

Guidelines for Counseling, Suicide & Social Media

Counseling

Unless you are a trained, certified, professional counselor, you are not qualified to handle every situation that may arise as you serve children and youth in ministry. Issues that should be referred to your Pastor and/or to a trained professional after responsible reporting include:

- Child Neglect**
- Emotional Abuse**
- Physical abuse**
- Sexual Abuse or Sexual Molestation**
- Drug & Alcohol Abuse**
- Economic Exploitation**

Suicide

Suicide is the second leading cause of death in 15-24 year olds. Suicide occurs 3-4 times more often in boys than in girls. The most common method is by gun. Cluster suicide is becoming a growing problem. Using alcohol or drugs or experiencing depression increases the incidence of suicide. Suicide threats or casual remarks should always be taken seriously. Report this immediately! The person may sound casual about suicide, but only because suicide seems no worse than the other mental pain that they are already suffering. Guardians and relevant staff (Pastor, Youth Director) should always be alerted about suicide threats. Suicide threats often require the involvement of mental health professionals.

Social Media

"Social media are a collection of online platforms and tools that people use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives, and media itself, facilitating conversations and interactions online between groups of people." -Doreen Moran, Digital and Social Marketing

“Friending:” Friending youth is a powerful ministry tool when used appropriately. When adults “friend” people under age 18 they should also request to “friend” their parents. Involving parents in this decision is important. An example of this request:

I would like to be your child’s “friend” on facebook and/or twitter. I prefer “friending” both youth and their parents as part of our congregation’s practice to promote transparency and appropriate adult – youth relationships. I encourage you to monitor all of your child’s social media practice. I am happy to support you in navigating social media with your youth.

This practice promotes the safety of children and youth while providing good accountability with the adults who work with youth.

Posts: Social media, by its very definition is a public forum. There is no privacy in social media, even with the use of security settings. Think before you post. Ask yourself: Would I say this in a public place? What are possible unintended consequences or interpretations of this post?

Groups or Pages: Consider communities that gather on facebook in the same way you would a community gathered in a room or a home. Youth Pages or Groups should be monitored at all times by Safe Haven Adults.