Mental Health Series Week 1: Depression & Suicide (Elijah)

Story/Quote

One morning, a man was walking along the beach and saw that the tide had washed thousands of starfish up on the shore. Up ahead he saw a boy who was picking them, one at a time, and tossing them back into the ocean.

He ask the boy, “Why are you spending so much time doing this?” The child replied, "If I don’t, the starfish will bake in the sun, and will all die by the afternoon."

The man replied, "But, there must be thousands of starfish. You can't possibly rescue them all, so what difference is throwing a few back going to make?"

The boy tossed another starfish back into the ocean and said, "It sure made a difference to that one!"

Statistics

A 2021 survey done in Clark County (just to our northeast) showed that 21% of high schoolers had serious thoughts of taking their own life, 17% reported having a plan to do so, and 9% of them actually attempted suicide. For middle schoolers, which includes 10-14 year olds, that survey showed that 26% of them had serious thoughts of taking their own life, 19% reported having a plan to do so, and 11% of them actually attempted suicide.

Of course we know that depression and suicide is not just a young person issue. Between the years 1999 and 2019, every single age group showed at least a 30% increase in suicide.

When we hear the statistics, we can feel like the man looking at the thousands of starfish thinking that it’s hopeless, we can’t even make a dent! But I encourage each of you here, no matter how young or old you are, that you can make a difference in the life of one person and collectively, we can make a difference! In fact, since the church is the only place where ultimate hope can be found, I don’t think this mental health crisis can be solved without us.

Causes

There are two basic categories of causes of depression.

* Inside your body (need a doctors help to fix)
  + Chemical imbalance
  + Some illnesses or diseases, chronic pain
  + Genetics
* Outside your body
  + Major life event (grief, job loss, move)
  + Stress & burnout
  + Shame, guilt, regret
  + Loneliness

Warning Signs

Depression

* Persistent feelings of sadness or emptiness most days.
* The things that used to make you happy don’t make you happy anymore.
* General low energy (hard to get your body moving)/Inability to concentrate (hard to get your brain moving)
* Poor self-care
  + Sleeping problems (too much or too little)
  + Eating issues (too much or too little)
  + Lack of personal hygiene
* In kids, depression might show up as crying more, being clingier, acting out more, or even things like stomach aches and other physical symptoms.

Suicide (three contributing factors)

* Plan/Access
* A sense of “thwarted belongingness” (I don’t belong, not connected, nobody cares)
  + Can be a result of a breakup, severed friendship (or friend group), a job loss, death
  + We/They polarized culture (has compromised our sense of belonging)
  + Isolation measures from COVID made this a huge issue.
* A sense of “perceived burdensomeness”
  + I can’t do anything right, I’ll never be good enough, I’m a failure, I have nothing to bring to the table, I have no purpose

What to do if it’s you

* Have people ahead of time that you know you feel safe talking to to when things are hard
* Care for your physical needs (you won’t feel like it and it won’t be easy)
  + Create a good sleeping routing and environment
  + Eat healthy foods
  + Force yourself to shower
  + Exercise (even if it is just 2-10 minute walks a day)
* Seek help
  + Doctor to check for “inside the body” causes and prescribe treatment
  + Counselor to help process “outside the body” causes (we have some resources)
  + Care Minister (Stephen Ministry)
* Have go-to scriptures ready to meditate on

What to do if it’s someone else

Three R’s are helpful

* Recognize
  + Look for those warning signs (Plan/Access, Belonging, Purpose)
* Respond
  + Acknowledge what they are going through, validate their feelings, don’t argue
  + Ask the Hard Question (Do you want to hurt yourself? Are you thinking of taking your life?)
* Refer
  + If yes to “the Question”, stay with them and get help (911, a family member, teacher)
  + If no, or not immediately, refer to a counselor (we have places we can refer) or Care Ministry

How to start a conversation

Are you ok? You don’t seem like yourself lately. (Kids – you seem sad a lot lately)

I noticed you’ve missed small group (or practice a few times). What’s up?

This is awkward, but I really need to know if you’re all right.

Entering into someone else’s pain is one of the best ways to show Christ’s love to the “poor in spirit”.

If you have any questions or want to talk through anything you can reach out to me at [tambra@southwestchurch.org](mailto:tambra@southwestchurch.org).