

# Suicide Awareness and Action Plan

Covenant Presbyterian Church

Mental Health challenges, attempted suicide, and suicide continue to be major challenges for people in America (particularly those between 15-24 and over 60).<sup>1</sup> These challenges can be hidden and are often complicated, so we must enter into all of these situations with wisdom and prayerful dependence upon the Lord. **In order to increase awareness and provide meaningful guidance for God's people into these challenges, this document provides a list of warning signs for suicide and an action plan to prayerfully follow in light of these signs.**

If someone seems particularly down and you suspect they may be at risk for suicide (see warning signs below), **communicate this immediately to a CPC Pastor or Shepherding Elder.**

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*"The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit." Psalm 34:18*

*"Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. [...] Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." Romans 12:12, 15*

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## **Warning signs for suicide:<sup>2</sup>**

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself (seeking access to pills, weapons, or other means)
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide
- Hopelessness
- Rage, anger, seeking revenge
- Acting recklessly or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking
- Withdrawing from friends, family, or society
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Anxiety, agitation, unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Dramatic changes in mood
- No reason for living, no sense of purpose in life

## **Action Plan:**

1. If you think someone may be at risk of suicide or self-harm, **ask them direct questions** without dreading their answers. The goal is to see how down they really are.
  - a. Ask questions like this: "Are you having thoughts of suicide?" or "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"
  - b. Reassure them that you care and want to help. Remind them that there is nothing wrong with feeling down or having these questions. Acknowledge that the pain they are feeling is real.
  - c. Lovingly encourage this person to keep talking, as talking about their feelings and reasons for wanting to die might bring great relief to them and provide hope that the darkness will pass.
2. Next, **determine whether the person has a definite plan for suicide.** The higher level of planning, the higher the risk. That said, any thought of suicide must be taken seriously. Determine if they have a definite plan by asking the following three questions.
  - a. Have you decided *how* you would kill yourself?
  - b. Have you decided *when* you would do it?
  - c. Have you *taken any steps to secure the things* you need to carry out your plan?
  - d. Other risk factors to consider here are:
    - i. Are they under the influence of alcohol or drugs? This can heighten one's susceptibility to act.
    - ii. Have they attempted suicide in the past? If so, this can make future attempts more likely.
3. If any of the answers to these questions are yes, **the risk is high and this person needs professional help. Call 911 or go with them to the Emergency Room**, and follow this protocol.
  - a. Stay with the person – don't leave them alone. Ideally have two people with them.
  - b. Keep them in touch with a safety contact (i.e. suicide prevention line (1-800-273-8255), friend or family member, trusted church member/leader such as a shepherding elder/deacon, and/or a mental health professional).
  - c. Help them think about people or things that have helped in the past. Reassure them that you and others are with them.
  - d. If they have a weapon or is behaving aggressively, seek assistance from law enforcement to protect them, yourself, and others.
4. After a crisis has passed, ensure this person gets needed psychological, medical, and pastoral help.

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<sup>1</sup> Go to this link for FAQs about Suicide in America: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/suicide-faq/index.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> Taken from Mental Health Association of Maryland, Missouri Department of Mental Health and National Council for Behavioral Health (2013) *Mental Health First Aid® USA, Revised First Edition*, 106-108.

**Contact Information:**

Call **911** for any emergency need.

**Swedish Issaquah Emergency Room:**

- Address: 751 NE Blakely Drive, Issaquah, WA 98029
- Phone: 425-394-0610

**National Suicide Prevention Hotline:**

- 1-800-273-8255 (TALK)
- <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

For further pastoral and biblical guidance on these issues, read one of the relevant CCEF booklets at the CPC book table, watch the video linked below, or talk with a church officer.

CCEF Video on helping a friend with suicidal thoughts: <https://www.ccef.org/video/how-do-i-help-friend-who-has-suicidal-thoughts/>