

This document is the basic manuscript for the attached video.

This has been an unprecedented time and event for almost every person in our community. We have heard the words “crisis” and “trauma” but what they are in essence is “loss”. Everyone connected to this community has suffered some kind(s) of loss as a result of the storm. Some have lost much, if not everything. Others have lost less, but regardless of how it would be measured, all have lost. All people process and respond differently. The weight of loss and how we express it externally to others will be different for every person and widely unpredictable.

It is important to understand a person in crisis and trauma is attempting to function in a place where their normal ability and coping methods have been overwhelmed and are no longer sufficient to that person. They will therefore seek new ways to cope with their feelings. Often these new methods are destructive; drinking, drugs, anger, impulsiveness, self-harm, withdrawal, radical choices to name a few.

Many people will not seek direct help as they process the loss they feel. Many may not admit its effect on them to themselves or others. None the less, they will be affected, and it will be expressed. As life group leaders you are the front line for your group’s mental, emotional, and spiritual help. Folks in your group are going to be processing their loss personally and during group time. We want to help equip you as the leader to care for your people in this unique time.

We need to remember we are not professional counselors and it is not OUR PART to diagnose or fix the people we care for. We are called to love and help them see THEIR PART. We help encourage them in appropriate ways to Jesus, His Word, and the help He offers through others He has raised up and prepared for this moment.

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In this video Terri and I want to give information in three categories:

1. Identifying displays (symptoms) of loss, crisis, trauma, anxiety, and depression.
2. What to do and say in your groups and in one-on-one situations.
3. Provide you with a referral list of resources for needs and situations which surpass what you can provide.

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Things to look for:

How symptoms are displayed will vary in intensity and clarity for each person. Here is a list of general symptoms you can be listening for. If you hear a person alluding to them, at the right time you can question further to seek to understand the severity and impact they are having on a person's life.

- ⇒ Denial/avoidance
- ⇒ Anger/rage
- ⇒ Bargaining
- ⇒ Depression/hopelessness
- ⇒ Disorganization/inability to concentrate
- ⇒ Irritability/bitterness
- ⇒ Numbness/ambivalence
- ⇒ Frustration/impatience
- ⇒ Helplessness
- ⇒ Sadness
- ⇒ Excessive crying/emotional outbursts
- ⇒ Guilt
- ⇒ Interpersonal conflicts
- ⇒ Blaming
- ⇒ Difficulty sleeping or staying asleep
- ⇒ Increase or decrease in appetite or sexual desire
- ⇒ Dreams or nightmares
- ⇒ Self-harm
- ⇒ Physical illness: like flu, headaches, etc
- ⇒ Challenged or shattered views about self, life, the world, or God

When you hear or see expressions of these symptoms, they give you a clue that the person might be suffering from grief, loss, anxiety or depression. The frequency and severity of these types of symptoms could function as an increasingly loud warning bell for you.

If you are hearing expressions of these and unsure how confident you are to interpret them, you are strongly encouraged to reach out to Peter peter@riversdiechurch.org.

What to do and say:

It is wise to take time as a group to talk about the impacts of the storm. Use your judgment for how much time to give to this topic. How many weeks? How many minutes of a session? As a general suggestion, I believe at least one whole group time should be focused on this topic. In subsequent weeks I will give decreasing time that focuses on the storm...maybe 30 minutes, then 15. Finally, for the next several months I will just ask if anyone wants to share

more on this topic. Once a month for the next 6-8 months I will ask a specific question to the group, “how are you doing in your recovery from the storm? Do you feel like you are on a good path personally?” I will strongly encourage each member to give me some kind of answer.

Most people will recover and return to “normality” within a relatively short time. 10-15% of people will not. They will continue to struggle much longer or indefinitely. We are especially listening for those who continue to display expressions of loss over time. They need special help.

Loss requires identification. Giving your group or individuals time and opportunity to talk about their loss is essential. In that space, we can help them identify in degrees of specificity “what they have lost”.

“Grief is neither a problem to be solved nor a problem to be overcome. It is a sacred expression of love...a sacred sorrow” -Dr. Gerald May

Make the group feel safe. They must feel safe to share what may be hurtful, scary feelings, beliefs etc. As the leader, you need to communicate the safety of your group and may need to model a willingness to talk about loss in your own life.

Revisit the “group guidelines” and connect them afresh to this season of your group. They are critical for the group to feel safe.

- ⇒ Rescuing
- ⇒ Fixing
- ⇒ Mindful of time and self
- ⇒ confidentiality

Possible questions:

- ⇒ “Share for a few minutes about what you have been seeing, thinking, and feeling over these past weeks?”
 - ⇒ How have you been personally impacted by these events?
 - ⇒ What have you lost?
 - ⇒ Do you wonder if/how you will recover from this time?
 - ⇒ Do you wonder if you will be happy or fulfilled again?
 - ⇒ What has surprised you about this season?
 - ⇒ How are you doing?
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Special focus on Self-harm and Suicide:

Self-harm and suicide is not a topic or place to take chances. If you hear that a person plans to hurt themselves or others please reach out to Peter or Terri and follow the guidelines included at the end of this document.

Referrals

There are many resources available to folks with all sorts of needs. If you have a person that you do not know how to help in any area physical, mental, emotional, spiritual please reach out to Peter or Terri

The church is offering help with mental health support. We provide mentors and listeners, group counseling and individual counseling with professional licensed counselors. We can help with expenses also. This link is the portal to these resources <https://www.riversidechurch.org/relief>.

When in doubt, reach out to Peter, Terri, another staff members, or one of our elders. We do not want you to be in a place of uncertainty or ill-equipped. Please let us know how we can help.

Riverside Church Self-Harm Prevention Policy

If a leader learns of an individual considering suicide or talking about self-harm, they are to contact someone from the list below (if they cannot be reached immediately or the concern appears to be an emergency, immediately contact 911).

Staff:

- Steve Pruitt – (214) 402-5971
- Matt Nations – (941) 266-9014
- Mike Parker – (404) 354-9822
- Peter Dahlin – (256) 542-7549

Riverside Elders:

- Kevin Noell – (239) 292-5565
- Rocco Deluca – (401) 473-5584
- Matt Meagher – (239) 989-4250
- Jerry McManus – (239) 887-9870

Here are five things you must do before the individual leaves (if they do leave before you are able to have a full conversation with them, you must contact 911 immediately):

- **Ask them the tough questions.** Research shows that you asking them if they are suicidal will not “give them the idea” or “make them shy away from talking to you.” Here are some ways you can ask:
 - Do you ever wish you could go to sleep and never wake up?
 - Sometimes when people feel sad, they have thoughts of harming or killing themselves. Have you had such thoughts?
 - Are you thinking about hurting or killing yourself?
- **Recognize the limits of confidentiality.** There may be some things you keep confidential, self-harm and suicide is not them. If they ask you to keep it secret, your response needs to be “*I understand this is difficult for you to talk about, but I want to*

make sure you are safe. I can't make any promises about what we are about to talk about."

- **Start a support network with others.** Connect them with someone in their life at home who they feel safe to talk with about their suicidal thoughts. If they are under the age of 18, you must inform their legal guardian(s). Use good judgment because not everyone is a good fit to be a support person. Also, when you find someone, make sure they understand what you are asking of them and get their confirmation they are willing to do it.
- **Seek if they have professional counseling.** Ask if the individual is already in counseling and if they are, get the name and phone number of who they are seeing. If a person is talking about self-harm and/or suicidal ideation, there is a need for therapy.
- **Do not leave a person at imminent risk of suicide alone.** If you have ANY suspicions that a person is seriously considering harming himself or herself, let the person know that you care, that he or she is not alone, and that you are there to help. You may have to work with the person's family to ensure that he or she will be adequately supported until a mental health professional can provide an assessment. In some cases, you may have to accompany the person to the emergency room at an area hospital or crisis center. If the person is uncooperative, combative, or otherwise unwilling to seek help, and if you sense that the person is in acute danger, call 911 or (800) 273-TALK. Tell the dispatcher that you are concerned that the person with you "is a danger to [himself or herself]," or "cannot take care of [himself or herself]." These key phrases will alert the dispatcher to locate immediate care for this person with the help of police. Do not hesitate to make such a call if you suspect that someone may be a danger to himself or herself. It could save that person's life.

There are specific things you can do to help in the moment when someone talks about self-harm or suicide. Take these tips that come from the [Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#):

- **Take the person seriously:** Some people feel that kids who say they are going to hurt or kill themselves are "just doing it for attention." But if your child, friend, or family member confides thoughts of suicide, believe them and get help.
- **Listen with empathy and provide support:** A fight or breakup might not seem like a big deal, but for another person it can feel immense. Sympathize and listen. Minimizing what a person is going through can increase his or her sense of hopelessness.
- **Learn the warning signs:** Friends sometimes let friends know if they are thinking about suicide or dying. Other times, changes in behavior may show that someone is struggling.

- **Don't keep suicide a secret:** If anyone is considering suicide, don't promise to keep it a secret. Tell him or her you can help, but you need to involve other people. Neither of you have to face this alone.

Make sure you have the following resources always available to give out to people who make inquire or you feel need to have them:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-8255

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

The Lifeline (@800273TALK) · Twitter

<https://twitter.com/800273TALK>

Biblical Insights for Understanding Grief

THE BIBLE DIGNIFIES GRIEF BY PRESENTING IT AS A GOD-GIVEN,
THERAPEUTIC RESPONSE TO LOSS.

GOD GRIEVES

The Father grieves over evil in Noah's day (see Gen. 6:6).
The Son grieves over the death of Lazarus (see John 11:35-38).
The Spirit grieves over believers' sin (see Eph. 4:30).

GOD RESPONDS TO OUR GRIEF

Recording our tears (see Ps. 56:8)
Sympathizing with our weakness (see Heb. 4:15-16)
Eventually ending our grief (see Isa. 65:19; Rev. 21:4)

GRIEF MEASURES THE MEANING OF OUR ATTACHMENTS

Our attachment to friends (see John 11:36)
Our attachment to family (see Gen. 50:1)

GRIEF POTENTIALLY INTERRUPTS LIFE'S ROUTINES

Leaving mourner with little appetite (see 2 Sam. 12:17)
Causing mourner to wish for death (see 2 Sam. 18:33)
Multiplying mourner's illness and death (see 1 Sam. 4:18-22)

GRIEF POTENTIALLY PERSISTS OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME

For seven days (see Gen. 50:10)
For thirty days (see Num. 20:29)
For seventy days (see Gen. 50:3)

GRIEF IS POTENTIALLY EXPRESSED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS

Before a loss (see Matt. 26:37-38)
By shock, numbness or denial (see Mark 8:31-32)
In anger (see Job 10:9)
Through bargaining (see Isa. 38:1-22)
with depression (see 2 Sam. 12:16-18)
with acceptance (see Phil. 1:12,21-24; 4:11-13)

GRIEF IS POTENTIALLY FACILITATED BY VARIOUS EXPRESSIONS

Songs (see 2 Sam. 1:17-27)
Poetry (see Lam. 1-5)