

## **Prevention**

God is our Rock, our solid foundation. David knew it. Listen to his Psalms:

*“O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.”* (Psalm 19:14)

*“For You are my rock and my fortress.”* (Psalm 31:3)

*“I love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”* (Psalm 18:1-2)

In Matthew, Jesus says:

*“Therefore, everyone who hears God’s words and practices them may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock.”* (Matthew 7:24-25)

As social workers, you have the awesome privilege of partnering with pastors in teaching what God’s words are, how powerful they are in changing and transforming our lives, and how the Holy Spirit enables us to put those words into practice so that we indeed build our lives on Christ, the solid Rock. This is the most powerful tool in social work.

## **Intervention**

In John 10:10, Jesus lays out for us the spiritual battle for us around suicide. He says: *“The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.”*

Satan would accuse us, steal our joy, and destroy the abundant life that Christ came to offer us. I have often thought that Satan has only two goals for our lives. The first is to keep us from finding life in Jesus Christ. Failing in this, his second goal is to keep us from finding the abundant life that is ours through Christ. For those who do not know Christ as their personal Savior, Satan would seek to destroy them by preventing them from knowing Christ as their Rock and Redeemer. Salvation, we know is the answer. The goal is to lead them to a saving knowledge of our Rock and our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

*“And when He (Jesus) had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. And being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, “My son, your sins are forgiven.”* (Mark 2:1-5)

Jesus went on to heal the man, not only spiritually, but physically as well. The faithful actions of friends brought this paralyzed man to Jesus for healing. They acted when their friend was incapable of acting. They worked together to remove the obstacles that had made this man’s physical and spiritual life hopeless. In the same way, God calls us to

faithfulness and belief in his power to heal us and those we love. He is the one who can move a suicidal teen, immobilized from despair, to hope again. As in this example from Mark 2, often he asks us to play a part in bringing someone to him for healing.

### **Postvention**

After a tragedy occurs, we need God's healing, restored hope and a plan for rebuilding from the event. Again, we can turn to David, the Psalmist, for answers:

*"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me. Your rod and your staff comfort me."* (Psalm 23:4)

Job also knew the blessing of standing firm in the Lord, despite desperate circumstances:

*"But He knows the way I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*

*My foot has held fast to His path; I have kept His way and not turned aside.*

*I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."* (Job 23: 10-12)

Affirming and experiencing God's presence is the answer, even in times of deep darkness as when someone chooses to end a life. God provides the support, stability and comfort that bring us back, full circle, to his ability to be our Rock and solid foundation. God teaches us through every circumstance of our life, moving us into his words, into experiencing the life-transforming power of those words, into experiencing the Holy Spirit's empowering presence in our lives that helps us put those words into practice so that our lives are indeed built firmly on the Rock, our Lord Jesus Christ.

It has been my practice over a number of years to read through the Bible, cover to cover. Each time, God delights me with his love, amazes me with his power and teaches me with his perfect wisdom. And each time, he surprises me with new treasure I had not discovered before. One such gem he lifted off of the page of my Bible and into my heart came in the form of a young, unnamed servant girl from Israel. She lives in II Kings 5:

*"Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man was also a*

*valiant warrior, but he was a leper. Now the Arameans had gone out in bands, and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said to her mistress, 'I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy.' And Naaman went in and told his master, the king, saying, 'Thus and thus spoke the girl who is from the land of Israel.' Then the king of Aram said, 'Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel.'" (II Kings 5:1-5)*

We know the rest of the story. Naaman did go; and God healed this great Aramean general, Naaman, through Elisha the prophet of God in Israel. But consider this servant girl with me. Here is what we know about her:

She was young.  
She was captured by the Arameans and taken away from her family.  
She became a servant to Naaman's wife.

But there is much more to this little girl. Even in her lowly position, she was used as a mighty instrument to demonstrate God's power. She had been physically captured away from her earthly parents, but God used her faith to speak to kings and heal her master. She must have spoken with great authority for her words to be taken seriously and to set a chain of events in motion that God used for His glory. She didn't ask to be set free in return for her wise counsel or even to go back to Israel with Naaman.

My prayer is that the young people to whom you minister will find the same kind of great hope and trust in our great God, regardless of life's disappointments.

#### **40 Developmental Assets**

***Purpose:** These developmental assets are seen as healthy building blocks for young people to grow into healthy, caring, and responsible adults.*

***Note:** While these are all seen as essential elements to the healthy development of a child in the United States, we recognize that these may not all be practical or useful in another culture.*

***Directions:** Please take some time to identify both external and internal developmental assets that are applicable to your culture. Explain why these would be useful and effective in your culture. Be prepared to discuss and share this information with the larger group.*

***External Assets:***

***Why?***

***Internal Assets:***

***Why?***

**Resilience: The Seven Strengths**

If you have lived through a troubled childhood and come out on top, you can probably thank a handful of personal strengths that have allowed you to build a better life. Some of these are personality traits with which you were born; others you developed at an early age. Psychiatrist Steven Wolin and developmental psychologist Sybil Wolin identify seven such strengths, which they call resiliencies in their book, *The Resilient Self*, based on their work with adult survivors of adversity.

***Insight:*** You ask tough questions of yourself and others and don't shy away from honest answers. As a child, you became a careful observer and learned to rely on your own interpretations of events, not on what others told you. As an adult, you have learned to see things as they are and refuse to blame yourself for your family's troubles.

***Independence:*** You have learned to separate yourself, both physically and emotionally from your family's problems. As a child, when things got tough at home, you escaped to a friend's house, school activities, your books or hobbies. When you grew up, you may have moved out of town and curtailed visits home. When you do visit, you have learned to avoid letting family members draw you into their unhappiness.

***Relationships:*** You have developed close relationships to substitute for the ones you could not achieve with those who failed you. As a child, you learned to keep an eye out for concerned adults and became skilled at recruiting their attention and affection. You have cultivated a close circle of friends as a substitute family and, in choosing a mate, may have

picked one with the type of close-knit family you always wished you had.

***Initiative:*** You believe you are a master of your fate. Resilient children often work hard. They welcome challenges and develop clear and realistic goals. Resilient adults manage to build secure and happy homes for themselves and their children.

***Creativity:*** You have learned to bring order out of confusion in a way that makes your life more pleasing. As a child at play in a rich imaginary world, you practiced overcoming the evil forces that threatened your happiness. As you grew, you learned to express your inner turmoil through writing, music, art or dance.

***Humor:*** You keep your pain in perspective by finding the lighter side of your troubles. Children from unhappy homes often use humor to defuse difficult situations. Resilient adults are often adept at finding the absurd amid the pathos of their troubled pasts.

***Morality:*** Your painful childhood prompted you to develop a sense of compassion and concern for others. Resilient children, early on, develop a clear sense of right and wrong. Resilient adults often take risks to pursue what they think is right and find meaning in serving others.

## **Case Studies Worksheet**

Read the case study assigned to your group.

Identify the Developmental Assets this young person possesses.

How did developmental issues impact the situation that you read about? Can you make any assumptions or predictions based on Erikson's Stages of Development?

## **In-Servicing Teachers on Their Role in Crisis Response: Supporting Students in the Aftermath of Tragedy and Crisis**

### ***Guidelines for Teachers***

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### ***Note to Teachers***

It is incredibly rare to find someone who doesn't have a memory of one teacher that made a real difference in his or her life. Teachers do so much more than teach. You are role models, advisors, surrogate parents for some, encouragers, and the backbone of the structure that allows our youth to grow up as whole persons.

For some students, the teacher that stands out for them is the one who had a wonderful blend of structure and nurturing at a time that the student was challenged with an outside difficulty. Every year thousands of students lose a loved one to death. Every year hundreds of teachers cope with – and help their students cope with – the empty desk. A student who dies during the school year leaves behind a classroom full of griever. Although it isn't the reason you went into teaching, being able to provide support to students who are grieving is an opportunity to deepen your relationship with students and to give them skills that they'll use for a lifetime.

Every student has one or more teachers every single day. You give children the ongoing message about whether school is a safe place, whether students' human needs can be as important as whatever was on the lesson plan on a particularly challenging day, and whether they can risk telling you what troubles them the most when they just can't get past it enough to concentrate and do school work. So use these guidelines as springboards for activities, conversations and lessons. Think about the benefits of talking about death in the classroom at a time when students aren't grieving. They can begin to find trust in being able to bring up difficult topics.

God bless you for all you do with your students every single day. More than anyone will every really be able to recognize, your students are so very blessed to have you showing up in their lives with your concern and compassion day after day, in the midst of all of the demands that our new educational world places on you.

### *A Philosophical "Set"*

Reinforce that this is about "Working smarter, not harder."

Teachers don't have to become "instant counselors."

This will help them both professionally and personally.

These skills and concepts apply both to school-wide tragedies and for working with the one student who loses a loved one.

### *Teachable Moments*

Many opportunities every year

National and local events

Value of grief as a concept prior to an experience

### *Value in Acceptance, Compassion, School Climate*

Teaches empathy as an every-day value

Language and concepts integrated into conversations

Concern for others = students tell what they know

Lessons and attitudes begin to transfer over to anti-bullying concepts

Teaching teachers language and concepts takes it directly to the students

Moves beyond a "program" to attitudes

### *Tasks of Grief as a Basis (Dr. Alan Wolfelt)*

To hear the truth

To put our own words to the reality

To share the memories with others

To give the death meaning

To examine identity

To have a memorial/ritual of passage

Continued support

### *Activities and Discussions*

Look for assisting in task mastery

Does this help students understand the truth?

Am I giving them time to use their own words?

Am I giving time for them to share memories?

Quiet time for reflection (identity)

### *Role of Ritual*

Provides a turning point

Allows making of amends

Does not have to be complex or sophisticated

Teaches how to create ritual for the future

Examples of Ritual:

Letters burned following a suicide  
Flowers at graduation

### *Teacher Reluctance*

Weren't trained for it – might lose composure  
No language or conceptual foundation  
Fears that parents will object  
Some of the incidents are complex, fear-invoking  
Concepts above the developmental stage of students

### *Basics*

You don't have to be a counselor  
You can't take away their pain  
Avoiding it gives students the message that they are on their own  
Students are seldom reluctant to talk about it  
May not have words and concepts  
May have fears, anxieties they are hiding  
Often feel relief that someone brings it up

### *Anatomy of a Discussion: State the Obvious*

Lets students know you are tuned in to them  
Validates their perceptions  
Gives concrete information  
Doesn't make a judgment  
What a video camera would validate  
“This may be the first time some of you have known someone who died by suicide. When it happens, we have a variety of thoughts and feelings that come up. Some might be really sad and some might be fearful or angry. There are lots of other feelings, too.”

### *Give Some Examples*

“Sometimes when we lose someone to death, we begin to have fears that more people we love will die.”

“Sometimes when a friend loses someone close to them, we don't know whether to bring it up or never talk about it.”

### *Ask Questions*

“How many of you had already heard about this? What did you hear?”

“How many of you have lost someone close to you? What things did anyone do that helped you or your family?”

“What are things that we can think of to help a friend?”

### *Invite Other Concerns*

“What do you think worries your peers at this point?”

“Are there other things that are bothering you?”

“What could I do that would help?”

“What do you wish adults understood about how it is to be an adolescent today?”

### *Teachers' Role*

May read announcement of the death to students

Lead discussion with students

May lead activity of some sort

Return to academics when majority is ready

Do not gate-keep for the Safe Room

Come to meetings before and after school

Identify and refer students with extreme reactions

### *Easy Activities to Move Students Further into Discussion*

Write a letter of regret and appreciation

Break students into small groups and give questions

“If you lost friend, would you want your peers to bring it up when you came to school?”

Only close friends? Most of your friends? Anyone?”

“What are three things you can do to show someone that you care?”

When did you first realize that everyone would die someday?”

### *Remind Teachers*

Just being there is the most important thing

They already do so much of this naturally...we are just adding concepts and language to take it deeper

When someone close dies, often a student does not “hit bottom” in their struggle for several months. The second year may be worse than the first.

Don't let go of discipline, but use a gentle touch

Remind teachers that their students are blessed to have them

The are only as good for their kids as they are good to themselves

**Practice good self-care! Always!**

## **Developmental Assets and Resiliency**

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