

# Counseling the Suicidal

## Crisis Intervention

Ministering in times of Crisis is that form of helping relationship in which you as a human being enter into the human experience of another, while at the same time representing God and His purposes.

Each situation needs great discernment. The Word tells us to “Warn the idle, encourage the weak, and be patient with everyone.” (I Thessalonians 5:14)

The first instruction of what to do in a crisis is to stay calm. I Thessalonians 5:17 also tells us to “pray without ceasing.” Such prayers, spoken inwardly to God, can bring peace to our own soul and make us available to think clearly and calmly help in the moment of crisis.

## Battering

This includes physical, emotional and spiritual abuse of the person in the class or of other family members. Proceed with caution. Listen carefully. Don't jump to conclusions but at the same time, do not ignore what is being said. It may have taken a great amount of courage for the student to even verbally express an abusive situation.

- A. Become an investigator.
- B. Be sympathetic and cautiously concerned.
- C. Help alleviate fear. Perhaps use some choice scriptures. With wisdom, counter any distortions that may be verbalized.
- D. In time, involve other leaders.
- E. Be careful what you say and do because realistically you could be the object of harm.
- F. Don't be a Lone Ranger. Involve the church leadership and know the church's procedures for such situation.

There are women's shelters in our town. However, be aware that in many situations, the center is going to be run by radical feminists and their philosophy may not have anything good to say about men, and may advise the woman in a different manner than our Christian approach. This does not mean that she should not go to a shelter, if needed, but you need to make her aware of the situation.

Center for Prevention of Domestic Violence Hotline --- (710) 633-3819

If abuse has not occurred yet, help the woman set up a plan for prevention. In some situations the woman needs to call 911. If the spouse is guilty of battering, he will be required to go for counseling.

## Divorce/Child Custody

Be aware of the reality of desertion that the person is facing. Some of the crisis in desertion in a marriage can be unpaid bills, children to support, little or no income and other serious problems. In addition there is likely to be the basic crisis of shock, loss of self-esteem and related damage to both mate and children. Be aware of how overwhelming this reality can be.

Every child deserves a father and mother. Once a divorce is in place the court is in control of the parent's time with the children. Often divorce looks like the only way out without considering the children.

Often temporary separation is not considered as an alternative. At times the couple has been encouraged to divorce by friends and even some clergy. Some base their advice on the New Testament emphasis on God's grace and forgiveness for those who break their marriage vows, rather than working on the basis of a commitment to each other and before God.

Try not to take sides with one person or the other. Encourage bringing God into the process and looking to Him for answers rather than going with the flow.

The ideal in prevention would be to have a few mature Christian couples involved in encouraging and providing accountability, along with a godly example.

Pray aggressively for all crisis situation (Ephesians 6:11&12). Through your prayers with others, teach them how to pray aggressively for themselves and their situations.

## Issues of Suicide

1. Events that are indicative of suicide:
  - a. Symptoms -- long term despair, sad facial expression, unusual, sudden calmness after an emotional crisis.
  - b. Hints -- "I'm not going to be around any longer."
  - c. Threats -- pay attention to someone saying, "You could do better without me.", etc.
  - d. Preparations -- giving possessions or pets away, making a will suddenly.

e. Attempts -- the person needs extensive counseling by a professional.

## 2. The A-B-C Approach

This approach can be used for any crisis, not just suicide.

### **A = Achieve Contact**

If on the telephone, pay attention to what has been said and listen carefully. Find out where they are and the phone number there.

If you are with the person, a touch can be comforting, therapeutic and encouraging especially since it is someone you already know from class. Arrange to be with the person. In the situation of MPD/DID, it is best not to touch unless the person has given you permission. Your calm, relaxed manner can help reduce the anxiety.

### **B = Boil Down the Situation**

Listen patiently and attentively as the person describes the situation and try to assess the precipitating event or events. Identify specific feelings. Let them express their feelings, even doubts and negative feelings about God. Calmly ask questions but do not be overbearing with questions. Try to answer questions honestly but without raising the person's anxiety level unnecessarily.

Focus on the issues. In times of crisis it is easy to be overwhelmed by what appears to be a mass of confusing facts, potential problems and decisions that need to be made. You are in a position to help the person decide what specific issues must be faced first and what immediate problems need to be solved. Try to focus on the present situation.

### **C = Cope Actively**

The person's willingness to help with the situation is one important resource, but there are others. Even if you have plenty of time, you should not try to be the hero who walks alone with the person in crisis. Not being the hero is especially important if you are dealing with MPDs. Do not take control -- especially physically restraining the person, unless he/she is harming him/herself -- this will cause the MPD to panic and the situation will escalate.

Involve family or friends if this is possible. Rely on the Holy Spirit to guide you and share Scripture that is of comfort. In addition, the truth will counteract any lies that the person is being flooded with.

Remind the person of his/her own strengths and past successes in coping which can be both reassuring and helpful. If they begin to see ways they can help, allow them to do so. List alternatives for action.

Clarify reality as you see it. When appropriate, point out ineffective behavior. "Have you thought about ..." quietly give possible suggestions.

Develop a plan of action. You may have to write it down if there is a lot of inner confusion in the person. Ask about the person's expectations.

Generate realistic hope. Come back to great truths of Scripture. Pray with the person and help them pray.

Utilize all resources. Know what resources are available to help this person and how to locate them. Contact should be made with other appropriate leaders of the church. Be sure the person knows that you will be contacting these teachers and leaders.

In a calm way assure the person that the option of suicide does not get the benefits they want. Alleviate physical isolation by helping the person reestablish social ties. Remove all lethal objects such as medications or weapons. Before leaving or concluding phone contact, ask for a commitment to not take their life, or you will call 911. When they answer that they will not, then say, "I believe you."

### Follow up:

- Call and revisit.
- There may be confrontational issues where you may need to go with them.
- Role play with the person regarding circumstances they may need to work through.
- Help them learn how to pray through the situation.
- Daily pray aggressively for the person.

## Suicide and those with DID

One of the main things to remember when helping those with DID resist suicide is to always let them know that they will be in control of the situation; i.e., that you will never force them to go anywhere or do anything that they themselves do not choose to do.

From their past experiences, they were most likely never in control, either physically held down, spiritually overwhelmed, or emotionally manipulated. Therefore it is important to stress that they are in charge of their life.

As mentioned before, never corner, physically restrain or grasp the person. Also, don't make quick, unexpected movements. Always inform or ask permission to touch them.

Be honest with your feelings. Say things like, "I would be so sad if you died. You are so special to me." "You're such a fighter and have gone through so much. It would be so sad if you were to give up right before the good part begins."

Help them realize that the people who abused them in the past would be gleeful if they died. "Don't let them win," may be a helpful reminder.

Ask them if they have told their counselor. Make every effort to convince them to call him/her. But do not call the counselor without the person's permission. This is a controversial issue, I realize, but from personal experience, I do not believe that responsibility for this should be taken by the helper. The issue of trust is also at play here. Let them know clearly that without their permission you will not tell someone else about their situation. If they will not allow you initially to contact their counselor, keep trying to convince them.

Always pray with them if they are agreeable. Realize that there may be spiritual issues, lies from demonic forces at work in them. Ask the Lord to give you wisdom as to how to specifically pray for the person in this regard.

A note of encouragement; I believe that those with DID are one of the least likely populations to actually commit suicide. This is because their emotional overload is not usually due to any chemical imbalance in the brain (such as Bipolar illness) but to emotional/spiritual damage from past experiences.

Remember at all times that within yourself, you do not have the resources to prevent a suicide. But you do have a lifeline to the One who can!