

Notice

Date: August 9, 2018

To: General Authorities; General Auxiliary Presidencies;
Area Seventies; Stake, Mission, and District
Presidents; Bishops and Branch Presidents;
Stake and Ward Councils

From: Priesthood and Family Department (801-240-2134)

Subject: Preventing Suicide and Responding after a Loss

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Members of the Church everywhere are invited to take an active role within their communities to minister to those who have thoughts of suicide or who are grieving a loss. Please review the enclosed resource, *Preventing Suicide and Responding after a Loss*, with your stake or ward council. Discuss with them ways to share this information with other ward members.

Additional resources, including new videos and articles, are available at suicide.lds.org. The *Ensign*, *Liahona*, and *New Era* magazines also have published articles about suicide each September over the past few years.

This notice, with enclosure, is being translated and will be distributed to units identified as Albanian, Armenian, Bislama, Bulgarian, Cambodian, Chinese, Chinese (Simplified), Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, Fijian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Icelandic, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Kiribati, Korean, Lao, Latvian, Lithuanian, Malagasy, Maltese, Marshallese, Mongolian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Samoan, Serbian, Sinhala, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Tahitian, Thai, Tongan, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese. If leaders need this notice in languages not listed above, they may contact the Area Presidency. Area leaders can forward requests to the Priesthood and Family Department at ext. 2-2933.

15756

Preventing Suicide and Responding after a Loss

August 9, 2018

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

The rising suicide rate in many areas of the world is an issue of great concern. The purpose of this document is to assist parents, families, Church leaders, and Church members as they seek to minister to those affected by suicide.

Members may use this resource to learn about Church doctrine on suicide, the warning signs of suicide, how to help someone in crisis, and how to respond after a suicide loss. Leaders may use this resource to lead meaningful discussions with members in stake and ward councils and in other settings. The purpose of these discussions would be to help leaders and members minister more effectively to those who have been affected by suicide.

If holding a discussion about suicide would help in preventing suicide and ministering to those who are affected by this topic, such a discussion should be led by two adults. Leaders may want to invite a professional from the community who understands and respects Church doctrine on suicide to participate in the discussion. Discussions with children under 12 should occur only after parents have counselled with their children.

After stake and ward councils have reviewed this document, they should discuss appropriate ways to support community efforts and to inform members about available resources.

Doctrine and Principles

The Lord invited us to treat all people with understanding and compassion when He taught, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” ([Matthew 22:39](#)). Our efforts to minister to those who are affected by suicide will be more effective when we more fully understand doctrine and teachings, such as the following:

- Through His Atonement, Jesus Christ experienced the fulness of mortal challenges so He could know “how to succor his people according to their infirmities” ([Alma 7:11–13](#)). James E. Faust taught: “Since the Savior has suffered anything and everything that we could ever feel or experience, He can help the weak to become stronger” (“[The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope](#),” *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 22).
- Mortal life is a precious gift from God—a gift that should be valued and protected (see [Doctrine and Covenants 18:10](#); M. Russell Ballard, “[Suicide: Some Things We Know, and Some We Do Not](#),” *Ensign*, Oct. 1987, 6–9).
- When someone takes their own life, only God is able to judge their thoughts, their actions, and their level of accountability. Suicide need not be the defining characteristic of an

individual's eternal life (see [1 Samuel 16:7](#); [Doctrine and Covenants 137:9](#); Dale G. Renlund, "[Grieving after a Suicide Loss](#)," video at [suicide.lds.org](#)).

Additional resource:

- Gospel Topics at [topics.lds.org](#) and in the Gospel Library app

Warning Signs of Suicide

Most people who attempt suicide do not want to die; they simply want relief from the physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual pain they are going through. Many people in crisis show warning signs before they attempt suicide. If you learn to recognize the warning signs, you will be better prepared to minister to those who need help. Listen for statements such as "I don't care if I die" or "Everyone would be better off without me." Warning signs include the following behaviors:

- Looking for a way to kill themselves
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing their use of alcohol or drugs
- Giving away personal items for no reason
- Acting anxious or agitated or behaving recklessly
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings (see [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#))

One warning sign by itself may not mean there is a crisis. But if the individual has a history of attempts or if you notice a sudden change in the individual or start seeing multiple signs, act immediately. Free crisis helplines and additional information are available at [suicide.lds.org](#). (See "How to Help Someone in Crisis" in this guide for more details.)

Despite our best efforts, not all suicides can be prevented. Some suicides happen without any obvious warning. You are not responsible for someone else's choice to end their life.

Additional resources:

- "[I'm Worried about Someone](#)" at [suicide.lds.org](#)
- [Proverbs 17:17](#)
- "[Preventing Suicide](#)," Carol F. McConkie, video at [suicide.lds.org](#)

- “[Understanding Suicide: Warning Signs and Prevention](#),” Kenichi Shimokawa, *Ensign*, Oct. 2016, 35–39
- “[How do I know when to take a suicide threat seriously?](#)” at suicide.lds.org

How to Help Someone in Crisis

Always take seriously the warning signs of suicide and any threats to attempt suicide, even if you think the individual is not seriously thinking about suicide or is just seeking attention. Follow these three steps to offer support—Ask, Care, Tell.

Step 1: Ask. Ask the person directly if he or she is thinking about suicide. You might ask, “are you thinking about ending your life?” If they say that they are thinking about suicide, ask them if they have a plan. You might ask, “do you have a plan to hurt yourself?” If they have a plan, immediately help them get to a hospital or healthcare clinic, or call an emergency service provider or crisis helpline in your area. (Visit suicide.lds.org/crisis for helplines around the world.) If they do not have a plan, move to step 2.

Step 2: Care. Show that you care by listening to what they say. Give them time to explain how they are feeling. Respect their feelings by saying something such as, “I’m sorry you are in so much pain” or “I didn’t realize how hard things were for you.” You might offer to help them create a suicide-prevention safety plan (see “[How to Create a Suicide-Prevention Safety Plan](#),” Doug Thomas, *Ensign*, Sept. 2016, 63). A safety plan can help people identify their personal strengths, positive relationships, and healthy coping skills. It can also reduce their access to means of self-harm, such as weapons or pills. If they ask you not to tell anyone about their feelings, explain that you will respect their privacy as much as possible but they need more help than you can give. *Never promise to keep their thoughts of suicide secret.*

Step 3: Tell. Encourage the person to tell someone who can offer more support. Share contact information for helpful resources in your area. Resources may include community hospitals, urgent care clinics, or free crisis helplines. *If they will not seek help, you need to tell someone for them.* You may want to say something such as, “I care about you and want you to be safe. I am going to tell someone who can offer you the help you need.” Respect their privacy by telling only someone you think can help, such as a close family member, the person’s bishop, a school counselor, a doctor, or another health care professional. *If you are not sure who to tell, talk to your bishop or call a free crisis helpline in your area. Remember, you are not expected to support the person on your own.*

Note: If you are leading a discussion, consider asking participants to practice these steps. Give them a situation where someone comes to them and expresses suicidal thoughts and ask them to practice how they would respond.

Additional resources:

- [Mosiah 4:27; Moroni 7:45–47; Doctrine and Covenants 81:5](#)
- [Welfare Helpline](#) (for stake presidents, bishops, and branch presidents)
- [“Taking Time to Talk and Listen,”](#) Rosemary M. Wixom, *Ensign*, Apr. 2012, 10–13
- [“Preventing Suicide,”](#) Carol F. McConkie, video at suicide.lds.org
- [“I’m Worried about Someone,”](#) suicide.lds.org
- [“Suicide,”](#) Counseling Resources, LDS.org (for stake and ward council members)

How to Respond after a Suicide

Despite our best efforts, not all suicides can be prevented. It is normal for those left behind after a suicide to have feelings of denial, shock, guilt, anger, and confusion. President M. Russell Ballard said, “The act of taking one’s life is truly a tragedy because this single act leaves so many victims: first the one who dies, then the dozens of others—family and friends—who are left behind, some to face years of deep pain and confusion” (“[Suicide: Some Things We Know, and Some We Do Not](#),” *Ensign*, Oct. 1987, 7). For these individuals, healing comes through the Savior, who “descended below all things” so that He might know “according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” ([Doctrine and Covenants 88:6; Alma 7:12](#)). Professional resources and counseling may also be helpful.

Stake and ward councils may want to discuss how they can support an individual or family after a suicide. Questions to discuss may include the following:

- How can the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ bring healing to the individual or family?
- What needs have ministering brothers and sisters observed in the person or family? What service have they given?
- What ongoing emotional or spiritual support will the person or family need? Who can offer this support?
- Does the person or family have temporal needs, such as transportation or meals?
- How can ward auxiliary leaders support children and youth who have lost a loved one?

The grieving process after a suicide can last a long time. If someone continues to feel intense pain or grief, counsel with others who care about the person. Prayerfully consider how you can best offer support. You might want to help the person obtain a priesthood blessing or connect with resources in your area. Grief support groups, doctors, or other health care professionals may be helpful.

Note: If you are leading a discussion, do not talk about *how* a person took their life. This may unintentionally encourage someone in the group to copy the behavior described. If someone begins to share these details in a group setting, redirect the conversation in a kind way.

Additional resources:

- [“Grieving after a Suicide,”](#) Dale G. Renlund, video at suicide.lds.org
- [“To Parents Who Have Lost a Child by Suicide,”](#) Dale G. Renlund, video at suicide.lds.org
- [“Comfort after a Suicide,”](#) Carol F. McConkie, video at suicide.lds.org
- [“I Have Lost Someone by Suicide,”](#) suicide.lds.org
- [“How Survivors Heal,”](#) LDS Family Services, *Ensign*, Sept. 2017, 69

Other Resources

Counsel from Church Leaders

- [“Understanding Suicide,”](#) Dale G. Renlund, video at suicide.lds.org
- [“The Merciful Obtain Mercy,”](#) Dieter F. Uchtdorf, *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2012, 70–76
- [“Songs Sung and Unsung,”](#) Jeffrey R. Holland, *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 49–51
- [“To Heal the Shattering Consequences of Abuse,”](#) Richard G. Scott, *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2008, 40–43
- [“First Observe, Then Serve,”](#) Linda K. Burton, *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 78–80

Personal Experiences from Members

- [“Rodolfo’s Story: Father, Leader, and Suicide Loss Survivor,”](#) video at suicide.lds.org
- [“Princess’s Story: After a Suicide Attempt,”](#) video at suicide.lds.org
- [“Melinda’s Story: Finding Joy after My Husband’s Suicide,”](#) LDS.org
- [“Sitting on the Bench: Thoughts on Suicide Prevention,”](#) LDS.org

Other Church Resources

- [“Ambassadors of Hope: Working Together to Prevent Suicide,”](#) Maryssa Dennis, *Ensign*, Sept. 2018
- [“Are You a Safety-Pin Friend?”](#) Marissa Widdison, *New Era*, Sept. 2018
- MentalHealth.lds.org
- [“LDS Family Services Offices”](#) at LDS.org (for counseling or consultations)
- [“Lead Inspired Discussions,”](#) *Teaching in the Savior’s Way* (2015), 33–34

See suicide.lds.org for additional resources