

## FAQ – Tips for Handling Conversations about Suicide

Suicide is an obviously difficult topic. It has become a more frequently mentioned topic or issue at Need Him Global and therefore is harder to avoid. These conversations also are difficult because some truly require a professional counselor to get involved so we have to determine when we should refer someone to that option.

In order to help prepare you for your next conversation where this topic arises, and when to refer someone to outside help, please read and become familiar with the following tips for how to handle conversations about suicide:

1. Don't let the topic overwhelm you. Take a deep breath – you can do this. Pray for strength and be yourself. The right words are not as important as your attitude. If you are truly concerned then your manner will show it.

*Remember that the person is talking to you as opposed to anyone else that they know, and that this means that they trust you to help them more than any of these other people right now. There is a reason for that trust being placed in you. Even if you don't think that you can help them, or don't know what to say, they have faith in you and you should take confidence from this.*

2. Listen attentively. Learn what this person's problems really are and let the person unload despair and ventilate anger. Let their emotions come out and he or she will feel better as you talk through things. No matter how negative the person seems it is a positive sign that they are talking with you and even crying out for help.

*No one who is suicidal is expecting magic words that will instantly take the pain away. As best you can, ignore the need to "cheer them up" or give quick fixes to make them feel better. Many simply want someone to listen and accept that they are in a lot of emotional pain.*

*A lot of advice giving isn't necessary or even wanted up front. Just let them talk. This is not to say that you can't ask appropriate questions or make comments. But try to only say enough to keep the conversation moving while letting them open up in more depth about their problems.*

3. Find out their first name if you don't know it. Be kind, sympathetic, non-judgmental, patient, calm, and accepting. It is ok to ask a probing question if you need clarity on what is going on. It is good that they have gotten in touch with another person.

*Someone who is suicidal will have very low (or no) feeling of hope for a better future. Their problems will overwhelm them even more than normal and their issues seem insurmountable and like they will never end. Be nice. Don't tell them*

*that their problems aren't enough to feel suicidal over or make belittling comments about their emotions. Accept that even though you may be able to see "clearly" that their problems will go away someday, right now they cannot, and you should try to be sensitive to that.*

*It is ok to gently remind someone that there is still hope for the future to improve -- because it's something that they need to hear. But leave this until later in the conversation, after they have had a chance to vent and release some of their emotion.*

4. Simply talking about their problems for a length of time will often give suicidal people relief from loneliness and pent up feelings, awareness that another person cares, and a feeling of being understood.

*At some point during the conversation, you may notice some changes in their behavior. The biggest give-away is that they start to talk more slowly, and sound less noticeably upset. If they were crying, they may stop. This is not the time for advice or "closing speeches", it's the signal to encourage and pray for them if they will allow that.*

5. Avoid arguments, problem solving, advice giving, quick referrals, belittling and making this person feel that he has to justify his suicidal feelings.

*This is about their perception/reality and not yours. Remember this sentence if you feel judgmental, or can't understand why they are so upset. **"It is not how bad the problem is, or appears to you, but how badly it's hurting the person who has it.***

6. Look for answers to four critical questions as you are listening:

- Are they actually saying they are going to kill themselves?
- Have they said how they will do it?
- Do they have everything they need to do it?
- Have they given a time when they will do it?

*The more details they have around these questions, the more dangerous this becomes. **If they seem to have a plan and the means to follow through then you want to let them know they need professional help and you want them to talk with a trained counselor. In those cases, the National Suicide Prevention Line (800-273-8255) is the place to refer them. This should be done as soon as you come to that conclusion. You want to make this a strong suggestion without cutting them off or talking over them.***

7. If they have mentioned suicide in the topic or early on but never really get into the details, then don't bring it back up. If there is no apparent reason to send them to

another resource, then look to transition. Once have a good understanding of the issues, then summarize those back to him or her. This helps to preclude misunderstandings and demonstrates to them that you are being attentive.

*This does not need to be a detailed summary with all the bad stuff they could do but rather a quick summary of all the issues they are fighting.*

8. Don't become a therapist. However, it is acceptable to say that you believe certain things. Speak biblical truth as your encouragement and keep it simple.
  - God loves them.
  - There is hope in God.
  - God has a plan for them and can help through anything.
9. Before you let the person go, emphasize that there may be other causes for how they are feeling and they may want to consider finding help through professional counseling for those issues.
10. Always ask if they know Jesus Christ and if you could pray for them. We want to be true to our call to share the good news but we also want to apply good judgment where circumstances require us to understand if someone is so hurt that they are not listening. Avoid going into "auto-pilot" and presenting the Gospel when the person is clearly not in a position to hear it.

This list is not the answer to every conversation but the basic principles will help you manage these difficult conversations well. Please remember to flag these conversations for review if the suicide topic comes up and also tag it as such. We love you and are praying for you.