



# Suicide prevention

Suicide remains the  
**most common**  
**cause of death**  
in men

under the  
age of  
**35**

Five Years On, Department Of Health, 2005

## When life seems too much

No-one contemplates suicide lightly. It's a response to a situation they are facing in their lives that feels hopeless: impossible to change or escape from. Feeling that they have considered all their options, they have come to the conclusion that the ending of their life is the best choice open to them. This may seem unlikely if the person is a Christian and a member of a church, but the impact of the stuff of life can affect a Christian as much anyone else, even if we don't always want to admit this publicly.

## Who considers suicide – and why?

Anyone at all may reach a point where they consider suicide: people of any age, background, class, ethnicity and faith.

Each of us reacts differently when we're faced with life events. We may be resilient to a range of things that happen to us, but vulnerable to other ones. Don't assume someone's vulnerabilities will be the same as yours – one person can be affected badly by what others see as a relatively minor issue. It's essential to listen to how they see their situation, what it means to them and why it has that meaning.

If something happens – challenging our ability to cope with life, face others, or have hope for the future – and our apparent choices seem to reduce, then at some point death may appear to be an option. This is particularly the case when life seems to be collapsing: a pressure can begin to build to do something, take control, take action.

People facing long-term ill health or pain, terminal illness, the loss of someone or something important to them (role, purpose, security), or the revelation of a guilty secret, will be potentially more at risk of suicide.

Anyone suffering or recovering from a mental illness will have an increased risk of suicide. This includes those who have recently been discharged from inpatient treatment.

## If someone talks about suicide – take it seriously

It's important to note that if someone starts to speak about ending their life, even if they use euphemisms, then it means they are seeing death as an option. There's a risk that this thinking will proceed to action, especially if the circumstance or crisis worsens.



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People may not say outright that they want to kill themselves, but use such phrases as: 'I wish I hadn't been born'; 'I wish I could escape from life'; 'I wish I could just sleep' (forever and not wake up); 'I want to join my loved one' (who has already died); 'I just don't want to be here any longer'.

Don't be afraid to ask someone if they have thoughts about life being too much, or ending their life, as this can give them an opportunity to talk freely with you about how they are feeling.

## It's not just a cry for help

Many say that when a person talks about suicide, or even takes an overdose, it's just a 'cry for help' – as if they are merely attention-seeking. This is not the case. It should always be taken seriously. Assume they are seeking genuine help: either to try to fight off their suicidal ideas, or in a state of panic after taking an overdose.

The key factor in helping to prevent death by suicide is to provide people with the opportunity of someone to talk with when life begins to feel too much. This listener needs to be non-judgemental, unshockable and non-condemning, providing a safe place for the person to talk, reflect and find some support: a breathing space to relieve the build-up of pressure and to find hope for the future.

It's good for this support to be available in a church setting; however, some are too embarrassed to speak to people they know. This is why Chad Varah founded Samaritans, back in 1953, as the first crisis helpline. It's also why Premier Lifeline was founded as a Christian confidential helpline, to allow people to talk about emotional distress in the context of their faith.

## What about faith?

As Christians we're expected, at times like this, to take things to God. But if the crisis includes a crisis of faith where we're in conflict with God, ashamed or filled with remorse, then we may believe there's nothing left to lose. Alternatively, pressures of life, clouds of depression, or disordered thoughts may obscure the closeness of God or his willingness to forgive.

The Bible includes examples of people who have been under intense pressure and struggle with suicidal feelings. It's important to note that God doesn't condemn those feelings, but offers practical support. See 1 Kings 19, where he provides rest, food, drink and a space to recover for the suicidal Elijah.



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## Finding help

- **Premier Lifeline:** confidential Christian helpline, available 9am to midnight daily, on 0300 111 0101.
- **Samaritans:** 24/7 emotional support crisis helpline, on 08457 90 90 90 or [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)
- **Pastoral care:** be there for someone struggling; listen to them, encourage them to seek further help if necessary. The challenge is to assess the severity and intensity of the suicidal intent and the urgency of support needed.
- If someone is **actively suicidal**, you need to seek help for them immediately. This may require you to call the emergency services, including a mental health crisis team (if one exists in your area), the duty doctor service for their GP, 999 for an ambulance or – if necessary – the police.
- If you have concerns, but the person is **not actively suicidal**, encourage them to speak to their GP or the local mental health team, especially if they are showing signs of depression or thought disorder.
- Contact the **Association of Christian Counsellors:** [www.acc-uk.org](http://www.acc-uk.org) for an online directory of Christian counsellors.
- Make sure you **seek help for yourself** and **share the care**, so it doesn't fall on one person alone. Premier Lifeline and Samaritans are happy for you to call.

## ➔ Helpful links:

Mike writes about losing his father to suicide:

➔ <https://tinyurl.com/out-of-the-ashes-article>

The attitude to suicide in the Church:

➔ <https://tinyurl.com/attitude-to-suicide-article>

Think Twice - a Christian response to suicide:

➔ [www.thinktwiceinfo.org](http://www.thinktwiceinfo.org)