



## Suicide Prevention: A Guide for Faith Communities



**Georgia Department of  
Behavioral Health &  
D·B·H·D·D Developmental Disabilities**

Office of Behavioral Health Prevention &  
Federal Grants | Suicide Prevention Program

# Suicide Can be Prevented.

*For those who have no voice,  
we ask you to speak.  
For those who feel unworthy,  
we ask you to pour your love out  
in waterfalls of tenderness.  
For those who live in pain,  
we ask you to bathe them in the  
river of your healing.  
For those who are lonely,  
we ask you to keep them company.  
For those who are depressed,  
we ask you to shower upon them  
the light of hope.*

*- Maya Angelou*

# Get Informed. Take Action.

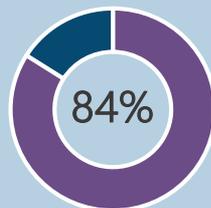
*"Life is a sacred gift, and suicide is a desperate act by one who views life as intolerable. Such self-destruction is never condoned, but faith communities increasingly support, rather than condemn, the person who contemplates or engages in suicidal behavior. They acknowledge that mental and substance use disorders, along with myriad life stressors, contribute significantly to the risk of suicide. And they reach out compassionately to the person who attempts suicide and to families and friends who have been touched by a suicide or suicide attempt."*

*- The Role of Faith Communities in Preventing Suicide*



About a third of faith leaders experience a suicide death in their congregations.<sup>1</sup>

84% of faith leaders had been approached by a suicidal person for help.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Mason, Karen. *Preventing Suicide: A Handbook for Pastors, Chaplains and Pastoral Counselors*. IVP Books, 2014.

# Suicide Can be Prevented.

## WARNING SIGNS

*Anyone can prevent suicide when they take action to help someone at risk*

Warning signs that indicate immediate risk include, but are not limited to:

- Talking about wanting to die or kill oneself
- Researching ways to die or take one's life
- Making efforts to access or stockpile means (a way to take their life)
- Talking about feeling hopeless, having no reason to live, or feeling stuck

Other warning signs that signal increased suicide risk include:

- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden
- Increase in use of alcohol or drugs
- Anxious, agitated, or reckless behaviors
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

*"Suicide prevention is a very mainstream religious activity that builds from what the vast majority of congregations already want to do. They just don't tend to name the significance of what they are doing as suicide prevention."*

*- Reverend Dr. Gary Gunderson, 2004*

*"Spiritual leaders and the faith community, and now the research community, know that practices of faith and spirituality can promote healthy living and provide pathways through human suffering, be it mental, emotional, spiritual, or physical."*

*- Consensus Statement on Suicide and Suicide Prevention from an Interfaith Dialogue*

Some protective factors against suicide that faith communities are uniquely able to address include:

- Connectedness to individuals, family, community, and social institutions
- Self-esteem and a sense of purpose or meaning in life
- Cultural, religious, or personal beliefs that discourage suicide
- Reasons for living (e.g., children in the home)
- A sense of control over one's future
- Positive, optimistic outlook

Get Informed. Take Action.

## TAKE ACTION

*Anyone can prevent suicide when they take action to help someone at risk*

Ask

**Ask, openly and compassionately, "Are you thinking about suicide?"**  
Asking the question opens up the conversation, shows you care, and lets them know you are willing to talk.

Listen

**Listen instead of giving advice or trying to fix things.**  
Giving the person a chance to talk helps relieve stress, shows them someone cares to listen, and helps them feel less alone.

Stay

**If someone is thinking of suicide, stay with them.**  
Help keep them safe until they can get appropriate care. If you cannot stay, help them arrange to have someone else stay.

Help

**Work together to find the right kind of help.**  
If there is immediate danger, call 911.  
In an emotional crisis or for help arranging treatment, call the Georgia Crisis and Access Line any time at 1-800-715-4225.



# Suicide Can be Prevented.

## SELF-CARE

*Taking time to renew the spirit is an important step in providing suicide care*

Caring for others who are experiencing crises can be emotionally and physically draining. Without proper time to relax, reflect, and revitalize the body and soul, faith leaders can experience compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma on top of the normal stresses that come with their positions and everyday life. When these stressors become overwhelming, faith leaders may experience depression, feelings of isolation, and/or anxiety or even have thoughts of suicide.



Some research indicates that finding fulfillment in the areas of life listed can reduce feelings of depression, isolation, and anxiety for faith leaders.<sup>1</sup>

Making time and space to practice self-care and cultivate supports in these areas is an important part of ministry and service. Regular self-care rejuvenates the spirit of a faith leader so they can serve others with an open heart.

- Social support they can turn to in difficult times
- Financial stability
- Close friendships outside those served and their family
- Harmony with those they serve, both in theology and relationship
- Ability to meet others' needs without extensive personal sacrifices
- Feeling appreciated and loved by those they serve
- Observing a weekly day of rest
- Taking regular vacations

<sup>1</sup>Proeschold-Bell, R.J., Eisenberg, A., Adams, C., Smith, B., Legrand, S. and Wilk, A. (2015), The Glory of God is a Human Being Fully Alive: Predictors of Positive Versus Negative Mental Health Among Clergy. JOURNAL FOR THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION, 54: 702-721.

# RESOURCES

*Information and guidance to support  
suicide prevention in faith communities*

National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention | Faith Communities  
<https://theactionalliance.org/communities/faith-communities>

Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) | Faith Communities  
<https://www.sprc.org/settings/faith-communities>

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) | FaithNet  
<https://www.nami.org/namifaithnet>

Georgia DBHDD | Suicide Prevention Program  
<https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/bh-prevention/suicide-prevention>



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