

Religious Education Congress 2017
Amy Florian
Suicide: Better Understanding and Support for this
Incomprehensible Tragedy
Session 6-11

Suicide: Better Understanding and Support for this Incomprehensible Tragedy

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Amy's most recent book: *A Friend Indeed: Help Those You Love When They Grieve* – on Amazon

Suicide Terminology – Died by suicide; Took his/her own life; Suicide victim

Know resources – crisis center, hospitals, police protocols, 1-800-SUICIDE, 1-800-273-TALK, 741-741

Suicide myths

1. They want to be dead
2. They are selfish
3. Asking about it makes suicide more likely
4. Most give a lot of warning
5. Most leave a note

Risk factors

1. Depression/bipolar/mental illness
2. Family history
3. Mood swings; Sudden calm
4. Trauma or major loss
5. Feeling hopeless or like a burden
6. Religious interest changes
7. Change in eating and sleeping
8. Giving things away or saying goodbye

Catholic Teaching

Early Church

4th – 20th centuries – especially with Aquinas

But 18th century provisions for mental illness or exceptional circumstances

Direct suicide

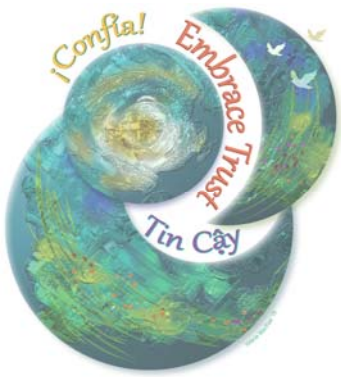
Indirect suicide

20th century on

Canon Law

CCC #2280 and following

Current Funeral Liturgies after suicide



Concern for a suicidal person – Don't:

- Argue or try to talk them out of it
- Act shocked or say it's wrong
- Promise confidentiality
- Blame yourself

Do:

- Listen to anger & pain
- Be calm; say you care
- Ask about it & if there's a plan
- Do they have lethal means?
- Offer hope; ask them to wait
- Assist in getting professional help

If someone is seriously suicidal

- Get someone there NOW
- Do not leave if you're in person; stay on the line if on the phone
- Call a local crisis center and/or a hotline and/or the local police or hospital

After a Suicide

How to talk about it in a school or religious ed classes

Don't: "At least he's out of pain now". Or "She's finally at peace"

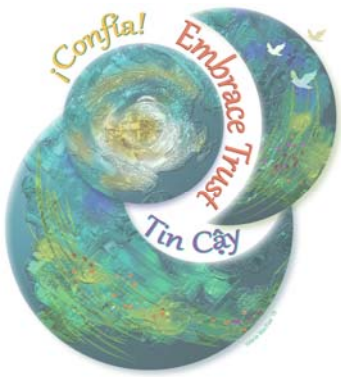
Honor the person honestly, but address suicide as the wrong and most tragic choice

Common Grief Complications Post-Suicide

- -Stigma
- -Guilt
- -Anger

Supporting the family

- Offer assurances of God's mercy
- Use real words
- Ask and really listen, allowing their unique experience/struggle
- Offer education and resources
- Don't go away – long-term grief



Some resources

Online support – Alliance of Hope

Blog – Grief After Suicide

Support groups – i.e. AFSP (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention); L.O.S.S.; HEARTBEAT;
local hospital

Examples of books on suicide loss

My Son, My Son – Iris Bolton

No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving the Suicide Death of a Loved One – Carla Fine

A Long-Shadowed Grief: Suicide and Its Aftermath – Harold Ivan Smith

But I Didn't Say Goodbye: Helping Children and their Families After a Suicide – Barbara Rubel

But I Didn't Get to Say Goodbye: For parents and professionals helping child suicide survivors –
Barbara Rubel

The Suicidal Mind –Edwin Schneidman

Seeking Hope: Stories for the Suicide Bereaved – Michelle Linn-Gust