

SESSION 3: LIFE IN A HURTING WORLD

LOOK AROUND: PARENT GUIDE

Suicide.

As parents and ministry leaders who care about young people, it's one of our biggest fears.

It's currently the second leading cause of death among young people ages 10 to 24.¹

Yet often parents don't know the depths of their child's pain. Over half of 11- to 17-year-olds who have contemplated suicide report that their parents aren't aware of it.²

Regardless of age, sometimes our anxiety can be too much for any one of us to handle on our own. This week our youth group is going one step further in what we've been learning throughout this series on anxiety—that God designed us to be in circles of care—to highlight that sometimes we benefit by expanding our circle to include professional help. Sometimes our best next step is to seek a trained therapist or counselor who knows what to ask, and when and how to ask it.

At times we all fear that if we talk with a teenager about depression or suicide, we will somehow plant a seed in their mind that makes them more likely to contemplate self-harm. But the truth is that being silent about suicide is far more dangerous than having a sincere conversation about it.

If you open channels of communication with your kids at home about the topic of suicide, they'll be more likely to talk with you about any future sadness or depression they experience. Making suicide discussable makes it preventable.

Help your child understand that having inner struggles doesn't mean we lack faith. In reality, having inner struggles means we're human. The good news is we can grow in faith *even in the midst of our struggles* when we look up and see the encouragement God and our faith community want to offer us, look inward and recognize God at work within us, and look outward to the world around us for help and support.

HELP YOUR STUDENT GROW BY HAVING A CONVERSATION WITH YOU THIS WEEK

Parents know that there are some important Talks to have when raising kids. For example, sex and relationships. Saying no to drugs and alcohol. Not talking to strangers. Perhaps within your ethnicity and culture, there are other topics that you're committed to teaching your children to protect them or to preserve their heritage.

But do your kids know what they should do, who they can speak to, or how they can healthily process their emotions if they ever feel like they want to hurt themselves? This is the *other* Talk every parent needs to have with their kids. As a family, have the conversation and make a plan together. Here are some suggestions to help you have that conversation:

- Begin by making sure your kid knows they can talk to you about any feeling at any time. Your student's take-home sheet has some conversation starters to help spark new discussions for you both.
- Talk together about what helps them cope with feelings of anxiety in a healthy way.
- Save the suicide helpline number (**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255**) in your phones, or post it somewhere accessible in your home in case your child ever needs it.
- Invent a "code word" your kid can use when they need your full attention. Give your kids a signal that they can send you by text, or say to you on a phone call, that means you drop everything and focus on them.
- Discuss the pros and cons of seeking professional help if it is ever needed. How would you decide to take that step as a family?
- Make a list of the trusted adults your kid could go to if they ever need to talk or get advice. As much as you want them to talk with you, if you're unavailable or if your child is uncomfortable talking with you about particular feelings, you want them to have a team of one to five adults who are part of their circle of care.

HERE'S SOMETHING YOU CAN DO TOGETHER AS A FAMILY

Students are exploring the Ignatian Prayer of Examen as a tool to help center themselves and seek God when life feels anxious. We're calling it the "Daily Replay."

You can encourage your student to develop this practice by walking through these prayer steps together, asking how the practice is helpful or challenging, or using the steps to grow in your own practice of prayer.

1. **Become aware of God's presence.** *Where has God been at work in my life today?*
2. **Review the day with gratitude.** *Which conversations or encouraging words am I thankful for?*
3. **Pay attention to your emotions.** *Is there anything that is making me feel anxious or sad that I can talk with someone about?*
4. **Forgive, and ask for forgiveness.** *What forgiveness do I need to ask of God so that I can fully experience the gift of peace?*
5. **Look toward tomorrow.** *What would I like to do differently tomorrow?*

The Daily Replay is based on the Ignatian Prayer of Examen, and adapted for teenagers. Find out more about this prayer practice at www.ignatianspirituality.com.

If you find apps helpful in reminding and guiding you through your own practice of the prayer, search your app store for Ignatian Spirituality's "[Reimagining the Examen](#)," or "[Examen](#)" from FULLER studio.

HERE ARE MORE TOOLS TO HELP YOUR FAMILY DEVELOP FAITH IN AN ANXIOUS WORLD

When it comes to developing faith in an anxious world, the majority of your most important parenting happens behind the scenes as you stay sharp and alert, ready to support your child with what they need:

- Check out the [Faith in an Anxious World Parenting Podcast: Episode 3](#), available wherever you listen to podcasts.
- Visit fulleryouthinstitute.org/anxiousworld for additional practical advice on how young people can best navigate anxiety.
- Seek professional help from a local counselor or therapist.
- Reach out with your questions to a crisis hotline (**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 or suicidepreventionlifeline.org**).

ENDNOTES

¹ For more information on suicide statistics, see the National Institute of Mental Health suicide fact and resource portal at <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide.shtml>.

² Jason D. Jones, Rhonda C. Boyd, et al., "Parent-Adolescent Agreement About Adolescents' Suicidal Thoughts," *Pediatrics* 143:2, February 2019, <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/143/2/e20181771>.