

[Church Name] Policy: Suicide Prevention & Crisis Response

Adapted from Holding Hope: A Biblical Guide to Suicide Prevention in the Church, Appendix A. Replace all bracketed items with your church's specific names, roles, and resources before adoption.

I. Purpose

This policy exists to protect life, provide clear guidance to church leaders, and ensure a consistent, compassionate response to suicidal risk within [Church Name]. It applies whenever a pastor, elder, ministry leader, or trained volunteer becomes aware that a member, attender, or participant in a church program may be at risk of suicide.

II. Guiding Principles

This policy is built on four convictions that guide every decision made under it:

1. **Every Expression Is Taken Seriously** — No statement of suicidal thought is dismissed as exaggeration, attention-seeking, or a passing mood, regardless of who brings it forward.
2. **Safety Is the Highest Priority** — When safety and any other concern — confidentiality, program continuity, personal discomfort — come into tension, safety governs the decision.
3. **Care Is Shared** — No leader carries a high-risk situation alone. Additional leadership is involved as a matter of course, not exception.
4. **Confidentiality Has Limits** — Personal information is handled with care and respect, but confidentiality is never maintained at the expense of a person's safety.

III. Scope

This policy applies to the following individuals in their capacity as representatives of [Church Name]:

- Pastoral staff
- Elders and deacons
- Small group and ministry leaders
- Trained volunteers, including care team and prayer team members

IV. Recognizing Risk

Leaders operating under this policy should be alert to the following indicators, understanding that they may appear individually or in combination:

- Statements of hopelessness or a settled belief that circumstances will not improve
- Direct or indirect expressions of a desire to die or “not be here anymore”
- Withdrawal from small group, worship attendance, or a sudden change in behavior
- Giving away meaningful possessions or language that resembles saying goodbye

V. Immediate Response Protocol

If a leader becomes aware that a person is expressing suicidal thoughts, the following steps apply in sequence:

1. **Remain Calm and Present:** The leader stays with the person, keeping tone and posture steady rather than reactive.
2. **Ask Directly:** The leader asks plainly: “Are you thinking about killing yourself?” Indirect or softened language is avoided.
3. **Assess Risk:** The leader asks about plan, means, and timeframe to gauge the level of urgency.
4. **Maintain Presence:** If risk appears elevated, the person is not left alone under any circumstance.

5. **Escalate Immediately:** The leader contacts [Policy Owner / Title] directly, or the on-call elder if the Policy Owner is unreachable.

VI. Emergency Criteria

Emergency services (911) are contacted immediately if any of the following are present:

- **A clear plan and access to the means to carry it out**
- **The person is unable to commit to their own safety**
- **An attempt is already in progress**

Nearest emergency facility: [Hospital Name], [distance] from the church — [phone number].

VII. Referral Expectations

Beyond an immediate crisis, leaders are expected to:

- Encourage professional care and offer to help make the first call
- Provide referrals from the church's trusted local resource list
- Remain actively engaged in connecting the individual to resources, rather than merely naming them

Primary Biblical Counseling Referral: [Name / Practice] — [phone number]. **Psychiatric Referral:** [Name / Practice] — [phone number]. **Medical Referral:** [Name / Practice] — [phone number].

VIII. Documentation

All significant interactions involving suicidal risk shall be:

- Documented using the church's standard incident form
- Stored securely, accessible only to those with a legitimate role in the care process
- Shared with the Policy Owner and, when appropriate, the elder or deacon board chair

IX. Leadership Communication

Information regarding an active situation is shared on a strict need-to-know basis. The [Policy Owner / Title] coordinates all communication related to an active situation and serves as the single point of contact for leadership.

X. Training

[Church Name] will:

- Provide basic suicide awareness training annually to staff and small group leaders
- Send the Policy Owner and at least one additional staff member through suicide intervention training regularly
- Review this policy with church leadership at a set interval each year

XI. Review and Amendments

This policy shall be reviewed periodically by [Church Personnel Team / Elder Board] to ensure its continued effectiveness. Amendments must be approved according to [Church Name]'s standard governance process before taking effect.

XII. Effective Date

This policy is effective as of the date of adoption by [Church Name] and shall remain in effect until modified or rescinded through the church's standard governance process.