



Suicide Prevention & Response

A RESOURCE FOR CHURCHES

This resource was developed by
the Mental Health & Pastoral Care Institute at Mary Andrews College



Suicide Prevention & Response



10 September is **World Suicide Prevention Day**, an awareness day observed each year to encourage commitment and action to prevent suicides. This resource provides information and ideas for how your church might mark this day and how churches can contribute to suicide prevention.

SUICIDE FACTS AND STATISTICS

Approximately 200 people in Australia attempt suicide every day and, on average, 8 of these die from suicide. Suicide is the leading cause of death for people in Australia aged between 15 and 44.

For detailed statistical information see the [Mindframe summary](https://mindframemedia.imgix.net/assets/src/uploads/ABS-summaries/National_slides_2018.pdf) of the 2018 Australian Bureau of Statistics Causes of Death data:
https://mindframemedia.imgix.net/assets/src/uploads/ABS-summaries/National_slides_2018.pdf

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE AROUND SUICIDE

It is generally recommended to use terms like 'suicide', 'died by suicide' or 'took his/her own life'. This language is considered more appropriate and less stigmatising than terms like 'committed suicide', 'successful suicide' or 'failed attempt at suicide'. Those experiencing suicidal thoughts and actions need a compassionate response and not condemnation.

Please consider carefully your needs when reading information about suicide. If anything in this resource raises issues or concerns for you, please seek assistance. If you need immediate assistance, please contact a crisis service:

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467

Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636

Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800

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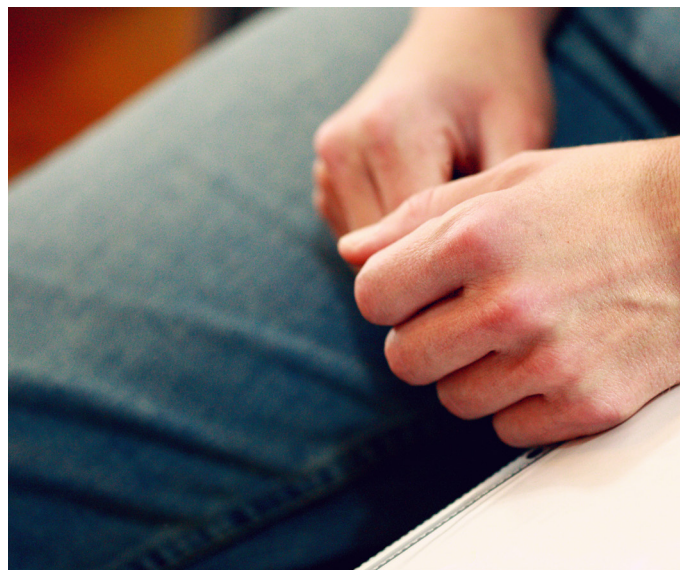
MARKING WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY

The stigma and silence around suicide prevents some who are experiencing suicidal thoughts or those who have been impacted by suicide or a suicide attempt from talking about their experience. The simple act of praying about suicide, even once a year, helps to break down stigma and encourages those struggling to reach out for assistance.

Suggestions for a church announcement or for introducing a prayer

Be careful with the language you use, especially if children are present in the service. Avoid any content that might trigger distress.

- If the service is close to World Suicide Prevention Day (10 September), mention that the church wants to acknowledge this day.
- Acknowledge that in our fallen and broken world we all experience difficulties and distress, but for some these experiences are overwhelming and that they struggle to cling to hope and life.
- Remind people that being Christian does not protect us from these challenges. Acknowledge that there are likely to be people present who are experiencing these feelings now, or have in the past, or who have loved ones who are or have experienced these feelings.
- Remind people that God has a heart of compassion and love and cares deeply for those experiencing distress.
- Encourage people to reach out for assistance if needed. (After the service, it may be helpful to have some mature Christians available to speak with and pray for any who require support.)



PRAYERS

Here are some example prayers you could use during the service.

A call and response prayer:

We pray to you, Father,

For all those in despair
That they would choose life.

For those facing devastating loss
*That they would remember your presence
and intercession for them.*

For all those who feel they are a burden
*That they would love themselves as
you love them.*

For all those without hope
*That they would find in you, Father,
a reason to live.*

For those who feel alone
*That they would find in our gathered
community a reason to live.*

For those facing evil in this world
*That they would remember your redemption
of the evil done to Joseph.*

For all those suffering the misery of depression
and other psychological pain
*That they would reach out for help
like blind Bartimaeus.*

For all those in despondent desolation
That we would reach out to them.

Almighty God, you alone give life and
take it, but life is not easy.
*With the psalmist we proclaim that
without you we would be swallowed alive,
torn up and engulfed by the flood and
swept away by the torrents of this life.*

Preserve us, Father. We put our hope in
you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

(Adapted from Scott M. Gibson & Karen Mason, *Preaching Hope
in Darkness: Help for Pastors in Addressing Suicide from the Pulpit*)

PRAYERS

Lord God,

You are merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love.

You are the Father of compassion and God of all comfort,

We pray this day for all who are distressed, who feel alone, who lack hope, who despair of life, who feel like giving up.

Help them to call to mind the reasons to live.

Give them your strength so that they might press on and hold on to life.

Remind them of your love for them in our Lord Jesus Christ, a man of sorrows who was familiar with suffering and who is able to sympathise with us in our weakness and troubles.

Remind them that you will never leave us or forsake us.

Help them to cast their cares upon you, knowing how deeply you care for them.

Grant grace and mercy to help them in their time of need.

We pray also for those who care for and support people who struggle with suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

Please give them grace, wisdom, and strength.

Enable them to persevere in their love and care.

Finally, gracious Father, we ask for your comfort for those who have lost loved ones to suicide.

Be their rock and refuge, an ever-present help in their grief.

Thank you that in the midst of all the sadness, disappointment and heartache of this life that we have a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, in whose name we pray, Amen.

PRAYERS

Blessed Lord, who yourself has borne our griefs and
carried our sorrows:

Hear our prayer for all that are in trouble and distress.

Draw them, we pray, to yourself, that they may find
the comfort and strength which you alone can give.

And grant to all of us the loving heart and ready
hand to help,

That in serving the needs of others we may show forth
our love and gratitude to you, our Lord and Saviour
Jesus Christ.

Amen

(Adapted from *Parish Prayers*, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 301f.)



WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE CONCERNED THAT SOMEONE MIGHT BE SUICIDAL

Everyone can play a part in preventing suicide. Here are three steps you can take:

STEP 1

Have a conversation

You don't have to be medically or psychologically trained to check-in with someone you're concerned about. Normally we prefer not to talk about difficult things, but reaching out shows you care and could save their life.

Ask a question like, 'How are you?', 'Are you OK?', or perhaps let them know that you've noticed that, 'You don't seem to have been yourself recently'.

No matter how they respond, it's important to listen carefully with empathy and without judgment. Ask open ended questions to encourage conversation, but with sensitivity and gentleness. Go at their pace.

When someone shares their feelings it can change those feelings and lower a person's level of distress.

greater the risk to your safety. Similarly, there are different levels of risk for suicide.

The 'ladder' of suicide risk is shown below. In assessing risk, you start at the bottom of the ladder.

It is important to ask the direct question, 'I'm wondering if you're having thoughts of suicide?' Many fear that this might put the idea in the person's head, but in fact it's a key question that could save their life.

If the answer is 'Yes,' you stay calm, ask them to say more about these feelings and how long they have been having them. Thank them for their courage in telling you. Reassure them that you don't have to rush off and that you will listen and support them.

In assessing risk, you can ask the other questions listed on the 'ladder'. If they answer 'No' to any of these questions, there is no need to proceed to the others.

It's important to find out if they have a plan, as that means they are at greater risk and need professional help.

STEP 2

Ask direct questions to assess risk

There are levels of risk around suicidal thinking and behaviour. It is important to assess the level of risk to determine what action should be taken immediately. The higher you climb a ladder, the



IMMINENCE	'Are you intending to take your life now?'
MEANS	'Do you have the means to carry out that plan?'
PLAN	'Do you have a plan for how you would take your life?'
INTENTION	'Do you intend to act upon these thoughts?'
THOUGHTS	'Do you have thoughts about taking your life?'

STEP 3

Seek further help and help them make a safety plan

If someone has the means to take their life and intends to do so, do not leave them alone. Call 000 or take them to the Emergency department of the nearest hospital.

If the person has a suicide plan, it is very important that they receive professional assistance. Ask them if you can call a helpline together or offer to take them to a GP.

Anyone experiencing suicidal thoughts should be encouraged to seek further help. Seeing a GP is a good starting point. The GP can make an assessment and provide a referral if appropriate.

Even if the person experiencing suicidal thoughts is not at immediate risk, making a safety plan can help them get through the tough moments. You can help them do this.

A safety plan puts together the person's various coping tools under these headings:

- Recognising your warning signs
- Making your surroundings safe
- Reminders of reasons to live
- Things that can make you feel strong
- People and places to connect with
- Family and friends you can talk to
- Professional support you can contact

You can fill out a plan on the Beyond Blue 'Beyond Now' app or online <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/beyondnow-suicide-safety-planning> or you can write down the plan on a piece of paper.

The Virtual Hope Box app fulfils a similar purpose. It has various reminders and tools to assist when someone is experiencing distressing thoughts and feelings.



FURTHER INFORMATION

Websites:

Life in Mind – a national gateway connecting Australian suicide prevention services to each other and the community: <https://lifeinmind.org.au>

Beyond Blue – <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/suicide-prevention>

Video resources:

Interview with psychologist, Karen Mason, on The Pastor's Heart about Suicide and church: prevention and response:
<http://www.mentalhealthinstitute.org.au/resources/suicide-prevention>

Chris speaks of losing her daughter to suicide in the 10/10 series (Trigger warning: this video contains challenging content)
<http://www.mentalhealthinstitute.org.au/resources/1010-videos>

Written resources:

'What one church member can do to prevent someone taking their life' <http://www.mentalhealthinstitute.org.au/resources/suicide-prevention>

Christian books:

Karen Mason, *Preventing Suicide: A Handbook for Pastors, Chaplains and Pastoral Counsellors*

Scott M. Gibson & Karen Mason, *Preaching Hope in Darkness: Help for Pastors in Addressing Suicide from the Pulpit*

Albert Y. Hsu, *Grieving a Suicide: A Loved One's Search for Comfort, Answers & Hope*, 2nd ed.