

Supporting Individuals Facing Suicide

Purpose

This guidance offers suggested support for pastors when an individual expresses suicidal thoughts or risk of self-harm. Crises often involve limited clarity and high urgency. Pastors are called to provide calm presence, ensure safety, and involve appropriate support while affirming each person's inherent dignity. This guidance does not replace emergency or mental health intervention.

Immediate Crisis Response

- Listen calmly; do not panic or judge
- Ask directly about suicidal thoughts, plans, and access to means
- Assess immediacy of risk
- Do not leave the person alone if danger is imminent
- Involve emergency or mental-health professionals when required
- Arrange follow-up within 24–48 hours

Pastoral Posture

- Calm, present, compassionate
- Take pain seriously
- Validate suffering without minimizing or theologizing
- Emphasize God's nearness and care
- Offer presence and hope without promising quick resolution

Concrete Steps

- Ask directly about ideation, intent, plan, and means

- Determine level of risk and immediacy
- Ensure the person is not left alone if risk is present
- Contact emergency services when danger is imminent
- Develop a basic safety plan:
 - Identify trusted supports
 - Reduce access to lethal means where possible
 - Document referrals and follow-up

What to Avoid

- Theological speculation about suffering or God's will; speculating about eternal destination in death by suicide
- Minimizing pain or using platitudes
- Promising confidentiality when safety is at risk
- Acting as the sole support
- Speculation about eternal destiny

When to Involve Others

- Immediate danger: Emergency services (non-negotiable)
- Ongoing risk: Mental-health professionals
- With consent: Trusted family or friends
- After an attempt or death: Crisis and bereavement support

Ongoing Care

- Schedule intentional follow-ups
- Encourage supportive community connection
- Clearly affirm that suicide is not an unpardonable sin
- Care for loved ones after an attempt or death