

Introduction to the Alive to Thrive Leader's Guide

Suicide is a topic that few people want to broach. The fact that you've chosen to lead these sessions speaks volumes about you. So God bless you for this!

The crisis is all too real. The numbers change from study to study, but the trend is alarming. Too many teenagers are choosing death over life. As a culture, we're facing an epidemic. As parents, we're facing an existential threat to our family. In times of epidemic and threat, credentials are an afterthought. You may be a licensed counselor, a concerned youth worker, or a desperate parent. Whatever the case, you need to understand this: You're the ideal person for this job. God has laid this matter on your heart, and you can be confident "that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

Like the boy with the loaves and fish in John 6:9, whatever you bring is enough. The Lord can and will multiply your resources to produce ultimate good from unimaginably bad circumstances.

This guide is designed to accommodate you, no matter how much or how little group-leading experience you have. *Alive to Thrive* is filled with eye-opening statistics, poignant stories, and road-tested strategies for identifying risks related to suicide and lessening their impact on teenagers. This leader's guide distills that information to its most potent form. Call it a "frontline" mentality. Our goal is to give you what you need to equip the parents in your group, in a streamlined and useful format.

Toward that end, each session contains five segments:

- "Break the Ice" provides a light opening into a heavy topic.
- "Explore the Word" introduces a relevant passage from Scripture to set the tone for your study.
- "Consider the Need" explores the essential information from the book.
- "Embrace the Challenge" gives parents a chance to wrestle with the problem together as they forge workable solutions and strategies.
- "Bring It Home" gives parents a chance to share their personal burdens with the group and receive support and encouragement.

The challenge is formidable, but it's no match for the One who stands ready to work in and through you as you assist parents in showing their teens what it means to be *Alive to Thrive*.

Session 1

The Best Defense Against Suicide

Get Ready

For this session, you'll need

- Building blocks (Step 1)
- Computer for PowerPoint presentation (Step 3)
- Screen for PowerPoint presentation (Step 3)

Aim

To help group members build a solid foundation in their kids' lives that incorporates parent-child attachment, self-care, loving discipline, and unwavering support.

1. Break the Ice

[About 10 minutes]

Begin the session with a tower-building contest. Divide the group into teams and give each team a stack of building blocks. The team with the tallest tower at the end of the five-minute time limit wins. Make a mental note of the teams' strategies, especially as they relate to the bottom section of their towers. Pay attention to the time and resources teams expend to build a foundation before they start to build up.

Afterward, ask the following questions to guide your discussion of the activity:

What happens if you try to build something without a foundation? If no one else mentions it, point out that you may be able to create something impressive—momentarily—but it won't be stable. It doesn't have the strength within to withstand outside forces. Eventually, it will fall.

Why is it essential for kids to have a solid foundation? If no one else mentions it, suggest that much of what applied to building a tower also applies to raising kids. They may seem impressive as they rise in the world, but they don't have stability. They're susceptible to outside forces. If they're pushed hard enough, they will fall.

2. Explore the Word

[About 5 minutes]

Say something like this: **Jesus had something to say about building on the right foundation.** Ask someone to read Matthew 7:24-27. Use the following questions to guide your discussion of the passage. Encourage volunteers to share the answers they wrote in their participant's book.

Why do people build, either purposefully or unknowingly, on sand instead of on solid ground? If no one else mentions it, suggest that some people were never taught to recognize the difference between the two; the sand seems solid to them. Some care more about the appearance of their house—or life—than they do about its foundation. Some see solid ground as less flexible—and, therefore, less appealing—than sand.

How can you tell if your house is built on solid ground? If no one else mentions it, point out that we can consult God's Word and ask the Holy Spirit to make us aware of "foundation problems." We can also pay attention to what happens when "storms" come. Do they rock us to the core and threaten to collapse everything around us? Or are we able to stand firm upon our unmovable foundation?

3. Consider the Need

[About 20 minutes]

Start your PowerPoint presentation. Use the accompanying questions and comments to guide your discussion.

Say something like this: **When it comes to raising kids, the foundation begins with the parent-child attachment process. Attachment enables a baby to connect in a healthy way with her primary caregiver. It teaches her brain how to process and interpret the information it gets from the five senses so that she can feel safe in this world. Attachment is fundamental to the growth of a healthy worldview.**

Slide 1

Healthy attachment depends on parents meeting three conditions. Talk briefly about why most kids are able to take these three things for granted. If no one else mentions it, suggest that keeping their kids safe, proving themselves trustworthy, and meeting their kids' basic needs is Parenting 101. When people become parents, those things seem to come naturally to them.

Slide 2

Unfortunately, the attachment process can be disrupted by a number of factors. Talk briefly about how each factor on the list might disrupt healthy attachment between parent and child. Refer to the story of Noah in the "Consider the Need" section of the participant's book. Talk briefly about the roots of Noah's struggles.

Slide 3

Attachment issues can cause challenges later in a child's life. Talk about the frustration kids must experience when they're being treated for a condition they don't have, while their real struggle is being overlooked.

Slide 4

The second foundational building block is self-care. Raising well-adjusted, well-connected kids depends on the strength of our relationships. And relationships can only be as strong and healthy as the individuals involved. You can't connect meaningfully with others if you don't bring your best self to the table. So good relationships begin with good self-care.

Slide 5

Which area of self-care is the biggest challenge for you? Get responses from a few group members. Talk briefly about what our kids learn about self-care by watching us.

Slide 6

The third foundational building block is loving discipline. Discipline is more than just a slap on the wrist for bad behavior. It's actually a training course for life. Through discipline, parents prepare their kids to face challenges by modeling discernment and teaching strong decision-making skills. Without loving discipline, kids are robbed of the chance to develop these four basic skills. Talk briefly about what happens to kids who don't have self-regulation, kids who don't have resiliency, kids who don't have balance, and kids who don't have competence or confidence. If no one else mentions it, point out that the absence of these life skills can make kids more susceptible to thoughts of suicide.

Slide 7

Highlight a few of the tips for discussion. For example, you might talk about the challenges of recognizing the difference between something that hurts and something that harms—that is, recognizing the difference between something that will ultimately build character in them and something that will cause permanent psychological scars. Or you might talk about how parents can extend grace to their kids without fostering a sense of entitlement.

Slide 8

The fourth foundational building block is support. Support is the nitty-gritty part of parenting. Encourage group members who are comfortable with the idea to talk about the kind of support—or lack of support—they received from their parents, and what it meant to them. Emphasize that if kids don't get support from parents, they'll look for it elsewhere, whether it's on a school playground or an online chat room.

Slide 9

Talk briefly about the challenges of being a supportive parent, using the items on the list as a reference. For example, intentionality involves making plans to engage with our kids. However, as our kids get older, their schedules get fuller. Trying to make plans and be intentional becomes a lot harder.

4. Embrace the Challenge

[About 15 minutes]

Divide the group into three teams. Assign each team one of these three foundational building blocks for defending against suicide: self-care, loving discipline, and support. Say something like this: **We've talked about these building blocks in a general way. Now it's time to get specific. Your team is going to answer one question about your assigned building block: What does this building block look like in a healthy parent-child relationship?** Encourage teams to brainstorm as many different responses as they can think of.

During the activity, you will need to circulate among the teams. Use the following suggestions to supplement their ideas.

Self-care

- It looks like a father reading a book in the family room.
- It looks like a mother working out with her daughter.
- It looks like a father talking at the dinner table about a Bible passage that spoke to him during his morning devotions.

Loving discipline

- It looks like a mother praying hard and resisting the urge to step in and make things better when her son experiences the consequences of a bad decision.
- It looks like a father taking time to cool off before he reacts to his daughter's disobedience.
- It looks like a mother refusing to give in on her daughter's grounding, even though it means her daughter will miss a sleepover and be angry at her all weekend.

Support

- It looks like a father working overtime to afford a used trombone for his son.
- It looks like a mother quoting one of her daughter's favorite song lyrics to inspire her or cheer her up.
- It looks like a father arranging a private tour of a local college observatory for his astronomy buff son.

Give the teams several minutes to brainstorm and then have them share their responses with the rest of the group. Encourage other group members to react and offer additional ideas.

If you have time, use the questions from the "Embrace the Challenge" section of the participant's book as a review. Ask volunteers to share the responses they came up with for these questions:

- Secure attachment depends on parents meeting three conditions, so that a child knows (1) "I'm safe"; (2) "I can trust my parents"; and (3) "I have a voice, which means I'm confident enough to speak my thoughts and ask for what I need, knowing that my parents will respond and make sure that my needs are met." What specific things can parents do to meet those three conditions?
- How can you take care of yourself in a way that leaves a lasting impression on your kids?

- Of these four qualities—self-discipline, resiliency, balance, and confidence—which one is most important to instill in our kids? Why is it so important? What happens when it’s missing? How can parents instill or reinforce it in our kids’ lives?
- What is the difference between healthy support and unhealthy support, when it comes to our kids?

5. Bring It Home

[About 10 minutes]

Before you wrap up the session, give your group members an opportunity to share how closely the issues of defending against suicide hit home for them. Encourage a few volunteers to share their responses to the questions in the “Bring It Home” section of the participant’s book.

Make sure that the rest of the group responds with a concerned, compassionate, and nonjudgmental spirit to any volunteers who are brave and transparent enough to share their struggles. Close the session in prayer, asking God to make Himself known in an unmistakable way to the teenagers and parents in your group who are struggling with defending against suicide.

Session 1 PowerPoint Text (with Design Suggestions)

[Slide 1]

Secure attachment depends on a child knowing . . .

1. I am safe.
2. I can trust my parent.
3. I have a voice, which means I'm confident enough to speak my thoughts and ask for what I need, knowing my parents will respond and meet my needs.

[DESIGN: Illustration or photograph of a baby with a thoughtful look on her face.]

[Slide 2]

Threats to Healthy Attachment

- Difficult pregnancy or prenatal trauma
- Difficult birth or delivery
- Early hospitalization of the infant
- Toxic stress (illness, mental illness, childhood trauma)
- Adoption

[DESIGN: Photo of a sonogram picture of a baby]

[Slide 3]

Signs, Symptoms, and Consequences of Attachment Issues

1. Manipulative behaviors

These behaviors include badgering to get her way, throwing a tantrum, trying to intimidate others, making threats, and using flattery.

2. Reactive attachment disorder

Feelings of fear and insecurity push the person into survival mode. He reacts without thinking with a fight-or-flight behavior. He cannot respond to his environment—or to love or nurturing—in a rational way.

3. Volatility

A person who lacks attachment often has little or no concern for others. As a result, she has the potential to become destructive or violent.

4. Confusion with other issues

Attachment disorder may be misdiagnosed as ADD/ADHD, anxiety, depression, learning disabilities, PTSD, autism, OCD, and countless other things.

[DESIGN: Photo of a parent and child in a school principal's office]

[Slide 4]

5 Reasons to Make Self-Care a Priority

1. *Self-care enables you to love.*

Jesus said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). You can't love others if you don't love yourself.

2. *Self-care maintains healthy bodies and minds.*

We have a responsibility to be good stewards of the physical and mental resources God has entrusted to our care.

3. *Self-care provides a buffer against illness and disease.*

Benefits include mood elevation and greater mental alertness.

4. *Self-care provides stress relief.*

Stress increases if you don't keep your mind and body in good shape.

5. *Self-care enables you to follow God's commandments and do His work.*

The healthier you are, the more energy you have to play your part in God's plan.

[DESIGN: Photo of a parent and teen working out together.]

[Slide 5]

Self-Care Strategies

Spiritual (Heart)

- Prayer
- Bible study
- Devotions
- Solitude
- Silence
- Scriptural meditation

Mental (Intellect)

- Thinking
- Reading
- Journaling
- Discussing important topics with others

Emotional (Soul)

- Listening to your feelings
- Identifying your emotions
- Coming to a conclusion about they mean and what to do about them

Physical (Body)

- Healthy diet

- Regular exercise
- Adequate rest
- Conscious effort to reduce stress

[DESIGN: Photos of an open Bible, a crossword puzzle, a woman sitting in a garden and a plate filled with healthy food]

[Slide 6]

4 Basic Life Skills That Come from Discipline

Self-regulation

Your child is able to monitor and control his own choices and behaviors, instead of relying on others to do it for him.

Resiliency

Your child is toughened through age-appropriate consequences. Because she hasn't been shielded from the world, she has the life experience not just to withstand disappointment and setbacks, but also to learn and grow stronger from them.

Balance

Your child is able to maintain mental and emotional equilibrium. He has the ability to bounce back to a healthy outlook after dealing with a difficult situation.

Competence and confidence

By trying new things, failing and trying again, your child eventually achieves a level of competence that, in turn, becomes the foundation of personal confidence.

[DESIGN: Photo of a gymnast on a balance beam]

[Slide 7]

Tips for Building Life Skills in Your Child

Maintain a safe environment.

A safe home environment includes balanced elements of both nurture (love, kindness, and acceptance) and structure (rules, regulations, and consequences).

Distinguish between hurt and harm.

Hurt may be painful and unpleasant, but it can yield positive results. Harm is painful and unpleasant, but it causes permanent or long-lasting damage. As parents, we must protect our kids from harm, but allow them to experience hurt, which produces resiliency.

Provide choices.

Structured choice gives kids a voice and a certain amount of control over their lives. Both are important for the development of competence and self-confidence.

Offer a positive focus.

Verbalize what you want your kids to do, not what you *don't* want them to do.

Allow for do-overs.

If your kids fail to do what you ask, tell them to try again. That's how they learn. "Do-overs" have a greater impact on the brain than negative consequences. They promote memory and reinforce positive behaviors.

Give consequences.

Kids need to understand that bad choices lead to bad consequences, even in adult life. This brings us back to the hurt-versus-harm idea. Consequences are meant to hurt, but not harm.

Listen.

Teach your children how to use their verbal skills. Model appropriate ways of expressing emotions. Listen to them when they talk. Zero in on the real questions they're asking. Help them understand why you require a certain kind of behavior.

Offer justice, mercy, and grace.

Justice is the response that fits the behavior. It teaches children the difference between good and bad and highlights the impact of wrongful choices and actions. Mercy is not receiving the negative consequences you deserve. Grace is getting positive consequences you don't deserve.

[DESIGN: Photo of a parent listening while his or her teen is talking]

[Slide 8]

What Does a Supportive Parent Do?

- Supplies her child with basic resources
- Creates an environment in which those resources can be put to best use
- Promotes the development of her child's unique identity
- Fosters her child's ability to think
- Provides her child with the skills and tools he'll need later in life
- Becomes a student of her child
- Learns what lights his fires and what throws him for a loop
- Stimulates her child's unique talents and interests
- Soothes her child's special disappointments and hurts

[DESIGN: Photo of a mother comforting her teenage son]

[Slide 9]

What Does Support Include?

A safe environment

Kids have a place to learn, grow, and find out who they are.

Opportunities

Kids have the freedom to experiment, dabble in new interests, and practice new skills in a place where they're loved and accepted, even when they fail.

Intentionality

Parents plan ways to play a genuinely supportive role in their kids' lives.

Active engagement

Parents are present and available, and come up with creative ways to engage their kids.

Resources

Parents supply their kids with the materials, tools, and equipment they need to pursue their interests.

Encouragement

Parents nudge their kids in the direction of increasing independence while letting them know that they have their backs—and always will.

Communication

Parents ask their kids open-ended questions about their day. They inquire about their friends and their interests. They practice the art of being a good listener. They try to be available to enter into conversation whenever their kids want to talk.

Commitment

Parents teach the value of follow-through and dedication by gently urging their kids to see projects through to the end.

Conflict resolution

Parents show kids how to handle conflict with intentionality, patience, and grace.

Crisis management

Parents demonstrate how to handle problems in a calm, honest, and confident way.

A support network

Parents make a conscious effort to pull in reinforcements by getting kids involved in a strong church youth group and encouraging them to form lasting relationships with other solid, healthy adults, including teachers, pastors, youth leaders, coaches, mentors, aunts, and uncles.

Faith modeling

Parents make family devotions and prayer a regular part of life in their household, talk about their relationship with the Lord, and lay the foundation for their kids to establish their own personal faith-relationships with God.

[DESIGN: Photo of parents watching their teenage daughter perform a magic trick in their home]

Session 2

Things That May Make Your Children Vulnerable to Suicide

Get Ready

For this session, you'll need

- Assortment of craft supplies and other objects (Step 1)
- Computer for PowerPoint presentation (Step 3)
- Screen for PowerPoint presentation (Step 3)

Aim

To help group members understand how worldly values, significant losses, divorce, domestic abuse, and bullying make kids vulnerable to suicide, and help them devise workable strategies for addressing those factors in their kids' lives.

1. Break the Ice

[About 10 minutes]

For this activity, you'll need to assemble a large assortment of objects. You're going to divide the group into small teams or pairs. Each team or pair will use the objects to create something that represents divorce and the effect it has on kids. Remind group members that divorce is one of the factors that make kids vulnerable to suicidal thoughts.

Think creatively as you round up your objects. You'll certainly want to include craft supplies, such as glue, markers, scissors, tongue depressors, construction paper, clay, glitter, toothpicks, pipe cleaners, and yarn. You might also add unusual objects, such as wooden blocks, dominoes, a Jenga set, a threaded needle, and swaths of torn fabric, small picture frames and anything else you can think of. In other words, give the teams plenty of creative things to work with.

Before the session, create your own representation in order to give teams an idea of what you're looking for. For example, you might create three figures—a man, a woman, and a child—from clay. You might then stick several toothpicks in the figures of the man and the woman, to represent the arrows and barbs they've used to hurt one another.

Give the teams a few minutes to work, and then ask each one to display and explain its creation. Afterward, ask the following questions to guide your discussion of the activity:

How does divorce impact kids for life? If no one else mentions it, suggest that it robs them of their security. After all, if the most basic and important unit in their life, their family, can't stay together, what can?

How would you rank divorce, compared to worldly values, significant losses, domestic abuse, and bullying, in terms of negative impact on kids? Encourage group members who grew up as children of divorce to offer their unique insights on the topic. Obviously there is no right or wrong answer. And the last thing you want is a heated debate among people who have experienced a significant loss, children of divorce, and victims of domestic abuse. Your goal here is simply to illustrate that each of these factors has an enormous impact on kids.

2. Explore the Word

[About 5 minutes]

Say something like this: **Of the five factors we mentioned, worldly values is the one that would seem to have the least immediate and dramatic impact on kids. But that's what makes it so dangerous. As parents, we can't always see the impact worldly values are having until they've caused damage. That's why the apostle Paul was so adamant in his warning to the believers in Rome.**

Ask someone to read Romans 12:2. Use the following questions to guide your discussion of the passage. Encourage volunteers to share the answers they wrote in their participant's book.

What does it mean to conform to this world, or as some Bible versions say, to conform to the pattern of this world? If no one else mentions it, suggest that it means allowing the things of this world to change us—or to impact the way we think of life. It means responding to worldly influences and challenges in the way the world expects us to respond.

How can we help our kids test and discern what God's will is—especially when they're faced with worldly influences, significant losses, divorce, domestic abuse, or bullying? If no one else mentions it, suggest that God's Word, prayer, and the Holy Spirit are our three most powerful allies in this pursuit.

3. Consider the Need

[About 20 minutes]

Say something like this: **As parents, we want to do everything in our power to equip our kids with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes they need to succeed in life. Yet there's a sense that all bets are off once they step outside the front door. The truth is,**

we're not the only influences in their lives. So even when we do all we can, our kids will still face circumstances that hurt them.

We need to be aware of influences and situations that can take our children by surprise and shake their spiritual, mental, and emotional stability. Worldly values, significant losses, divorce, domestic abuse, and bullying all fall under this category. Let's talk first about worldly values.

Start your PowerPoint presentation. Use the accompanying questions and comments to guide your discussion.

Slide 1

Solid values are the anchors that will keep our kids from drifting off course when the winds of the world begin to blow. Ideally, our children get those values from us. However, we can't be confident we're passing along solid values until we know what our true values are. This means that the first step in the process has to include careful self-examination. If you're comfortable with the idea, share your answers to the questions on Slide 1. Talk briefly about your attitudes, investment, and motivation. Encourage a few volunteers to do the same.

Slide 2

If our kids don't get solid values from us, they're susceptible to being influenced by less solid worldly values. Talk briefly about specific worldly values that are always threatening to infiltrate our kids' belief system. If no one else mentions them, suggest things like the shallow materialism of media influencers, the narcissism of the "selfie" culture, and the media-driven notion that anyone who disagrees with you politically is your enemy.

Yet there are steps we can take to make our kids resistant to worldly values. That begins with anchoring them to values that honor God and align with His Word. Here are a few tips for making that happen. Talk briefly about how to establish and promote a family identity.

Slide 3

The next factor we need to talk about is significant loss. As odd as it may sound, we can get a head start on suicide-proofing our kids by helping them confront the inevitability of loss as early as possible. We're not talking about tossing them into the deep end of the pool before they're ready for it. Instead, we're talking about a slow, gradual, age-appropriate process that leaves kids with a basic understanding that, while the world can rob us of many beautiful and meaningful things, it can never take away our dignity and purpose as children of God.

We need to prepare them for two types of losses: concrete and existential. Concrete losses involve separation from real people and real things in the physical world. Existential losses are ones we experience inside, whether or not there's any

corresponding loss in the physical world. Here are some examples of each. Ask a few volunteers to share briefly about concrete or existential losses that impacted their lives.

Slide 4

The best way to prevent grief and loss from morphing into suicidal thoughts and actions is to keep short accounts. Acknowledge the pain and deal with it right away. If our kids are hit by a devastating loss, they must not try to convince themselves that it's no big deal, or that they need to stay strong and not disappoint the rest of the family, or other such thoughts. Instead, they need to make up their minds to plunge straight into the sadness, and then keep on swimming until they reach the other side. It may hurt for a while, but it's far better than any of the alternatives.

Here are a few coping strategies to remember. Talk briefly about how to overcome kids' resistance to these coping strategies. For example, if your child is reluctant to get involved in a support group, you might get him to agree to attend a certain number of meetings. If, after that, he's still opposed to it, you can try a different approach.

Slide 5

The third factor is the one we touched on at the beginning of this session: divorce. In the U.S. alone, it's estimated that there are 800,000 divorces each year, leaving more than one million children affected. Research tells us that there's a 55 percent increase in attempted suicide in kids whose parents have divorced or are going through a divorce. There's also a 90 percent increase in the need for psychological help.

Here's a partial list of the specific effects that divorce can have on a child. Encourage group members who have gone through divorce, either as a child or as a parent, to share their personal experiences with the effects on the list and add any others that aren't on it.

Slide 6

How can parents guide their kids through the pain and loss of divorce? There are no easy answers, especially when the parents are experiencing their own pain and loss—not to mention anger, guilt, betrayal, humiliation, and countless other emotions. But here are some steps you can take. Encourage group members who have gone through divorce to weigh in on the challenges of certain steps. For example, someone in your group may have some valuable tips for getting along with an ex-spouse.

Slide 7

The fourth factor is domestic abuse. Multiple studies show that domestic abuse survivors experience suicidal thoughts at a dramatically higher rate than people who haven't experienced abuse. To complicate matters, kids and teens who find the courage to come forward with information about the abuse they've witnessed or experienced at home may not feel comfortable disclosing their deepest feelings. Those who do admit to having suicidal thoughts don't always connect them with their upbringing.

As we address this sensitive topic, the first thing we need to do is understand what domestic abuse is.

Slide 8

There are specific ways in which exposure to domestic abuse can steer kids in the direction of taking their own lives. The connection between being a victim of domestic abuse and developing a suicidal mentality is very real, as this list shows. Talk briefly about how parents can counteract these dangerous thoughts in their kids.

Slide 9

The fifth factor is bullying. Kids who are the targets of bullying have an increased likelihood of developing anxiety, depression, psychotic experiences, substance abuse, headaches, stomachaches, tiredness, dizziness, sleeping issues, and back pain. Add all this together and you can see why bullied teens are more likely to harm themselves. Ask volunteers to share briefly about their own experiences with bullying.

Slide 10

One of the problems parents face in dealing with bullying is that kids are often reluctant to discuss it. Here are some questions you can use to draw your kids out. Talk briefly about which of the questions your kids would be likely to answer right away, and which ones might take some prompting.

4. Embrace the Challenge

[About 15 minutes]

Divide the group into five teams. Assign each team one of the five factors you discussed: worldly values, significant losses, divorce, and domestic abuse. Say something like this: **Your goal is to come up with a list of workable suggestions and strategies for making teens less vulnerable to your team's assigned factor—and, in turn, making them less vulnerable to suicide.**

Encourage team members to incorporate into their discussions and strategy-making their responses to the questions in the “Embrace the Challenge” section of the participant's book. Give the teams several minutes to work. When their lists are complete, ask each team to share its tips and strategies. Encourage the rest of the group to react to the team's ideas and suggest ideas for making them work.

Use the following suggestions to supplement the teams' ideas.

Worldly values

- Be prepared with answers when kids ask tough questions that challenge your family identity, such as, “Why is God's value system best?” or “How can I know what God is saying?”
- Emphasize the disciplines of Bible study, spiritual meditation, prayer, and biblical teaching. Do it not just with your words, but also with your actions.

Significant losses

- Introduce age-appropriate books and movies that deal with loss. Give kids a chance to talk about their reactions.
- Invest your emotional energy in healthy and life-giving relationships. Make new friendships to help you move forward.

Divorce

- Try a period of separation to provide a break from frequent arguments and to give spouses a clearer perspective on the problems they're contributing to their marriage.
- Encourage kids to share their feelings in a way that works for them, whether it's drawing or taking a long walk while the two of you talk, or writing them in a journal.

Domestic abuse

- If you're facing imminent danger or have just experienced physical harm, call 911 without delay. Let the police intervene and allow the process to unfold from there.
- Insist that your spouse seek professional help. Create a crisis by giving him or her an ultimatum ("Either we get counseling, or I'm staying away until you're ready to resolve this problem").

Bullying

- Check your kids' emails, texts, and social media postings. Make sure that they're being treated well, treating others well, and being good decision-makers.
- Give your kids phrases they can use in a bullying incident. They could use humor to defuse a tense situation, or use straightforward language, such as "That's enough!"

5. Bring It Home

[About 10 minutes]

Before you wrap up the session, give your group members an opportunity to share how closely the issues of worldly values, significant losses, divorce, domestic abuse, and bullying hit home for them. Encourage a few volunteers to share their responses to the questions in the "Bring It Home" section of the participant's book.

Make sure that the rest of the group responds with a concerned, compassionate, and nonjudgmental spirit to any volunteers who are brave and transparent enough to share their struggles. Close the session in prayer, asking God to make Himself known in an unmistakable way to the teenagers and parents in your group who are struggling with factors that make kids vulnerable to suicide.

Session 2 PowerPoint Text (with Design Suggestions)

[Slide 1]

Examine Yourself

Attitudes

What is your basic worldview? Your attitudes—how you look at life—have a way of shaping and informing the choices you make.

Investment

Time, money, and energy are precious commodities. What you do with them says volumes about your true value system. If people looked at your bank account records, your credit card bill and your calendar, what would they learn about you?

Motivation

To determine true values, it pays to look beneath the surface. People can do similar things for very different reasons. Ask yourself, “What is the ultimate purpose behind my involvement in _____?” You may be surprised at your own answer.

[DESIGN: Illustration of a human brain, with three different areas shaded. The first is labeled “Attitudes”; the second is labeled “Investment”; the third is labeled “Motivation.”]

[Slide 2]

Strategies for Implementing Godly Values in Your Kids

Build a family identity.

Help your children find their sense of group identity at home by clearly identifying the values and beliefs you hold as a family. Take steps to ensure that your family’s values stand in stark contrast to the values of the world.

Practice assurance and acceptance.

Make your home the kind of place where these issues can be discussed openly. Encourage your kids to ask questions and challenge basic assumptions. Explain why you believe what you believe. Most importantly, let your kids know that you’ll always love and cherish them, no matter what they do.

Be consistent and steadfast.

Model your values in front of your kids. Make integrity the centerpiece of your family relationships. Keep your promises, and do what you say you’re going to do.

Be intentional.

Assess your values frequently so that you can keep tabs on where you and your family stand, regarding the things that matter most in life.

[DESIGN: Photo of a family having devotions together]

[Slide 3]

Concrete Losses

- Death of a parent, sibling, extended family member, or close friend
- Rejection by friends (including bullying)
- Major life transition: move to a new town, new school, new community
- Financial hardship due to a parent's loss of employment
- Loss of home due to foreclosure or inability to pay rent
- Breakup with boyfriend or girlfriend
- Disappointment or failure in sports or academics
- Death of a pet
- Parents' divorce
- Injury or serious illness
- Church split or moral failure on the part of spiritual leaders

Existential Losses

- Loss of self-respect
- Loss of hopes and dreams
- Loss of meaning, significance, or purpose
- Loss of identity during adolescence (due to physical and hormonal changes, peer rejection, or related issues)
- Loss of the freedom to be oneself after puberty (especially for girls, due to pressure to adopt a more sexualized persona)
- Loss of individuality (due to pressure to conform)
- Loss of choices or control (often leading to eating disorders or cutting)
- Loss of security (due to loss of parent, home, or finances)
- Loss of faith and trust, whether in parents, adults, society, the church, or God
- Loss of social group or support system (due to transition or peer rejection)
- Loss of parents, mentors, and role models
- Loss of peace, routine and a sense of balance
- Loss of childhood innocence
- Loss of imagination and creativity
- Loss of independence

[DESIGN: These two lists should appear as side-by-side columns.]

[Slide 4]

Coping Strategies for Grief

- Lean into your faith and relationship with God.
- Find a safe place to express your emotions (for example, in a journal).
- Seek help and support outside the family. Don't be afraid to ask for what you need.
- Engage the services of a licensed professional counselor. (Face-to-face sessions are most helpful.)
- Stay connected with friends and family.

- Create a ritual, a tradition, or an event of some kind to memorialize your loss (for example, an annual 5K run to raise money for cancer research in memory of a deceased loved one).
- Preserve memories in scrapbooks or photo albums.
- Join a grief support group. Share your story with others who have experienced a similar loss.
- Take good care of yourself physically (diet, exercise, sleep).

[DESIGN: Photo of a mother and teenage daughter finishing a charity 5K race]

[Slide 5]

What Effects Does Divorce Have on Kids?

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Lower motivation for routine and responsibilities
- Anger and irritability
- Stress
- Loneliness
- Lowered self-esteem and self-confidence
- Conflicting loyalties
- Reduced satisfaction with life
- Defiance
- Disconnection from others, including friends
- Distraction and difficulty in school
- Hyperactive-type behaviors
- Loss or increase of appetite
- Regression to a younger age in their behaviors, to seek attention and safety
- Wanting to be gone from the house as much as possible

[DESIGN: Photo of a torn wedding picture]

[Slide 6]

How to Lessen the Negative Impact of Divorce on Your Kids

Avoid divorce in the first place.

With the strong support of family members and friends, pastors, mentors, and a marriage counselor, couples can work through virtually any issue—if they're willing to do the work.

Listen to your children.

Provide a safe place and undistracted time to talk about what they're thinking and feeling. Let them know that it's *okay* to feel or think those things. Help them come up with ways to manage their internal turmoil.

Get along with your ex-spouse.

It's easier said than done, but it's critical for your children's sake. You expect your children to get along with others. This is a perfect opportunity to model how to do that.

Put stress buffers and crisis prevention measures into place.

Adjusting to the loss of the marriage is hard enough for kids, so it's up to parents to absorb other losses as much as possible, instead of making choices that require kids to lose a home, school, friends, or beloved pets.

Respond quickly and proactively to any signs of divorce-related problems in your children.

Listen to the concerns of your kids' teachers, pastors, and other trusted people who can provide you with realistic feedback. If you see changes in academic progress, social relationships, behavior, or physical or psychological health, seek help quickly.

[DESIGN: Photo of the torn wedding photo from Slide 5, taped back together]

[Slide 7]

Domestic Abuse Involves More Than Physical Violence

It also involves

- aggressive behaviors such as screaming, yelling, and throwing objects
- intimidating, bullying and destroying a spouse's possessions
- calling a spouse names and demeaning a spouse privately or in front of others, even if claimed to be said "in jest"
- controlling the household finances so that a spouse doesn't have access to money
- using coercion or threats (to divorce, to take the kids away, to stop working)
- isolating or restricting a spouse by deciding who the spouse can or can't be friends with and when the spouse can and can't see them
- demanding accountability for everything done and every place visited
- minimizing and denying negative actions and their impact
- blaming the spouse for one's own anger, violence, selfishness, and irrational behaviors
- telling the children that the spouse is a bad parent and blaming that spouse for the family's problems
- using his maleness or her femaleness as a privilege over the spouse.

[DESIGN: Photo or illustration of siblings trying to comfort one another; in the background, a shadow on the wall shows their parents arguing]

[Slide 8]

What Goes Through Kids' Minds When They Witness or Experience Domestic Abuse?

I don't deserve to live.

The child internalizes the idea that he's worthless. *Dad hates me, he thinks. I guess I should never have been born.*

I don't want to grow up to be like Dad.

A genuine anxiety of duplicating the sins of the father can drive a child to bail out on life altogether.

I feel helpless and hopeless.

The child feels like a complete failure. *I couldn't protect Mom, she thinks, and I couldn't protect myself. It's hopeless.*

I'm walking on eggshells.

The child lives in a state of constant dread and anxiety. She abandons all hope for a better future.

It's making other problems worse.

Violence in the home is the direct enemy of strong attachment and a sense of security. It sets the child up for a life of anxiety and an obsession with survival.

I want to escape.

All the child can think about is finding a way out. In a life dominated by domestic violence, he sees suicide as an attractive option.

[DESIGN: Photo of a teen deep in thought]

[Slide 9]

What Is Bullying?

- Making fun of others
- Spreading rumors or gossip
- Physically assaulting someone
- Threatening someone
- Purposefully excluding someone
- Coercing someone into doing something they don't want to do
- Damaging or destroying someone's personal property
- Sending mean messages by email or text, intending to hurt someone
- Pretending to be someone else online to hurt someone
- Stealing a person's account information to send damaging messages to others
- Sending sexually suggestive pictures or messages about another person
- Sending embarrassing or unflattering pictures of someone

[DESIGN: Photo of a girl looking at her phone, with a sad, scared expression on her face]

[Slide 10]

Questions to Get Your Kids Talking About Bullying

- Have you ever witnessed bullying or cyberbullying? If so, what did you see? What

did you do?

- Who tends to bully? What do you think is going on in a bully's mind? What's going on in the mind of someone being bullied?
- What's being done about bullying in your school?
- What are some effective ways to step in when someone is being bullied? How would you want others to step in if or when someone is bullying you?
- If a person were bullied, what would it be like for people to step in and help?
- What are some easy ways to encourage others?
- Why do you think cyberbullying is common?
- How can we use technology in more positive ways?
- In a recent study, eight out of ten kids said they had gone out of their way to do something kind for another kid who was having a difficult time. What type of things could be done for you or others?
- What stops you from finding help for yourself or another person being bullied?
- What are some resources at your school for people who are being bullied? Who needs to know about the bullying to be able to help? What does it mean to be interdependent?
- How can we pray about bullying?

[DESIGN: Photo of a family talking around a dinner table]

Session 3

Mental Health Issues and Suicide

Get Ready

For this session, you'll need

- Items for "The Challenge" (Step 1)
- Computer for PowerPoint presentation (Step 3)
- Screen for PowerPoint presentation (Step 3)
- White board or poster board and marker (Step 4)

Aim

To help group members recognize the connection between mental health issues and suicide, and equip them to assist kids who may be struggling with mental health issues.

1. Break the Ice

[About 10 minutes]

Begin the session with an activity called "The Challenge." Ask for volunteers to perform the simple task of carrying a lunch tray (or a plastic serving tray) with one hand across the room and back as quickly as possible. Your first volunteer will carry just the tray. Your second volunteer will carry the tray, only this time it will be stacked with assorted plastic cups and plates. Your third volunteer will carry the tray, stacked with cups and plates, and

loaded with marbles, heavy ball bearings, and miniature beach balls—things that will make it difficult for the person to keep the tray balanced. Your fourth volunteer will carry the tray, loaded with cups, plates, and assorted spherical objects, while wearing a boxing glove. If you have a fifth volunteer, you can add a blindfold into the mix.

Afterward, ask your volunteers to describe the experience and talk about what made it especially challenging for them. The obvious takeaway is that what was easy for one person was extremely challenging—and perhaps even nearly impossible—for another.

In what ways might a young person who struggles with mental illness be able to empathize with our final volunteer in this challenge? If your group members have trouble making the connection, point out that a task that seems simple to one person—in this challenge, the first volunteer—may seem incredibly difficult to someone who struggles with mental illness, because of the baggage he carries. Talk briefly about how mental illness adds layers of difficulty to life.

What are some things we take for granted that people who struggle with mental health issues can't take for granted? If no one else mentions it, point out that nearly anything could fall in this category. Things that come easily to most people, such as holding a conversation, walking into a classroom, or deciding what to have for dinner, can be overwhelming for people struggling with mental illness.

2. Explore the Word

Say something like this: **The apostle Paul knew what it was like to struggle with a debilitating condition. He referred to his as a thorn in the flesh. He doesn't tell us whether it was a chronic illness, a disability, or a struggle with mental health. All we know is that three times he pleaded with the Lord to take it away, and three times the Lord said no.**

Ask someone to read 2 Corinthians 12:6-10. Use the following questions to guide your discussion of the passage. Encourage volunteers to share the answers they wrote in their participant's book.

How did God explain His decision not to take away Paul's thorn in the flesh? If no one else mentions it, point out that God determined that He could be glorified through Paul's weakness. God used Paul to accomplish extraordinary things. If Paul had no obvious weaknesses or struggles, people might have mistakenly assumed that he was doing those extraordinary things on his own. God worked through Paul's thorn in the flesh to leave no doubt about who was *really* responsible for them.

What might someone who struggles with mental illness take away from Paul's discussion of his thorn in the flesh? Emphasize that God doesn't give people mental illness in order to make Himself look good. Instead, He works through our weaknesses, which are the results of living in a sinful world, in order to accomplish His will. If no one

else mentions it, point out that Paul embraced the Lord's answer of "no" to his prayer request and thrived, despite his weakness.

In 1 Kings 19:4-8, how did God care for Elijah when he was suffering from depression, and what can we learn from that? God sent an angel with food and water, and he allowed Elijah to rest. He made sure Elijah had enough strength for his next journey. If no one else mentions it, point out that God's response to Elijah's desire to die was to care for him with compassion and kindness; God did not respond with anger or impatience. Anyone struggling with mental illness should know that they are still loved by God.

3. Consider the Need

[About 20 minutes]

Say something like this: **What do we do when our kids' "thorn in the flesh" involves mental illness and threatens not just their ability to function, but their will to live? That's the question we're going to tackle in this session, and it's a challenging one.**

Once children enter puberty and their teen years, it's not always easy to know what's normal behavior and what's not. After all, adolescence can be a dramatic and volatile stage of life, even under the best of circumstances. So how can we tell if our son or daughter may have a mental illness and be at risk of suicide? It's a question of knowing what to look for.

Start your PowerPoint presentation. Use the accompanying questions and comments to guide your discussion.

Slide 1

Let's start with depression, which is by far the most common mental and emotional health problem among teenagers. Here's a starter list of behavior that falls within the normal range and behavior that may be signs of depression. Talk briefly about how parents can tell when certain behaviors stop being normal and start becoming symptoms of depression.

Slide 2

Depressed people don't always take their lives. When they do, however, there are usually a few common factors involved. Talk briefly about what each of the factors on the list might look like in a real family. For example, a teen struggling with depression might overreact to a bad grade on a midterm exam, convince herself that it will ruin her GPA, and panic about not being able to get into her first-choice college. The more she catastrophizes the event, the more dangerous her thinking becomes.

Slide 3

Ask volunteers to talk briefly about what these strategies might look like in their lives. For example, who, specifically, would they ask to come alongside their child to offer support? What will they find when they examine themselves?

If no one else mentions it, point out that the list of strategies underscores the helplessness parents feel when their teens struggle with depression. We can be vigilant. We can seek the assistance of doctors and counselors. We can make sure our kids follow their doctor's recommendations. We can pray. Beyond that, though, there isn't much we can do, except remind our kids how much we love and support them.

Slide 4

Diagnoses of anxiety are also sharply on the rise among teens. Anxiety brings its own set of challenges. Encourage volunteers to share a few personal experiences with anxiety, whether they come from their own struggles, the struggles of their teenage child or the struggles of another loved one. Explain that your goal is to put a human face on the struggle, so that people who haven't experienced it can understand it better.

Slide 5

Obsessive-compulsive disorder, or OCD, is a condition of the brain often characterized by intrusive, anxiety-producing thoughts. Sometimes, these thoughts can become so disturbing, unrelenting, and paralyzing that a person with OCD will attempt suicide just to stop the intrusive thoughts. People with OCD develop repetitive or ritualistic behaviors in an effort to get rid of these thoughts and reduce their distress.

As you did with the previous slide on anxiety, encourage volunteers to share a few personal experiences with OCD, whether they come from their own struggles, the struggles of their teenage child, or the struggles of another loved one. Again, explain that your goal is to put a human face on the struggle, so that people who haven't experienced it can understand it better.

Slide 6

Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, can prevent a child from recovering from a traumatic event. It can cause him to regress in skills he's developed. It can disrupt his behavior. It can put a strain on his relationships.

Talk briefly about the kind of traumas that can trigger PTSD, including sexual assault, bullying, a random violent act, and the death of a loved one. If no one else mentions it, suggest that one of the things that makes PTSD so devastating for teens and their parents is that, many times, parents aren't aware of the trauma in their child's life that triggered it.

Talk briefly about what it means to be a LOVESAFE parent. Encourage volunteers to single out the letter in the acrostic they think would be most difficult for them to apply, as well as the letter they think would be most helpful for their teen.

4. Embrace the Challenge

[About 15 minutes]

Say something like this: **The common theme running through our discussion of different types of mental illness is the need to enlist the help of professionals if the symptoms reach a certain level. But it doesn't mean we, as parents, are powerless to help our kids. We can be their biggest champions. But we have to know what to do—and what not to do.**

Spend several minutes brainstorming a list of dos and don'ts for helping teens who are struggling with mental health issues. Encourage group members to call out their ideas so that you can write them on a white board or poster board. Use the following suggestions to supplement your group members' ideas.

Do . . .

- share your family's history of mental illness your child's medical doctor and therapist.
- talk to your child frequently about the stress he's experiencing at school.
- find a therapist who specializes in working with adolescents.
- pay attention to the impact that your child's mental illness has on the other people in your family.

Don't . . .

- overreact when your child is feeling down for a day or two.
- overlook the opinions, insights, and observations of other adults in your child's life.
- make light of your child's feelings of hopelessness or despair.
- offer a lot of unrequested advice.

Review your two lists. Draw a star next to the ideas that your group members consider the most important to remember. Encourage group members who struggle with mental health issues, or who have kids who struggle with them, to share their thoughts on various ideas, based on personal experience.

If you have time, use the questions from the "Embrace the Challenge" section of the participant's book as a review. Ask volunteers to share the responses they came up with for these questions:

- How can you tell whether your child is facing the normal ups and downs of life as a teenager or struggling with depression?
- How should parents respond when anxiety starts to control what their child will or won't do?
- What specific steps can a parent take to help a child who's in an obsessive-compulsive routine, such as checking a door ten times to make sure that it's locked?
- How can parents find the right mental health professional for their child?

5. Bring It Home

[About 10 minutes]

Before you wrap up the session, give your group members an opportunity to share how closely the issue of mental health hits home for them. Encourage a few volunteers to share their responses to the questions in the “Bring It Home” section of the participant’s book.

Make sure that the rest of the group responds with a concerned, compassionate, and nonjudgmental spirit to any volunteers who are brave and transparent enough to share their struggles. Close the session in prayer, asking God to make Himself known in an unmistakable way to the teenagers and parents in your group who are struggling with mental health issues.

Session 3 PowerPoint Text (with Design Suggestions)

[Slide 1]

Normal Teenage Behavior

- A day or even several days of feeling down, especially when coupled with a significant event
- Typical teenage irritability (annoyed by parents, siblings, schoolwork, etc.)
- Prioritizing activities in a healthy manner, even if that means dropping out of some of them
- Skipping periodic meals or occasional overeating
- Naps several days of the week, staying up later than is beneficial (and still able to function normally)
- Occasional “off” days, restless after sitting in classes all day, overwhelmed by big decisions
- Some sleepiness, lack of energy, especially if not getting enough sleep
- Expressed frustrations, questioning self-worth (especially after a big-deal event)
- Questions about death or the meaning of life

Clinical Depression

- Persistent low mood or sadness
- Fatigue or low energy levels
- Feelings of dejection, despondency, apathy, and hopelessness
- Lack of energy
- Trouble sleeping, or sleeping a lot more than usual
- Significant weight loss or weight gain
- Loss of interest in work, recreational activities, interests
- Neglect of personal hygiene
- Cognitive abilities are slowed or difficult
- Anger
- Inability to function in normal tasks
- Suicidal thoughts

[DESIGN: The two lists should be presented as side-by-side columns.]

[Slide 2]

How Does Depression Lead to Suicide?

1. Catastrophizing

Depression causes people to make mountains out of molehills, to dwell on negative thoughts, and to find reasons to abandon hope in the smallest details of life.

2. Isolation

Depression causes people to withdraw. Left alone with their own morbid thoughts, they lose the capacity to think about anything but their misery.

3. Lowered resistance to negative input

Knowing that other teens have chosen to end their lives can cause a depressed teen to entertain suicidal thoughts.

4. Altered perception

Depression changes the way people look at the world. They assume others loathe them as much as they loathe themselves.

5. Psychosis

When people are pushed to their limits, altered perception can trigger a complete break from reality. Once they cross that line, they're capable of almost anything.

[DESIGN: Photo of a teenager who looks depressed]

[Slide 3]

Strategies for Helping a Teen with Depression

Connect with your child.

Be empathetic and compassionately curious about what's going on in her life. Ask open-ended questions designed to draw her out, such as, "How would you describe your feelings about school these days?" Be an active listener.

Contact other adults in your child's life.

Check in with teachers, coaches, school counselors, youth pastors, or other leaders to see if they've observed anything unusual in his behavior or attitudes.

Get a medical evaluation.

Make an appointment with your doctor as soon as possible to rule out potential physiological factors.

Locate a therapist.

Engage the services of a licensed professional Christian counselor, preferably one who specializes in working with adolescents. You may also consider getting involved in group therapy or a peer support program.

Examine yourself.

Take a close look at your family history, acknowledge any personal issues that you've had with depression, and discuss these matters openly with your child. This will help to normalize his feelings. Any family history of depression is vital information to relay to the medical doctor and therapist.

Be directive.

Don't allow your teen to minimize the situation. If she doesn't want to see a counselor, find out why. Provide options by saying, "You can see therapist X or therapist Y—the choice is yours." But make sure the issue doesn't go unaddressed.

Be a good model.

Set a positive example for your child in terms of good nutrition, exercise, sleep, and healthy relationships with God and other people.

Explore appropriate medications.

Today there are many different medications available for the treatment of depression.

[DESIGN: Photo of the teenager from Slide 2 talking to a medical doctor]

[Slide 4]

Warning Signs of Anxiety

- Worry, edginess, jumpiness, or tense stomach sensations occur more days than not and persist for several months
- Persistent muscle tension
- Concentration is difficult, when not the norm for this child
- Displays anxiety that seems excessive for the situation
- Focuses anxiety on a possible future situation that may or may not occur
- Difficulty controlling or containing worried thoughts or feelings
- Sleep disturbances (restlessness, difficulty falling or staying asleep)
- Easily fatigued
- Physical or emotional symptoms cause problems in social, academic, or other important areas of functioning

[DESIGN: Photo or illustration of a teen lying awake in bed with an anxious look on her face]

[Slide 5]

5 Steps to Treating OCD at Home

Step 1: Be aware.

Recognize the disorder for what it is. When problematic thoughts arise, tell your child, "This thought is an obsession."

Step 2: Relabel.

Realize that the intrusive obsessive thoughts don't reflect reality, but are rather the result of OCD. Rename it by saying, "You're having an intrusive thought that is false."

Step 3: Reattribute.

Recognize that the intensity and intrusiveness of the thought or urge is caused by OCD. It may be the result of a biochemical imbalance in the brain.

Step 4: Refocus.

Replace the obsession with a positive thought. Shift your child's attention by having him do some constructive activity.

Step 5: Re-evaluate.

Help your child refuse to take the OCD thought at face value. Disarm it by saying, “This is your OCD. It has no meaning.”

[DESIGN: Photo of a doorknob with a lock in it and a photo of an oven dial]

[Slide 6]

How to Be a LOVESAFE Parent

If your child is struggling in the aftermath of a traumatic event, remember this acrostic.

Listen

Listen to your child’s experiences of the traumatic event without trying to correct distorted perceptions or offer words of comfort.

Observe

To decide whether or not professional help is needed, record any changes in physical, emotional, or social patterns you’ve seen in your child since the traumatic event happened.

Validate

Tell your child that her post-trauma thoughts and feelings are real and understandable.

Engage

Help your child choose people to be around who are likely to be a comfort and who will encourage healthy interaction.

Teach self-care

To reduce stress and facilitate healing, encourage your child to stay hydrated, eat small meals throughout the day, participate in some physical activity, and get plenty of sleep.

Allow alone time

Too much attention can cause her to dwell on the traumatic event more than is necessary. She needs short periods of time alone to engage in quiet, safe activities she enjoys.

Find support

Recovery from PTSD usually requires help from friends, family members, teachers, pastors, doctors, and mental health professionals.

Encourage

Frequent and consistent encouragement is necessary to instill hope in your child. Encourage him to engage in regular, rigorous, and safe exercise to diffuse the disruptive physical and emotional reactions to trauma.

[DESIGN: Photo of a father in a deep conversation with his teen son]

Session 4

Technology and Suicide

Get Ready

For this session, you'll need

- Cellular phone and internet connection (Step 1)
- Computer for PowerPoint presentation (Step 3)
- Screen for PowerPoint presentation (Step 3)

Aim

To help group members recognize the potential for harm that social media and technology present, and to help them devise workable strategies for protecting their kids.

1. Break the Ice

[About 10 minutes]

A few hours before the session is scheduled to start, post a brief message to each of the social media platforms that you use. Ideally, the message will provoke a response, without being too personal or too controversial—perhaps something like “What’s your favorite band?”

To begin the session, share your post with the group and read a few of the reactions or replies you get. Ask, **What’s a non-controversial post that would likely cause an immediate reaction among your social media contacts?** Keep the mood lighthearted as volunteers share their ideas. You might also ask people to share experiences in which a social media post ignited much more of a reaction than they anticipated.

Say something like this: **That instant response and immediate gratification are two of the many reasons kids are drawn to social media. If you were to ask your teens why they have such a strong connection to their devices, what do you think they would say?** Encourage several group members to respond so that you can get a sense of what other parents are facing.

If you were to ask your kids about the dangers of social media and technology, what do you think they would say? It will be interesting to compare the reactions of different kids. Encourage group members to share their feelings about their kids’ social media and technology habits.

2. Explore the Word

[About 5 minutes]

Say something like this: **For a book written thousands of years before the invention of the telephone, the Bible offers some incredible wisdom that we can apply to our social media and technology habits.** Ask someone to read 1 Corinthians 10:31 (“So

whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”). Use the following questions to guide your discussion of the passage.

What does it mean to do something for the glory of God? If no one else mentions it, suggest that it involves intentionally making choices that will cause others to see God’s work in our lives. It involves considering God’s will before choosing to do something.

How can we bring glory to God in the way we use social media and technology? If no one else mentions it, point out that we can use them as means for sharing our faith or for posting Bible passages that are especially meaningful to us. Beyond that, we can make sure that we don’t do anything on social media or when we use technology that damages our Christian witness or hinders our ability to bring glory to God.

3. Consider the Need

[About 20 minutes]

Start your PowerPoint presentation. Use the accompanying questions and comments to guide your discussion.

Slide 1

Before we can determine whether something has the potential to bring glory to God, we have to look at it closely. Encourage group members to add their own pros and cons to the lists. Based on the lists you come up with, ask group members to determine whether the pros of social media and technology outweigh the cons.

Slide 2

If you’re comfortable with the idea, talk briefly about your own social media and technology habits, and what your kids might be learning from you. Encourage group members to talk about how comfortable they feel as role models for their kids in this area.

What are realistic goals for your kids when it comes to social media and technology?

Encourage several different group members to share their goals and talk about how difficult it would be to reach them. If no one else mentions it, suggest that the reward of setting social media limits—that is, protecting our kids—is worth the difficulty.

Slide 3

Over the past several years, there have been a number of reports of teens, both boys and girls, who have taken their own lives after their nude photos were shared publicly online. In some cases, the sharing was a deliberate act of revenge on the part of a boyfriend or girlfriend. In others, it was simply an act of meanness.

It isn’t hard to understand why these young people felt that suicide was their only option. Such personal violations would be devastating for anyone. But they’re especially unbearable during adolescence, when feelings of every kind are raw, intense, and close to the surface. In the mind of a teen, embarrassment and shame

can lead directly to hopelessness and despair. It's not surprising that some kids conclude that suicide is the only way out.

Refer to the story of Sammie in the "Consider the Need" section of the participant's book. Talk about the emotions that Sammie is likely experiencing—and the thoughts that might be running through her head. Talk about the myth that only certain types of kids are susceptible to sexting.

Slide 4

How many of these strategies have you tried with your kids? Encourage group members to talk about the challenges they faced in implementing certain strategies and what they would do differently next time. Talk about which strategies were most effective and why.

What strategies would you add to this list? Encourage several group members to offer their input.

Slide 5

One of the greatest dangers kids face on social media is the exposure to traumatic images. How would you define traumatic images? If no one else mentions it, suggest that they're any images that people aren't psychologically prepared to see. They're images that send a shock to people's system or that linger longer in people's brains than people want them to.

Slide 6

The truth we must face is that social media and technology are designed and targeted to hit kids' sweet spots. They promise instant gratification with a single click. How can parents hope to offer alternatives that can compete with them?

If no one else mentions it, suggest that the advantage parents have is not necessarily the activity itself, but the prospect of doing something together. Whether they acknowledge it or not, most kids enjoy spending time with their family.

Ask volunteers to share other ideas for pulling kids away from their screens and immersing them in the real world.

4. Embrace the Challenge

[About 15 minutes]

Say something like this: **In a group setting like this, making changes to our kids' social media and technology habits seems like the wise and loving thing to do. At home, when it comes time to institute these changes, our wisdom and love will seem less obvious to our kids. But we can prepare for their reactions.**

Divide the group into teams for an “iron sharpening” (Proverbs 27:17) activity. Instruct teams to choose one of the following topics related to social media or technology: texting, social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat) or video games.

Here’s how the activity works. Each team will split into two groups: parents and kids. The “parents” will brainstorm household rules and limits for their chosen topic. The “kids” will push back by explaining why those rules are unnecessary or won’t work. The goal with this activity is to simulate an actual interaction between parents and kids, minus the drama and emotions.

Walk among the teams as they work. Use the following questions to prompt, guide, and supplement their discussions, as needed.

Texting

What kind of example are you, as a parent, setting in this area? How much time do you spend texting? What percentage of your texts would you feel comfortable with your kids reading? What would happen if you set the same limits for your entire family, and not just your kids? What restrictions make sense?

Social media platforms

What kind of example are you, as a parent, setting in this area? How much time do you spend on social media? What percentage of your social media posts and threads would you feel comfortable with your kids reading? What would happen if you set the same limits for your entire family, and not just your kids? What restrictions make sense?

Video games

What kind of example are you, as a parent, setting in this area? How much time do you spend playing video games? Are you comfortable with your kids playing those same video games? What would happen if you set the same limits for your entire family, and not just your kids? How hard is it to get your kids to stop playing once they start? What restrictions make sense?

Afterward, ask teams to recap their interactions and share any insights or workable strategies they came up with.

If you have time, use the questions from the “Embrace the Challenge” section of the participant’s book as a review. Ask volunteers to share the responses they came up with for these questions:

- What is the biggest challenge parents face when it comes to social media?
- Under what circumstances might your child be susceptible to the temptations of sexting, whether that means taking a picture or posing for one?
- How can you make sure that your voice still resonates when you’re not around and your kids are being bombarded by the temptations of social media and technology?

5. Bring It Home

[About 10 minutes]

Before you wrap up the session, give your group members an opportunity to share how closely the issues of social media and technology hit home for them. Encourage a few volunteers to share their responses to the questions in the “Bring It Home” section of the participant’s book.

Make sure that the rest of the group responds with a concerned, compassionate, and nonjudgmental spirit to any volunteers who are brave and transparent enough to share their struggles. Close the session in prayer, asking God to make Himself known in an unmistakable way to the teenagers and parents in your group who are struggling with the issues of social media and technology.

Session 4 PowerPoint Text (with Design Suggestions)

[Slide 1]

The Pros and Cons of Social Media

Pros

Staying connected
Strengthening existing relationships
Modeling positive use
Finding a voice

Cons

No privacy
Virtual reality versus actual reality
Internet narcissism
Disengagement
Brain impairment
Pressure to conform
Ill-effects of multitasking
Involvement with pornography
Cyberbullying

[DESIGN: Photo or illustration of the scales of justice, with the word "Pros" on one side and the word "Cons" on the other]

[Slide 2]

Meeting the Challenge of Social Media in Your Child's Life

1. Do a self-assessment.

Take stock of your own social media habits. Make sure your walk matches your talk.

2. Be a positive role model.

Once you've got control of your own social media and technology use, show your kids what it means to keep this area of your life in line.

3. Develop a workable safety plan.

Be educated. Make up your mind to be the parent. Understand that it's okay for kids to be bored. Impose reasonable age limits on social media and technology use.

4. Set realistic goals.

These might include limiting social media to two hours a day, requiring all screens to go dark at least one hour before bedtime, ensuring accountability with public passwords and using content filters.

5. Build a strong, healthy relationship with your kids.

Give them a sense of belonging at home by fostering mutual respect and taking time to communicate with them.

[DESIGN: Photo of four cell phones sitting abandoned on a counter while a family plays a board game together in the background]

[Slide 3]

How Big Is the Problem of Sexting?

- 11% of teens admit to sending nude photos to strangers
- 80% of teens who have sexted are under the age of 18
- 57% of teens reported that they had been asked to send a sext
- 12% of teen girls feel pressured to sext
- 38% of teen girls and 39% of teen boys say they've received sexually suggestive text messages or emails that were meant for someone else

[DESIGN: Photo of a text screen that reads, "u look [fire emoji]"

[Slide 4]

Practical Strategies to Prevent Sexting

1. Don't give kids a phone with a camera.

Let them use a basic flip phone until they've reached a level of maturity and responsibility required to use a camera phone.

2. Provide phone privileges on the basis of proven maturity.

Guide your kids step by step through the stages of social, personal, and sexual self-awareness and self-control. Don't simply hand out phones as a matter of entitlement or to gain the cool parent award.

3. Be aware of the motivations and psychological factors that lead kids to get involved in sexting.

Talk with your kids about the peer expectations, self-esteem issues, threats from bullies, or requests from an aggressive boyfriend or girlfriend that could drive them to do things they might prefer not to do. Let them know that you understand the allure and the mystery of sexuality and the thrill and excitement of pushing boundaries.

4. State your expectations clearly.

Draw up a set of rules for phone and computer use. Discuss them with your kids and post them in a place where the whole family can see them. Reserve the right to monitor calls and review text messages. Let your kids know that you won't tolerate secrets. Make it clear that random spot-checks can be expected. Establish consequences for violations, and follow through on them.

5. Warn your kids in no uncertain terms about the dangers of sexting.

Point out that there are serious emotional, psychological, and spiritual risks associated with counterfeit intimacy. Remind your kids that digital images never truly go away.

[DESIGN: Illustration of a father handing his annoyed daughter a rotary dial phone]

[Slide 5]

5 Things Parents Can Do About Traumatic Images

1. Don't be afraid to be the tough parent.

No one else is going to censor the things your kids look at. That thankless job falls to you, so you might as well embrace it.

2. Talk about it.

Sit down with your kids for honest and age-appropriate conversations about the power of visual images. Ask them if they've seen things that make them uncomfortable. If they have, talk about why those images impact us negatively.

3. Process together.

If your child has been traumatized by exposure to certain images, make your home a safe place to discuss and work through it. Consider enlisting a professional counselor to help your child.

4. Stay connected.

Keep in mind that the best way for kids to learn about sex, managing violence, relationships, and the value of life is through conversations with you—and not by way of the internet.

5. Do the real thing.

Counteract creeping confusion between the actual world and the virtual world by getting your kids involved with real life.

[DESIGN: Illustration of a mother standing between her teenage son and a computer screen, blocking his view]

[Slide 6]

Ways to Engage Your Kids in the Non-Screen World

- Go on hikes.
- Play catch or Frisbee.
- Throw a football back and forth.
- Ride bikes.
- Encourage nondirective, unstructured play in the backyard.
- Play a real board game instead of the digital version.
- Give them music lessons.
- Provide them with opportunities to participate in outdoor sports.

[DESIGN: Illustration of a video game room. The wall behind the console has been smashed open, revealing an inviting, sunny day outside.]

Session 5

Problem Behaviors and Suicide

Get Ready

For this session, you'll need

- Computer for PowerPoint presentation (Step 3)
- Screen for PowerPoint presentation (Step 3)

Aim

To help group members recognize the signs of substance abuse, eating disorders, and self-harm, and devise strategies for helping their teens avoid or work through these problem behaviors.

1. Break the Ice

[About 10 minutes]

Begin the session with a game called "Spot the Untruth." Instruct group members to think of three "facts" about themselves—two of which are true and one of which is untrue. Explain that the goal is to make it as difficult as possible for the group to guess the untruth. The best way to do that is to think of one or two outrageous truths and a plausible untruth. For example, someone might say, "One, there are currently nine animals living in my house [untrue]. Two, I've never broken a bone or had a cavity [true]. Three, I once played a concert for an audience that included three members of Congress and an Academy Award winner [true]."

After group members share their three facts, have everyone else guess which one is the untruth. Afterward, ask the following questions to guide your discussion of the game:

What are some other untruths that people believe to be true? Emphasize that you're not looking for politically charged answers here. If no one else mentions it, point out that some people believe that indulging in alcohol, drugs, or sex will bring them happiness. Others believe that their bodies need to be starved or harmed in order to make them look or feel better.

Where do these untruths come from? If no one else mentions it, read the apostle Peter's words in 1 Peter 5:8: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Suggest that one of the ways Satan devours us is by causing us to believe lies that hurt us.

2. Explore the Word

[About 5 minutes]

Say something like this: **Let's look at one of the truths our enemy doesn't want us to believe.** Ask someone to read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. Use the following questions to guide your discussion of the passage. Encourage volunteers to share the answers they wrote in their participant's book.

What does it mean for Christians to have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us? If no one else mentions it, point out that we don't have the final say on how we treat our body. It is, after all, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

How do we honor and glorify God with our body? If no one else mentions it, suggest that we treat it as a gift from Him and do everything in our power to keep it healthy, inside and out.

3. Consider the Need

[About 20 minutes]

Say something like this: **If we can help our kids embrace the responsibility—and the opportunity—that comes from the Holy's Spirit's dwelling within us, we can break the power of problem behaviors. Until that time, though, we need to talk about problem behaviors associated with suicide. And we need to start with the most obvious ones: alcohol and drug abuse.**

Start your PowerPoint presentation. Use the accompanying questions and comments to guide your discussion.

Slide 1

Talk briefly about how to make these statistics more relatable. For example, if there are twenty seniors in your church's youth group, that means, statistically speaking, eight of them have used alcohol or drugs in the past twelve months. Ask: **How hard is it for teens to hide their alcohol and drug use from their parents?** Some group members may recall how easy it was for them as teenagers to do things behind their parents' backs. Others may point out that the statistics indicate that most kids *haven't* tried alcohol or drugs in the past year, and attribute that to vigilant parents. Encourage debate on the issue, as long as it doesn't result in finger-pointing or trying to make parents feel guilty.

Slide 2

Which of these signs might go unnoticed if parents aren't specifically looking for them? If no one else mentions, suggest that many of these signs could be mistaken for typically unpredictable teenage behavior. That's why it's important for parents to be vigilant.

Slide 3

Which of these strategies are harder than they sound—and why? Encourage group members to speak from the heart about the difficulties of, say, following through on

consequences. For example, if you take the car keys away from your daughter, you're suddenly faced with the problem of getting her to and from school, work, practices, games, and other places she has to be.

Slide 4

The next problem behavior we need to talk about is eating disorders. The book divides them into three categories. Ask any volunteers who are comfortable with the idea to share, briefly and discreetly, their own personal experiences with one or more of these categories of eating disorders.

Slide 5

The statistics are alarming. Talk briefly about what makes people who struggle with eating disorders so susceptible to suicide. If no one else mentions it, point out that eating disorders are connected to people's self-acceptance. If they can't accept themselves, they may start to believe that they don't deserve to live. Also, the battles with eating disorders are unrelenting. They're being fought every meal. They can wear people down and cause them to consider ending the battles permanently.

Slide 6

Think about Eric's story from your participant's book. If his college roommates had been paying attention, what signs would they have noticed in his appearance and behavior that might have set off some alarm bells? If no one else mentions it, suggest that they might have noticed him obsessing over his calories and portion sizes, being hyperfocused on exercise and making negative remarks about his weight.

Talk briefly about why it's hard for parents to recognize eating disorders in their kids until they become startlingly obvious. If no one else mentions it, point out that kids who struggle with eating disorders learn quickly how to hide them.

What's the best approach to getting help for a teen who's struggling with an eating disorder? If no one else mentions it, point out that medical intervention is essential. That likely will involve regular appointments with a doctor, a dietician, and a mental health counselor. Treatment can last for months, and may require hospitalization or outpatient visits. Point out also that, as is the case with alcoholism and drug addiction, eating disorders never really go away. Instead, people learn to cope with and manage them. As they do, they need warm, nurturing, caring support from their loved ones.

Slide 7

The third and final problem behavior we're going to talk about is self-injury. What messages are teens sending when they harm themselves? If no one else mentions it, suggest that some teens may be indicating that they're unable to deal with the stress they're experiencing. Others may be crying out for help in the only way they know how. Whatever the message, it's important that parents get it. Research suggests that 70 percent of kids who engage in self-harm will make at least one suicide attempt; 55 percent will make multiple attempts.

Slide 8

What's your best strategy if you notice one or more of these signs in your child? If no one else mentions it, emphasize the importance of starting a conversation immediately. You might say something like, "I've noticed some scars on your arm lately. If those scars could talk, what would they say?" You might teach her the basics of self-care, as well as stress-management strategies that work for you. You might introduce a hobby or some other activity that your child can do when she feels like harming herself.

Say something like this: **We began this session talking about lies. Before we finish this PowerPoint presentation, we need to look at four lies in our culture that may contribute to kids' problem behaviors.**

Slide 9

Why is it so easy for parents to get caught up in the performance-driven culture? If no one else mentions it, point out that it's tempting for parents to live vicariously through our kids. Their successes become our successes, and their failures—or mediocrity—become our failures or mediocrity. People who are competitive by nature tend to compare themselves to other parents, based on their kids' performance.

Why is failure—even temporary failure—such a dreaded thing in our culture? If no one else mentions it, suggest that media, especially social media, plays a large role. Sports recap shows highlight the worst plays of the week. Video clips of "fails" often go viral. People see only the end (unsuccessful) result of an action, instead of the courage, skill, and effort that went into the attempt.

Why is it so tempting to believe that we deserve to be happy? If no one else mentions it, suggest that it appeals to our worst self-centered instincts. We convince ourselves that, if we're not happy, there's something wrong with the people around us, something wrong with our circumstances, something wrong with the universe, or something wrong with God.

Why do people turn to alcohol, drugs, sex, and money to meet their needs? If no one else mentions it, point out that the media, especially social media, give us a false image of what alcohol, drugs, sex, and money can do. They show us scenes of people laughing; having fun; fulfilling desires; and posing near enviable possessions in exotic locations, surrounded by beautiful people. What they don't show are the mornings after, the throes of addiction, the loneliness, the feelings of emptiness, the insecurity, and the lack of genuine fulfillment that also accompany these things.

Slide 10

We're not going to say much about this yet, except that the *Alive to Thrive* book identifies four steps for helping your child find healing from problem behaviors. Leave the slide on the screen while you move on to the next section.

4. Embrace the Challenge

[About 15 minutes]

Divide your group into teams. Assign each team one of the four steps toward healing listed on Slide 10. Instruct each team to brainstorm tips and strategies for maximizing the impact of its step. After a few minutes, ask each team to share what it came up with. Use the following suggestions to supplement each team's ideas.

Listen to your child.

Create the right environment, in a place that's free from distractions. Assure your child that there will be no negative consequences for being honest with you. Allow him to express his feelings without interruption. Resist the urge to correct him. Show genuine empathy and compassion for what's happening in his life.

Share your own struggles with emotional pain.

Empathize with feeling alone and confused. Talk openly with your child about how you dealt with your pain—in healthy and unhealthy ways. Spare her any grisly details, but help her understand that your teen years were far from perfect.

Make a menu of options to choose from when your child is experiencing negative emotions.

Work with your child to create a list of healthy activities he can do when he's stressed. The list may include journaling, drawing, physical exercise, singing, listening to music, or anything else that appeals to him. Eventually, you want him to be able to verbalize his feelings. In the meantime, find some options that don't require conversation.

Seek support from other people.

Ask for help from friends, family members, pastors, and healthcare professionals. Social support is important to provide a buffer between your child and the hurtful things in this world. Professional support is necessary to help her learn to cope with pain in healthy ways.

If you have time, use the questions from the "Embrace the Challenge" section of the participant's book as a review. Ask volunteers to share the responses they came up with for these questions:

- *What have your kids learned from your relationship with alcohol and drugs?*
- *Based on your own experience or the experiences of people close to you, what can you tell your kids about eating disorders?*
- *What behaviors would cause you to suspect that your child might be injuring himself or herself?*

5. Bring It Home

[About 10 minutes]

Before you wrap up the session, give your group members an opportunity to share how closely the issues of alcohol and drug use, eating disorders, and self-harm hit home for

them. Encourage a few volunteers to share their responses to the questions in the “Bring It Home” section of the participant’s book.

Make sure that the rest of the group responds with a concerned, compassionate, and nonjudgmental spirit to any volunteers who are brave and transparent enough to share their struggles. Close the session in prayer, asking God to make Himself known in an unmistakable way to the teenagers and parents in your group who are struggling with problem behaviors.

Session 5 PowerPoint Text (with Design Suggestions)

[Slide 1]

The Scope of the Problem

What percentage of kids admitted using alcohol or drugs in the past year?

[DESIGN: Three photos, roughly the same size. The first is of a group of ten high school seniors (or kids who appear to be that age); four of the kids are fully shaded or highlighted in some way; the photo is labeled "12th Graders: 40%". The second is of a group of ten high school sophomores (or kids who appear to be that age); three of the kids are fully shaded or highlighted in some way; the photo is labeled "10th Graders: 30%". The third is of a group of ten eighth graders (or kids who appear to be that age); one of the kids is fully shaded or highlighted in some way, another is shaded over about a third of his or her body; the photo is labeled "8th Graders: 13%".]

[Slide 2]

Signs of Alcohol or Drug Abuse in Teens

- Social withdrawal and loss of interest in favorite activities
- A change in friends
- Sudden downward trend in academic performance
- Health issues and constant illnesses
- Changes in appearance and hygiene
- Lying or secretiveness
- Financial problems, asking for money or stealing
- The presence of drug-related paraphernalia
- Suspicious, troublesome or reckless behavior
- Memory blackouts
- Physical symptoms including trouble sleeping, depression, tremors, restlessness, irritability, loss of appetite, nausea, sweating, and difficulty concentrating

[DESIGN: Photo of a teenager who looks a little disheveled. It should not be obvious from the photo whether or not the teen is showing signs of alcohol or drug use.]

[Slide 3]

6 Strategies for Reducing the Risk of Drug and Alcohol Abuse

1. *Model good behavior.*

Set the example you want your kids to follow when it comes to alcohol and drugs.

2. *Build drug-resistant attitudes in your kids.*

Create an environment that balances love and limits. Express a strong disapproval of alcohol and drugs. Encourage respect for the God-given gift of a healthy body and mind.

Let your kids experience consequences for their actions. Build a positive sense of identity within your family. Encourage church-related activities that build a meaningful personal faith.

3. Talk with your kids about drug abuse.

Keep the lines of communication open. Offer thoughtful and constructive commentary when you see people drinking or smoking pot.

4. Seek out trustworthy adult mentors.

Get to know your kids' teachers and coaches, as well as the parents of their friends. Encourage your kids to form strong connections with healthy role models.

5. Create consequences for unacceptable behavior.

The consequences should escalate as the offenses do. Appropriate consequences might include loss of driving, dating, or phone privileges.

6. Be realistic.

If a problem arises, face it squarely. Get on with the task of helping your child. Refuse to wallow in guilt.

[DESIGN: Photo or illustration of a teenager handing car keys to a parent.]

[Slide 4]

3 Categories of Eating Disorders

Anorexia

Involves:

- starvation
- extreme fear of gaining weight
- and distorted body image

Bulimia

Involves:

- quickly eating enormous amounts of food
- self-induced vomiting
- repeating the cycle

Compulsive Overeating

Involves:

- eating enormous amounts of food, usually as a way of dealing with depression
- getting more depressed by the resulting weight gain
- repeating the cycle

[DESIGN: Near the text for "Compulsive Overeating," a symbol of three curved arrows that form a circle, indicating a cycle that continuously repeats itself.]

[Slide 5]

Eating Disorders and Suicide: By the Numbers

Suicide is the most common cause of death among people who suffer from eating disorders.

People who struggle with bulimia are 7.5 times more likely to commit suicide than people who don't.

People who struggle with anorexia are 31 times more likely to commit suicide than people who don't.

[DESIGN: Photo of a teenage girl looking at herself in a mirror.]

[Slide 6]

Signs and Symptoms of Eating Disorders

Teens who are struggling with an eating disorder . . .

- don't want to eat with the family, and prefer to eat in isolation
- make many trips to the bathroom during or after meals
- spend a great deal of time in the bathroom during the night
- always wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts, even on hot days
- obsess over calories, food labels, and portion sizes
- are hyper-focused on exercise
- wear baggy clothing to disguise weight loss or weight gain
- complain a lot about digestive issues or bowel problems
- always have an excuse as to why they can't eat a meal or why they aren't home during regular mealtimes
- constantly make negative remarks about their looks, weight, or body shape

[DESIGN: Photo of a small bowl of lettuce and a glass of water.]

[Slide 7]

Why Do Teens Intentionally Hurt Themselves?

1. To relieve emotional pain
2. To deal with deep-seated hatred
3. Curiosity or copycatting

[DESIGN: Photo of an X-Acto knife.]

[Slide 8]

Signs That Your Teen May Be Self-Harming

1. Scars on arms or legs (or stomach, breasts, or genitals)

2. Blaming wounds on frequent accidents
3. Keeping sharp objects (razors, utility blades) on hand
4. Bloodstained towels, washcloths, and sheets
5. Wearing long sleeves or long pants, even when the weather is hot
6. Difficulties with relationships
7. Isolation for long periods of time
8. Making statements that reflect self-hatred or feelings of worthlessness

[DESIGN: Three photos, roughly the same size. The first is of a teenager wearing a long-sleeved shirt and long pants. The second is of a teenager sitting alone in his or her room. The third is of a phone text screen that reads, "I wish I'd never been born."]

[Slide 9]

Correcting Faulty Cultural Messages

1. It's all about performance.
2. Failure is bad.
3. I deserve to be happy.
4. Drugs, alcohol, sex and/or money can meet my needs.

[DESIGN: The title of the slide should look like it's been corrected by a proofreader. The printed title should read "Correcting Popular Cultural Messages." But the word "Popular" should be crossed out and the word "Faulty" should be inserted, using a proofreader's caret mark.]

[Slide 10]

4 Steps Toward Healing from Problem Behaviors

1. Listen to your child.
2. Share your own struggles with emotional pain.
3. Make a menu of options to choose from when your child is experiencing negative emotions.
4. Seek support from other people.

[DESIGN: Photo of a parent and child having a meaningful conversation.]

Session 6

Dealing with the Issue of Suicide

Get Ready

For this session, you'll need

- Items for an obstacle course (Step 1)
- Computer for PowerPoint presentation (Step 3)
- Screen for PowerPoint presentation (Step 3)

Aim

To equip group members to recognize the factors involved in suicide and devise strategies for addressing them.

1. Break the Ice

[About 10 minutes]

Begin the session with an obstacle course demonstration. Create a simple course, using chairs, tables and other items in the room. You'll also need two blindfolds and a timer. Ask two pairs of group members to assist you. Explain that one person in each pair will be blindfolded. Send the pairs out of the room while you create the obstacle course.

Bring in the first pair, one of whom should be blindfolded before entering the room. Explain that the sighted partner will stand in one spot and guide the blindfolded partner through the course, using only verbal instructions. Time the partners to see how long it takes them to complete the course.

Bring in the second pair and repeat the process. This time, however, explain that the sighted partner will guide the blindfolded partner through the course by taking his hand and leading him. Time them to see how long it takes. Unless something goes wrong, the second pair's time should be much quicker than the first pair's.

After you put your room back in order, point out that the demonstration offers a vivid example of the difference between talking to people about suicide and walking with them through the depths of their despair. Ask the following questions to guide your discussion of the activity:

Why might it be difficult for some people to get closely involved with someone who's struggling with suicidal thoughts or someone who's been impacted by suicide? If no one else mentions it, suggest that some people may feel helpless, unsure of what to say or do. Others may be afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing and making matters worse. Still others may be wrestling with conflicted thoughts and feelings about suicide.

What's the difference between talking to kids about suicidal thoughts and walking with them through their struggles? If no one else mentions it, point out that walking with someone means enduring the highs and lows with them. It means asking tough questions and absorbing answers that are hard to hear. It means being there when no one else will. It means sacrificing your time, energy, and emotional well-being for the sake of someone you love.

2. Explore the Word

[About 5 minutes]

Say something like this: **One of the best-known passages in all of Scripture deals with this very issue.** Ask someone to read Psalm 23:1-6. Use the following questions to guide your discussion of the passage.

Why was David unafraid, even when he walked through the valley of the shadow of death? If no one else mentions it, point out that David was comforted by God's presence ("you are with me"). He knew God's instructions; he had an appreciation for God's Word. But what mattered most to him was knowing that God walked with him through his darkest hours.

What can we take away from David's experience? If no one else mentions it, suggest that we can do God's work in the lives of people who are struggling with suicidal thoughts by walking with them through their darkest hours, instead of standing back and offering advice from a distance.

3. Consider the Need

[About 20 minutes]

Start your PowerPoint presentation. Use the accompanying questions and comments to guide your discussion.

Slide 1

In order to fully appreciate the need for "walking partners" through the valley of the shadow of death, we need to understand the scope of the suicide problem. Encourage group members to "translate" the statistics into more relatable forms. For example, if 22 percent of teenage girls have contemplated suicide, that means that, statistically speaking, among your child's five closest female friends, at least one of them has thought about killing herself in the past year.

Slide 2

What percentage of the people in your circle of acquaintances struggle with depression? Talk briefly about the fact that depression in teens can be especially difficult to recognize because of the changes going on in their bodies.

Slide 3

Depression is like an explosive device. It's dangerous, but it needs a detonator, or triggering device, in order to be truly destructive. Ask volunteers to talk about how many of these triggers are present in their kids' lives.

Slide 4

Certain factors can make a child more susceptible to thoughts of suicide. Here are a few to look for. If no one else mentions it, point out that virtually all kids wrestle with at

least one or two of these factors at some point in their teenage years. So virtually all teens are susceptible to thoughts of suicide.

Slide 5

Four out of five teen suicide attempts are preceded by clear warning signs. However, the signs are only clear if you know what to look for. Point out that the presence of a warning sign doesn't necessarily mean that a teen is contemplating suicide. But it does give parents a reason to be vigilant, especially if two or three signs are present.

Slide 6

Beyond the warning signs, there are even more serious indicators that your teen is actually in the process of planning suicide. These include your teen saying things like, "I wish I could die" or "If anything happens to me . . ." They also include suicide notes, disturbing diary entries, or verbal expressions of bizarre or unsettling thoughts. If you become aware of these indicators, have a heart-to-heart talk with your teen. Don't be afraid to get "pushy" or ask direct questions like these. Ask volunteers to suggest other direct questions that might be effective.

Use the example of Hayley, from the story in the "Consider the Need" section of the participant's book. What questions would be appropriate for her parents to ask her?

Slide 7

Here's a diagram that you need to keep handy. If you suspect that your child is planning suicide, use the S.L.A.P. method to gauge the danger. Talk briefly about what to do if you discover that your child is running a 25 percent risk of suicide, what to do if it's 50 percent, what to do if it's 75 percent, and what to do if it's 100 percent.

Slide 8

Communicating with your kids is essential to lessening the threat of teen suicide. You can start your conversation by talking about suicide on a cultural level, as an epidemic in our society. Here's how to make the most of your conversation. Talk about briefly about ways to drive home the importance of creating a family plan with your kids.

Slide 9

Ask for volunteers to talk about the experience of losing a family member, friend, or acquaintance to suicide. Encourage them to talk about their regrets about how they handled the situation, what they learned from the experience, and what they would do differently if, God forbid, it ever happened again.

Slide 10

Which of these steps would be the biggest challenge for you—and why? Encourage group members to talk about why certain steps likely would be more difficult for them than others. If you have time, as a group, you might brainstorm ways to lessen the challenges.

Slide 11

We want to end this final slideshow on a positive note. As we've seen, the forces that are aligned against our kids are powerful. But they're no match for the forces that are aligned with us. What's the best prayer a parent can offer for a child who's struggling with thoughts of suicide? Encourage several group members to offer their thoughts.

4. Embrace the Challenge

[About 15 minutes]

Divide the group into pairs. Assign each pair one of the following scenarios. Instruct the partners to role-play the scenario, with one playing the person in need and the other playing the concerned friend. Circulate among the pairs. If you find that some people are really uncomfortable with role-playing a person in need, jump in and play the role yourself. Let the partners work together in trying to help you.

Scenario 1

Hayley's mom (from the story in the "Consider the Need" section of the participant's book) confides in her small group leader. She talks about Hayley's strange behavior in the hallway that evening and shares her concerns that her daughter may be having suicidal thoughts.

Scenario 2

After an *Alive to Thrive* group meeting, Antoine is talking with another parent about his son, who has struggled with depression for at least three years. Antoine was alarmed to discover that his son has experienced three "triggers" for depression in the past six months. His grades are slipping in school, his girlfriend broke up with him, and his grandmother died.

Scenario 3

Holly's daughter, a senior in high school, came home from school in tears. At first, she didn't want to tell her mom what was wrong. Finally, she explained that, in study hall, her best friend Lisa was talking about the best ways to kill yourself. When someone asked her how she knew so much about it, Lisa said that she spends a lot of time researching it. Holly calls Lisa's mom to tell her what Lisa said.

After each role play, encourage the rest of the group members to offer their thoughts on the encounter. Talk about the importance of speaking the truth in each scenario, rather than trying to downplay the situation to make the concerned parent feel better.

If you have time, use the questions from the "Embrace the Challenge" section of the participant's book as a review. Ask volunteers to share their responses to these questions:

- *What sign or signs have you seen in your child that made you worry about the possibility of suicide?*
- *What's a good strategy for getting past the awkwardness and discomfort of talking openly about suicide?*

- *What can you offer a loved one or acquaintance whose child attempted suicide?*

5. Bring It Home

[About 10 minutes]

Before you wrap up the session, give your group members an opportunity to share how closely the issues of suicide hit home for them. Encourage a few volunteers to share their responses to the questions in the “Bring It Home” section of the participant’s book.

Make sure that the rest of the group responds with a concerned, compassionate, and nonjudgmental spirit to any volunteers who are brave and transparent enough to share their struggles. Close the session in prayer, asking God to make Himself known in an unmistakable way to the teenagers and parents in your group who are struggling with the issue of suicide.

Session 6 PowerPoint Text (with Design Suggestions)

[Slide 1]

Suicide (22%) is the second leading cause of death among young people 15-24 years old. Only accidents (45%) cause more.

Approximately 575,000 teens will take action to end their lives this year.

Approximately 4,600 teens will succeed. That's 12 per day.

For every teen who commits suicide, 25 consider it.

17% of all teenagers have thought about suicide in the past 12 months.

22% of female teens have thought about it.

10% of male teens have thought about it.

Girls are 3 times more likely to take suicidal action than boys. Yet 81% of all suicide victims are male. Why? Boys tend to use firearms; girls tend to use drugs or poison, which are less effective. Also, girls tend to verbalize their feelings; boys tend to keep their emotions pent up.

[DESIGN: Photo of 10 teenage girls who are facing away from the camera or whose identities are obscured. Draw arrows pointing to two of the girls, along with the caption, "Thought about ending her life this year."]

[Slide 2]

Why Do Teens Commit Suicide?

1. Depression

75% of all suicides are due to depression, anxiety, or a sense of being trapped in difficult circumstances.

2. Psychosis

Malicious inner voices command mentally ill teens to harm themselves.

3. Impulse

Under the influence of drugs or alcohol, teens lose inhibitions and the ability to make rational and self-protective decisions.

4. Cry for help

Teens want to send a signal to others that something is seriously wrong.

5. Philosophical reasons

Teens make a deliberate, reasoned choice, perhaps motivated by a terminal illness or degenerative disease.

[DESIGN: The top reason, "Depression," should be in a much larger font than the others.]

[Slide 3]

Depression Triggers

- Divorce
- Violence at home
- Struggles at school
- Breakup
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Rejection by friends
- Substance abuse
- Death of a loved one
- Suicide of a loved one, friend, or acquaintance

[DESIGN: Photo or illustration of a detonating device.]

[Slide 4]

Risk Factors

Hormonally driven mood swings

Feelings of helplessness or worthlessness

Aggressive or disruptive behavior

Confusion about gender identity

Poor access to mental health screening

Reluctance to admit having a problem

Bullying

Lack of self control

Risky or impulsive behavior

Substance abuse

Parental separation or divorce

Access to firearms or prescription drugs

Interpersonal conflicts

Previous suicide attempt

Family history of suicide

Chronic pain

Degenerative disease

Serious psychiatric condition

Childhood trauma

Traumatic brain injury

Suicide among other teens in your community

A sudden major loss or humiliation

[DESIGN: Scatter the various risk factors randomly around the page, against a backdrop of a warning sign. The more prominent factors should appear in bigger and bolder typeface, as indicated.]

[Slide 5]

Warning Signs to Look For

- Sudden change in behavior or attitude
- Expressions of intense guilt or hopelessness
- Falling grades or problems at school
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased boredom
- Sudden outbursts of anger or violence
- Substance abuse
- Unsafe sexual activity or other risky behavior
- Lack of response to positive praise
- Physical complaints resulting from emotional stress
- Loss of interest in favorite activities
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Changes in eating habits
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Threatening, talking, or joking about suicide
- Sudden interest in obtaining potential tools for suicide (especially a gun or pills)
- Sudden change in mood from depressed to happy
- Sudden impulse to give away possessions
- Neglecting hygiene or personal appearance

[DESIGN: Photo or illustration of a parent watching a teen from a doorway. The teen is sitting in a chair with a glum look on her face.]

[Slide 6]

Questions to Ask Your Teen

- Where are these negative feelings coming from?
- What is it that's causing you to talk about suicide?
- Have you thought of a plan to kill yourself?
(If the answer is yes, take your teen to a doctor immediately.)
- Exactly what would have to change for you to feel better?

[DESIGN: Photo or illustration of parent and teen walking together.]

[Slide 7]

[DESIGN: INSERT THE S.L.A.P. DIAGRAM FROM PAGE 251 OF ALIVE TO THRIVE.]

[Slide 8]

When Suicide Is Part of Your Kids' Culture

1. Be aware.

Ask your kids what's happening at school. Find out if any of their friends are thinking or talking about suicide.

2. Emphasize relationship.

Spend one-on-one time with each of your kids. Make them feel comfortable with sharing their feelings with you.

3. Adopt realistic goals.

Recognize that you can't protect your kids from all dangers, but you can prepare them for negative experiences.

4. Model stress management.

Demonstrate healthy strategies for dealing with disappointment, disillusionment, depression, and stress. These strategies might include prayer, scriptural meditation, exercise, and embracing a hobby. Talk to your kids about their struggles and help them see that tomorrow is another day.

5. Make a plan.

Establish a family crisis intervention plan. Think of it as a fire drill for stress management. Find ways to communicate negative feelings to others and deal with them before they get worse. Practice these steps 3-6 times a year.

[DESIGN: Photo of a family sitting at a dining table, having a discussion.]

[Slide 9]

When Suicide Hits Close to Home

1. Talk about it as a family.

Give your kids a chance to air their feelings. Encourage them to talk openly about it, any time they need to. Explain that experiencing emotional ups and downs and asking tough questions about God and the meaning of life is normal.

2. Equip your kids.

If they have a friend who's struggling emotionally or contemplating suicide, teach them how to reach out with compassion. If they've lost someone to suicide, ask if they feel responsible. Emphasize that it's not their fault.

3. Use appropriate language.

Don't try to soften things with euphemisms or simplistic language.

4. Emphasize the importance of telling someone.

Help your kids understand that saving a friend's life is more important than keeping a secret. Coach them to talk to a teacher, pastor, or counselor who can intervene when a friend is suicidal.

[DESIGN: Photo of a teen with a grave expression talking on the phone.]

[Slide 10]

When Your Child May Be Considering Suicide

1. Evaluate the risk.

Use the S.L.A.P. method. If you see obvious signs of suicide planning, get your child to a doctor for evaluation immediately.

2. Talk about it.

Create a nonthreatening opportunity to discuss with your child what he's going through. Try going for a drive. Kids sometimes feel more comfortable talking to a windshield than engaging eye-to-eye.

3. Stay calm.

Keep in mind that your tone of voice, body language, and level of anxiety will impact the discussion. Ask the Lord to grant you an extra measure of self-control.

4. Ask questions.

Avoid yes-or-no questions. Instead, ask how, what, or why. Prompt your child with sentences for her to finish. Pose questions such as, "What's going well with you? What isn't? What does it feel like to be inside your body right now?"

5. Seek balance.

On the one hand, you don't want your teen to minimize the situation. On the other hand, you don't want to make mountains out of molehills. Finding the right balance is key to responding.

6. Guide and empower.

Emphasize to your child the need for professional help. Empower him with appropriate choices. Allow him the option of talking to other adult mentors, if you think he would open up to them.

7. End on a positive note.

Focus on life rather than death. Ask your child, "What do you think God wants you to be? What would it look like for you to live a positive, healthy life?"

[DESIGN: Photo of a parent and teen watching a sunrise together.]

[Slide 11]

4 Spiritual Truths to Help You Stay Anchored

1. *God is sovereign over all.*

He is in charge, even when we don't understand what He's doing (Isaiah 43:1-3).

2. *Christ is our Healer and Protector.*

Jesus' suffering on our behalf has the power to heal us and make us whole (Isaiah 53:5).

3. *The Holy Spirit is our Helper.*

Jesus sends Him to us in the midst of our grief and pain to turn our sorrows into joy (John 16:5-7, 20).

4. *Prayer changes things.*

If you're feeling hopeless, anxious, overwhelmed by grief, or empty inside, let prayer be your lifeline (Isaiah 59:1).

[DESIGN: Photo of a parent praying with a teen.]