

A Primer on Suicide Prevention – P103 Concordia Seminary (R. Marrs)

Suicide rate is highest among white men, and especially older white men, even those over 85.

It is the 8th leading cause of death in the USA, higher than HIV/AIDS and murder (>30k yearly)

It is the 3rd leading cause of death for young people, 15-24 y.o.

Assessment of suicidal potential:

- Level of depression

- Listen of thoughts of escape, no future, guilt, aloneness

- Sense feelings of hopelessness, desperation, anger, shame, worthlessness

- Assess lethality (violent plans are most lethal)

- Watch for impulsiveness and agitation (increased by alcohol, drugs, schizophrenia or bi-polar)

- Ask about a history of gestures or previous attempts

- Assess psychological history (e.g., any suicides in their family?)

- Integration of their faith (are they aware that God wants them to choose life?)

- 80% of those who suicide have given someone a warning

- Watch for warning signs like:

 - Being suddenly calmer

 - Getting one's affairs in order

 - Giving things away

Ask directly: Are you thinking of or planning to hurt (or kill) yourself?

 - Are you contemplating suicide?

 - Asking such questions does NOT implant the notion in their mind, but makes you a safe person to talk with about their ruminations.

Suicidal thoughts:

- Life just doesn't seem worth it any more

- I've thought about just letting go of the steering wheel when a semi is coming.

- I've thought about not being here anymore. It would be so much easier

- I've thought about falling asleep in the garage with the car running.

- I've thought about putting a gun in my mouth

Listen for the Myths and address them:

- Suicide is a solution

- Suicide will punish others

- People who talk about suicide won't really do it

- Talking with someone about suicide will just give them the idea

- Life will be easier for my loved ones after I'm gone

Websites & Numbers to become familiar with:

- 1.800.273.8255 (National Suicide Prevention hotline)

- Your local/regional suicide prevention hotline number

- www.save.org

- www.stopasuicide.org

- www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

- www.dbsaalliance.org (In Crisis? Tab for depression and bipolar support alliance)

Develop an assertive written plan/policy for your congregation. Protect those entrusted to you.

Info for this handout taken condensed from materials by Dr. Bev Yahnke (DOXOLOGY encore), Kathy Riesemeyer, George Ohlschlager (AACC Conference 2008), and personal experience/training of Dr. Rick Marrs of Concordia Seminary