

SJVC Suicide Awareness and Prevention: Tool Kit





Suicide Prevention
&
Awareness
Collaboration

Mission Statement: ***The Saint John Vianney Center Suicide Prevention and Awareness Collaboration works to end the stigma and improve community understanding surrounding mental illness and suicide prevention through outreach, education, and advocacy.***

Introduction:

In the Fall of 2022, Saint John Vianney Center initiated an online survey inviting the leadership of every Arch/Diocese and Women and Men's religious community in the United States to provide insight into their familiarity with and experiences related to suicide, particularly concerning the Clergy and Men and Women Religious they serve. A total of 270 individuals in leadership responded to the survey, representing a significant and diverse sample. The findings shed light on the prevalence of suicide and suicidal ideations among Diocesan Clergy and Men's and Women's Religious communities. We learned that 41% of the Arch/Dioceses, 10% of the Women's Religious Communities, and 23% of the Men's Religious Communities reported experiencing the suicide of a member of the Clergy or a Man or Woman Religious. In addition, 26% of the participants indicated that they were aware of a member of the Clergy and/or Religious currently struggling with suicidal thoughts. 52% of the respondents expressed feeling unprepared to assist someone who is experiencing suicidal tendencies. Fortunately, 74% desire to acquire personal intervention skills to address this issue. The results of this survey have led SJVC to begin the creation of a National Suicide Awareness and Education program for Clergy and Men and Women Religious.

Impact Story:

In shadows deep, a soul did weep,
Lost in night, bereft of light.
Yet even there, a whispered prayer,
Broke through despair, God's love took flight.

In every heart, pain plays its part,
But God's embrace heals wounds and scar.
For every tear, He draws us near,
In Him we find, our guiding star.

Though darkness tries to blind our eyes,
Faith's beacon shines, hope never dies.
In mercy deep, our souls He'll keep,
Eternal love, that hears our cries.

Heavenly Father, we come before you with heavy hearts, seeking relief from the devastating pain of suicidal thoughts. We know that You are the giver of life, and we pray that You would grant us the strength and hope to overcome the overwhelming darkness that can lead to such thoughts.

We ask for Your mercy and compassion to be poured out upon those who are struggling with thoughts of suicide. May Your loving embrace surround them, giving them the courage and peace to face each day with renewed hope.

We pray that You will bless them with the support and guidance of family and friends, who can offer comfort and encouragement in their time of need. Help us to be patient and understanding, to listen without judgment, and to offer words of hope and healing.

We also pray for those who have lost loved ones to suicide, that You would bring them comfort and solace in their grief. We ask that You bring healing to their hearts and minds, and that You would strengthen them as they seek to support others who may be struggling.

Lord, we know that nothing is impossible with You, and we believe that You are able to bring restoration and wholeness to those who are hurting. We trust in Your unfailing love and grace, and we ask that You pour out Your mercy upon us, that we might find the relief and hope that we so desperately need.

We pray all these things in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life.
Amen.

Common Myths about Suicide:

Myth: Talking about suicide increases the chance a person will act on it.

Fact: According to the Mayo Clinic, talking about suicide may reduce, rather than increase, suicidal ideation. Having a conversation about suicide helps people find an alternative view of their existing circumstances. If someone is in a mental health crisis or depressed, asking if he or she is thinking about suicide can help.

Myth: People who talk about suicide are just seeking attention.

Fact: Dr. Kristen Fuller, M.D. states that the widespread stigma is associated with suicide and as a result, many people are afraid to speak about the topic. Talking about suicide helps reduce the stigma, but also allows individuals to seek the appropriate treatment.

Myth: Suicide can't be prevented.

Fact : Most people who completed or attempted suicide don't want to die, but want an end to their pain. A suicidal crisis is temporary, and the impulse to end one's life does not last indefinitely. Intervention with someone who is expressing thoughts of ending their own life can make a difference and can help them get past the crisis. The importance of having open conversations and combating the stigma of mental health is critical.

Myth: Endorsing suicide thoughts immediately warrants intensive hospitalization.

Fact: CDC states that first steps include treatment that takes place in a one-on-one or group format between patients, family members, and clinicians. It can vary in duration from several weeks to ongoing therapy, as needed. When a person is in crisis, crisis response interventions are intended to reduce key risk factors for suicide. This includes feelings of depression, isolation, and hopelessness while determining the best level of care.

DHS: Department of Human Services (2023). *Suicide Prevention*.

Fuller, K. (2020, September 30). *5 Common Myths About Suicide Debunked*. NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control/Division of Injury Prevention and the Prevention Institute (2022) *Suicide Prevention Resource for Action*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Pravesh Sharma, M. D. (2022, December 8). *8 common myths about suicide*. Mayo Clinic Health System.

Risk Factors and Warning Signs : What to Look For

Risk Factors:

- Family history of suicide
- Chronic pain
- Trauma
- Previous Suicide attempt
- Substance abuse
- Barriers to Mental Health treatment (Financial, stigma, etc.)
- Loss
- History of depression and other mental illnesses
- Criminal/legal problems
- Impulsive or aggressive tendencies
- Hopelessness

Warning Signs:

- Talking about suicide, pain, or being a burden
- Preoccupation with death
- Behavior changes (sleeping too much or too little, withdrawal, giving away possessions)
- Increased Anxiety/Depression
- Increased anger or rage
- Extreme mood swings
- Making plans for suicide

Risk factors and warning signs. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. (2023, July 10). <https://afsp.org/>

Risk and Protective Factors. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, November 2) [Risk and Protective Factors | Suicide | CDC](#)

When In Crisis: Action Plan

Stay Calm

Listen. Do Not Preach.

Safe spaces allow for candid conversation without judgement. Here, others can talk about their emotions and thoughts freely. Creating this type of environment will encourage people to share openly which could lead to receiving much needed help. Being a good active listener allows the person seeking help, know that you care, you are listening, and you are trying to understand their unique situation.

Assess the situation.

- What is the risk? Previous attempts? Mental Illness?
- Do they have... Problem solving skills? Impulse control?
- Ask about any self-harm plans, "Do you feel life is worth living?"

If "No", go to the ER. If unsure, call the hotline. If "Yes", call a mental health professional.

Fighting the Stigma Against Suicide

What is a stigma?

Stigma is the sense of fear, shame, or negative perception about mental health issues, symptoms, or treatment. When avoiding difficult subjects like suicide, it makes it harder for those who are struggling to get help.

- Be open and non-judgmental in conversations about mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety.
- When talking about suicide or suicidal be direct – ask "are you thinking about suicide" versus "are you thinking about hurting yourself."
- Become mental health aware – educate yourself about how common mental health conditions are in the United States and familiarize yourself with the resources that are available to help those who need help coping with mental health symptoms such as anxiety or depression.
- Know that there are effective treatments for mental conditions and that with help, people recover. Take time to familiarize yourself with resources, such as the Employee Assistance Program, that can help those in need.

Suicide Prevention Lifeline and Other Resources



As of July 16, 2022, people can call, text or chat with the 988 Lifeline and are connected with a trained counselor. The counselor is trained to provide free and confidential emotional support and crisis counseling to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. This service is available 25 hours a day, seven days a week, across the United States. **The previous 988 Lifeline phone number (1-800-273-8255) will always remain available to people in emotional distress or suicidal crisis.**



Other Helpful Resources:

- 1) [NIMH » Home \(nih.gov\)](https://www.nih.gov)
 - a. National Institute of Mental Health
- 2) [Mental Health | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/)
 - a. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- 3) [How to Talk About Mental Health | SAMHSA](https://www.samhsa.gov)
- 4) [SAMHSA - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](https://www.samhsa.gov)
- 5) [Suicide Prevention Resource Center \(sprc.org\)](https://www.sprc.org)

Story of Hope

There was once a beloved Catholic priest named Father Thomas. He had dedicated his life to serving his parishioners, offering guidance and solace in times of joy and sorrow. Everyone in the community looked up to him as a pillar of strength and hope.

Father Thomas had a secret, hidden deep within his heart. For years, he had battled a darkness that nobody could see. He struggled silently with feelings of despair and hopelessness, never allowing his pain to surface in the presence of others. Behind closed doors, he battled with a heaviness that seemed unbearable.

Each day, Father Thomas would put on his vestments, stepping into the pulpit to deliver homilies filled with compassion and grace. He would reach out to those in need, offering prayers and comforting words, all the while bearing the weight of his own inner turmoil. But his faith remained steadfast, even as his spirit grew wearier with each passing day.

The parishioners, unaware of Father Thomas's hidden anguish, continued to admire and rely on him for guidance. They saw a man whose commitment to God's work was unwavering, never suspecting the pain he carried in his heart. He dedicated himself to his duties, pouring his love and care into the lives of others, all while neglecting his own well-being.

One night the burden became too much for Father Thomas to bear alone. He found himself standing at the edge of a precipice, staring into the darkness that mirrored his own despair. In that moment, he felt utterly alone, believing that he had exhausted all avenues of hope. The weight of his internal struggles became unbearable, and he contemplated ending his pain.

Overwhelmed with emotions, Father Thomas reached out to his closest confidant, Father Michael, a fellow priest who had been his friend and confidant for many years. He poured out his heart, sharing the depths of his pain and his struggles with mental health. Father Michael listened with compassion, embracing him in a gesture of unwavering support.

Together, they sought help from mental health professionals and support groups. Father Thomas began a journey of healing, surrounded by a network of caring souls who had once relied on his strength. It was through their love and understanding that he discovered he was never truly alone. The community, once unaware of his hidden battles, rallied around him, offering their prayers and support.

In time, Father Thomas began to find solace and peace within himself. He realized that his vulnerability and openness about his own struggles had created a space for others to share their own pain, breaking down the barriers of isolation that can plague even the strongest of souls. Through his journey, he became an advocate for mental health within the church, encouraging others to seek help and find solace in their faith.

Though scarred by his darkest moments, Father Thomas emerged as a beacon of hope, reminding everyone that even those who appear the happiest can carry hidden burdens. His story became a testament to the transformative power of love, compassion, and the unbreakable bonds of community.

And so, Father Thomas continued to serve his parish, not only as a shepherd of their faith but also as a reminder that even in the darkest of times, there is always hope.