

Suicide Prevention Week

For some people, life's struggles become so overwhelming that they take their own lives. Often, they experienced a profound sense of hopelessness, leaving them believing that their pain would never end.

While it is true that individuals with a history of depression, anxiety and other severe mental health disorders are at a higher risk for suicide than the general population, there are several other factors that place people at risk. These include chronic pain, serious illness, divorce and/or marital separation, severe financial crisis and substance abuse problems.

People of faith are uniquely positioned to help. In addition to providing pastoral care, congregations can be sources of support and education. When a community educates itself on suicide and contributing factors, individuals at risk are more likely to ask for help when support is needed.

**Sept. 8-14 Is
Suicide Prevention
Week**

What faith communities can do to prevent suicide:

- ✦ Educate members on depression, mental health and suicide.
- ✦ Train caregivers to recognize signs that someone is at risk.
- ✦ Establish pastoral care plans to help those in crisis.
- ✦ Obtain additional training in suicide prevention for staff.

Congregations can also learn how to provide short- and long-term support to members who have lost friends or relatives to suicide. Many of these individuals and families struggle with feelings of guilt, grief and despair, making support from a faith community an important part of the healing process.

Prayer: *Dear God, help me be present with individuals who are hurting. Show me how to walk with them the way that You walk with me. Use me to bring Light into places of darkness. Teach me what You want me to learn. Amen.*

Resources: Advocatehealth.com • Suicide Help – helpguide.org/mental/suicide_help.htm • 800.273.TALK (800.273.8255) – suicidepreventionlifeline.org/ • What is Depression? – nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=depression

Depression and Suicide

Depression in America is rampant. In the United States, 1 out of 9 persons experiences depression. The most recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control indicate 36,000 people died from suicide in 2011.

Sometimes described as “anger turned inward,” depression is a serious medical condition with profound impacts that include a significant risk factor for suicide.

While effective treatments, such as therapy and medication, exist, many people are reluctant to get help. This is in part due to common misunderstandings about depression, such as:

- ✦ It is simply sadness that will go away in a few days.
- ✦ It is a character deficit akin to laziness or immaturity.
- ✦ Seeking medical help for it is a sign of personal weakness.
- ✦ People can snap out of it at will.

It's not easy, but those suffering from severe and/or long-term depression often eventually find recovery and hope.

Friends and relatives can make a big difference. It's important to know that education plays a key role for individuals who are experiencing depression and for their loved ones.

If you know someone who struggles with depression, offer your support. Show you care. Often, the first intervention comes from the faith community, so talk confidentially with your faith leader for guidance regarding mental health care, crisis management and additional help.

Traumatic events, such as job loss, can trigger a downward spiral. Check in with folks if you know they've experienced such an event.

A faith community can work together to support individuals and families in crisis, greatly reducing the risk of suicide while strengthening the connectedness in the faith community.

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