A CALL TO ACTION

THE CHURCH’S ROLE IN SUICIDE PREVENTION, INTERVENTION, AND POSTVENTION

REV. DR. RACHAEL KEEFE
THANK YOU!
WHY I’M HERE
The Lifesaving Church
Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention

Author Contact:
Rev. Dr. Rachael Keefe
Rachael@beachtheology.com

Publisher Contact:
ChalicePress.com

Media Contact:
Erika Sanborne Media
Erika@consideringit.com
QUESTIONS YOU BRING...
SUICIDE PREVENTION

• What suicide prevention actually looks like
• Why Church matters in this
• Suggested practices
SUICIDE PREVENTION... COMMON MYTHS

1. Those who talk about it...
2. Talking about it...
3. It’s a sin
SUICIDE PREVENTION... THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS CONVERSATION

- Suicide rates
- Life expectancy
- Church silence
SUICIDE PREVENTION... FACTS - NATIONAL

- 10th Leading Cause of Death
- 2nd Leading Cause of Death for ages 10-34
- 4th Leading Cause of Death for ages 35-54
- Middle aged white men have the highest rates
- 129 Suicide deaths per day
- 90% have diagnosable Mental Illness at the time of death
SUICIDE PREVENTION... FACTS – NEW HAMPSHIRE

• 8\textsuperscript{th} Leading Cause of Death
• 2\textsuperscript{nd} Leading Cause of Death for ages 10-44
• 4\textsuperscript{th} Leading Cause of Death for ages 45-54
• 6\textsuperscript{th} Leading Cause of Death for ages 55-64
SUICIDE PREVENTION... TABOO & CHURCH

- The Bible
- Puritanical Preset
- Theology over psychology
What the Bible says...
Two “unforgivable sins”
- “Blasphemy against the Spirit” in Matthew 12:31 and Mark 3:29
- Willfully sinning after conversion (impenitence) in Hebrews 6:4-8 and 10:26-29
SUICIDE PREVENTION... THE BIBLE

- Tread carefully
- Protective Factor
- Spread Contagion
SUICIDE PREVENTION... RISK FACTORS

• Prior episodes of suicidal behavior
• Substance abuse
• Mood disorders

• Access to lethal means
• Trauma
• Grief/Loss
SUICIDE PREVENTION... PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Effective mental health care
- Connectedness to individuals, family, community, and social institutions
- Problem-solving skills

- Contacts with caregivers
SUICIDE PREVENTION... WHO IS AT RISK

- American Indians and Alaska Natives
- People bereaved by suicide
- People in justice and child welfare settings
- People who intentionally hurt themselves (non-suicidal self-injury)
- People who have previously engaged in suicidal behavior
SUICIDE PREVENTION... WHO IS AT RISK

- People with chronic medical conditions
- People with mental and/or substance use disorders
- People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender
- Members of the military and veterans
- Men in midlife and older men
SUICIDE PREVENTION...WHAT CHURCH CAN DO

• The Research
• Church involvement is a protective factor
  • Know the warning signs
    • TALK
    • BEHAVIOR
    • MOOD
Ask these questions:

• What message does your congregation embody?
  • Is it true welcome or some thing else?
  • How can you improve?
SMALL GROUPS

Stretch
SUICIDE INTERVENTION

• When is it necessary?
• How to intervene with compassion and integrity
• Do’s and Don’ts
SUICIDE INTERVENTION

• SERIOUS

• Three questions:
  1. thoughts?
  2. plan?
  3. means?

• Now what?
SUICIDE INTERVENTION

- Limits
- Boundaries
- Resources
SUICIDE INTERVENTION

Remember those Puritans?
SUICIDE INTERVENTION

The “Puritanical Preset” evidenced in commonly held beliefs

Suicide is a sin.
Anyone who dies by suicide is damned.
God’s grace does not extend to those who die by suicide.
GOD IS NOT A FAN OF SUICIDE
Jesus was always on the side of love and abundant life

Jesus “re-membered” people

God does not need our help saving souls

God needs our help saving lives
The big question
Is suicide a sin?

Yes, but not the way you think.

Suicide is the sin of community, not the individual.
• Ethics
• Safe-messaging
• Hope
Theology, ethics, and responsibility

- Protective Factor
- Contagion
- Ethical Dilemma
Safe Messaging

• Language
• NO means
• Protective/Risk Factors
• No promises

https://theconnectprogram.org/
Safe Messaging examples

• For those who thinking about suicide
  • God is not a fan.
  • Maybe God is merciful and maybe not.
  • Can we find another way for you to deal with your pain that would be more clearly pleasing to God?
POSTVENTION... MEMORIAL SERVICE

• Whole person
• Name suicide. No details.
• God values all life
• Where there is breath there is hope.
• Print resources
POSTVENTION

• Pay attention to what you say and do.
• Resolve ethical dilemma.
• Suicide can be prevented. Safe messaging goes a long way.
SUMMARY

- Unexamined beliefs around suicide may contribute to more suicides.
- People of faith have a responsibility to save lives first and foremost.
- God is not a fan of suicide.
- Suicide is the sin of community and not the individual.
- The more faith communities engaging in the conversation around suicide, the more lives saved.
CLOSING DEVOTIONS
Resources used in this presentation:
• American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, afsp.org
• Suicide Prevention Resource Center, sprc.org
• Center for Disease Control, cdc.gov