

## The Not Fun Discussion We Need to Have to Save Lives

### **Trigger Warning: discussion of suicide and self-harm**

I need to talk about something that is not fun, but is very important. We're facing an epidemic in this country right now: suicide.

Child and teen suicide is at record highs, and the adult life expectancy in the United States has dropped because of the frequency of suicide. It is the 10th leading cause of death, and the 2nd leading cause of death in ages 10-34. An average of 20 veterans kill themselves every day (source: NAMI). If these deaths were caused by an infectious disease, we'd have teams of scientists working around the clock on treatments. However, since 90% of suicides are a symptom of mental illness, it's time we start treating this as less of a character flaw and more of an illness.

Suicide sucks. Plain and simple. It deeply impacts families, friends, and communities. But we need to talk about it like we talk about cancer. Cancer also sucks and kills millions, but we have fundraisers, walk-a-thons, and frequent screenings. We need to start having similar conversations and preventative care to stop the symptom of mental illness that is suicide, especially in young people.

So how can we help? We can help by being educated, informed, good friends who are empathetic listeners. When someone shares with you something about their mental illness, it isn't because they're looking for a solution. You don't need to try to fix anything, you just need to be there to listen without judgement and encourage them to talk and get the help they need.

Strategies for being a good listener include: asking open-ended questions like "can you tell me more?", practicing active listening, being present in the moment and not distracted by other things, and then being sure to follow up with the person later. You can also always ask if there's anything you can do to help, like bringing dinner or taking them out for a hike.

What should you do if someone is acting a little off? Asking twice is also a good way of checking in with someone. Ask how someone is, and then ask again, since we're conditioned in our society to always politely reply "I'm fine" first. That's why it's important to ask twice.

And how do you know someone might be suicidal? Well, arguably, it's best to be incredibly direct and ask "are you thinking of killing yourself?" If the answer to that is yes, action needs to be taken. If you believe someone might be planning on killing themselves, please ask if they have access to any weapons and seek immediate medical attention. Make sure they have the resources they need, and always call 911 if in doubt.

There are many resources available for people who are suicidal. Here are several crisis hotlines, and I encourage everyone to save these numbers in their phones:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255)

Crisis Text Line (Text 741741)

*Text "Steve" to 741741 if you're a Person of Color looking for multicultural support*

Colorado Crisis Services (1-844-493-8255) or text "TALK" to 38255

Suicide sucks, but it's not inevitable. In fact, it's preventable. By being there to support people suffering from mental illness, we can provide routes out of the darkness of suicide and prevent people from dying. It is our duty as Christians to alleviate as much of the pain that causes suicide as we can through kindness and treating mental illness like any other illness.