a volunteer or crisis team can lovingly insert themselves into the person's life.

### 5. Threats

Most suicides are preceded by verbal calls for help that are shrugged off as someone looking for attention. Technically, that's exactly what they are. Comments like "I don't want to go on" or "I wish I had never been born" should be taken with great caution.

Action Step: Communication is key and cannot be overemphasized. Take threats seriously and focus less on talking and more on listening. Work to identify the root of these feelings and seek to understand them. There are several Christian organizations such as Christian Suicide Prevention (1-888-667-5947), which



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have hotlines or offer free on-campus counselors as a family resource. This is a great investment for any church or leader seeking to have deep roots in their community.

## 6. Tragedy

The death or loss of an important relationship can be overwhelming, especially for teens who are dependent on social and emotional stability. The suicide of a dear friend or relative can also stimulate feelings of self-harm.

Action Step: Stay on alert and encourage other close, trustworthy friends or family to engage. Dialogue and discussion about the loss can help dilute uncertainty. Oftentimes, the surviving victims are seeking out the Church to hold funeral services. This bereavement period is a great time: not to harpoon the family with a hidden agenda but to lovingly show support and offer assistance. Youth groups can hold discussion groups as a safe haven to share difficult feelings and deal with loss.

## 7. Being bullied

For students, school is a time when they are preoccupied with discovering who they are and if they are accepted. Constant bullying often diminishes feelings of love and hope and can lead to fantasies of escapism.

Action Steps: No student should ever have to endure verbal, cyber or physical abuse. Immediate action must be taken by confronting other parents. Youth ministers must be proactive with students to regularly discuss the taboo issues of today's young person. Bible studies about these topics can and should be taught. Numerous devotions and study books on relevant student issues can be found at your local Christian bookstore or [Lifeway.com](http://Lifeway.com).

For too long the Church has been silent. Better for students to be taught spiritual viewpoints than to hear opinions through hallways or the locker room. When bullied teens are protected and defended, self worth is rekindled.