

# TWELVE WAYS YOU CAN HELP SAVE A LIFE

Here are twelve ways that you can encourage someone who is feeling depressed or suicidal. These ideas are things anyone can do to help.

- 1. Visit.** People need to know that someone cares, and nothing does that more than spending time together. Visit at their home or yours, at a restaurant or a coffee shop. Sit in a park or take a walk. There is no replacement for human touch, the human voice, and the presence of another person.
- 2. Call.** A timely phone call and a listening ear can be lifesaving. If you don't know what to say, start with something like "I was thinking about you this morning and just wanted to check in and see how you are doing." Or "Is this an okay time to talk? I just wanted to tell you how much I love you and that I've been praying for you." No matter how you start, the important thing is to pay attention and listen.
- 3. Ask questions.** Whether it's in person or over the phone, ask open-ended, nonjudgmental questions. Here are some examples:
  - "What are you doing for fun lately?"
  - "Are you getting outside?"
  - "What music are you listening to?"
  - "What does your routine look like these days?"
  - "Are you having trouble sleeping?"
  - "What was the high point and low point of the past week?"
  - "On a scale of 1 to 10, how are you feeling today?"

The point is to get a fuller picture of their interior life and gently suggest ways to combat their despair.

- 4. Send a passage from Scripture or an uplifting quote.** This can take many forms: emails, texts, handwritten notes on index cards, calligraphy posters, or even needlepoint. It can be quick and simple or framed and beautiful. Encourage your friend to claim God's Word as promises they can count on.
- 5. Make a playlist or burn a CD of uplifting songs and hymns.** Music is one of the important ways many people hear the voice of God. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, in times of care and sorrow, music "will keep a fountain of joy alive in you." Musical tastes vary; the important thing is to personalize the playlist for the individual you are trying to help.
- 6. Write a letter and send it via snail mail.** In the age of electronic communication, receiving a card or letter in the mail is a special treat. The bonus is that the person can hold on to the letter and reread it when feeling despondent or hopeless.

- 7. Share a prayer.** When my wife receives emails or texts asking for prayer, instead of responding with a promise, she sends a prayer right then and there. If you don't feel comfortable with unscripted prayer, you can send a few personalized lines followed by the Aaronic blessing:

The Lord bless thee, and keep thee:

The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

Numbers 6:24-26, KJV

- 8. Share a meal.** More people than I can count have eaten around our table. Jesus did much of his teaching over shared meals for a reason: something about the relaxed environment helps people let down their guard and share what is really on their hearts. Your relationship is never the same once someone has been welcomed into your home. Note that the root of “hospitality” and “hospital” are the same; hospitality heals!
- 9. Take a walk.** My wife keeps up with most of her friends on walk-talks. The lack of interruptions, the release of endorphins, the connection with God's creation, and the rhythm of walking side by side all help to build deeper connections. At the end, she holds hands and prays with the friend, reflecting what they have learned together and offering up any concerns to our Lord, the Great Healer.
- 10. Sabbath together.** The Hebrew word for holy is *kadosh*, which means “set apart.” Think of Sabbath time as a time set apart from worldly concerns, commerce, and work. If your friend has been withdrawing, ask them to join you for church or for a walk and a meal after worship. Or try practicing screenless Sundays together, a holy time set apart for family, friends, and God. It's been shown repeatedly that time spent in nature can be both uplifting and healing.
- 11. Do something fun.** Sometimes just being together is more important than what you say. Play a board game, watch a movie, or listen to some favorite music together. Push back the furniture and dance. Read an uplifting fictional work or a book from the Bible aloud. Find a south-facing hill and soak up the sun. Go outside on a clear night and look at the stars. People who are depressed tend to isolate and turn inward. Jesus sought joy in community, and so should we.
- 12. Get help.** One of the most important lessons I have learned is to know when I am in over my head. Don't try to do this alone. Often a person who is depressed doesn't have the energy to seek help. Or they might not have the clarity of mind to know where to begin looking. Having a couple of excellent Christian counselors that you can trust and can refer folks to is invaluable. Ask your pastor and friends for references so you are prepared when the need arises. Helping a person who is depressed can be taxing, so be sure you have people praying for an extra measure of strength, wisdom, and patience for you, too.