

Crisis

"Any event or series of circumstances which threatens a person's well-being and interferes with his or her routine of daily living."

~Gary Collins

At this age, students are constantly facing issues, problems, danger, peer pressure, and temptation which can lead them to make a variety of distracting, hurtful, or dangerous choices. As we seek to help students live the best quality of life, our focus is never on trying to change students' outward behavior, but an inward restoration of brokenness, pain, struggling, and hurt.

The role of an Adult Leader is to help identify these internal realities and to work together with God, the students, their parents, Grace Students Staff, and others to bring healing and spiritual growth.

Our goal is not to judge students but to bring restoration by lovingly pointing students to Jesus, where forgiveness, restoration, and healing are found.

Remember: Never let any situations compromise the safety of any student(s), and always communicate any problems to Grace Students Staff as soon as possible.

What to do in a crisis situation

Remember these four important rules (two S's and two P's)

- 1) **Staff** – whenever there is a crisis of any kind or whenever you suspect *there might be* a crisis, always notify Grace Students Staff IMMEDIATELY. This will allow Grace Students Staff to document situations, report to authorities, and make necessary referrals. Whether the crisis is from the student's past, present, or a feeling of future danger ALWAYS inform Grace Students Staff IMMEDIATELY.
- 2) **Seriously** – always take students in crisis seriously.
- 3) **Promises** – never make any confidentiality promises to students (DON'T promise not to tell parents, pastors, authorities. DO promise not to tell other students.).
- 4) **Police** – if anyone is in immediate danger, or if you suspect immediate danger, call 911 or go directly to a hospital Emergency Room.

ABUSE -----

All Grace Students Volunteers are REQUIRED to report any suspected abuse or neglect to Grace Students Staff immediately.

What to do if a student has been, is being, or believes he/she is in danger of being abused...

- Always take students seriously.
- Allow the student to tell his/her story in their own words.
- Get clear information, especially the name(s) of the perpetrator being accused.
- Don't be a hero - Inform them that help is available and you will help them get it (know when it's over your head).
- Affirm them for telling someone.
- **Immediately call Grace Students Staff:** DO NOT hesitate, even if you are unsure of the student's story. ALWAYS CALL the Grace Students Staff. Do NOT take matters into your own hands.
- Let the student know that you are responsible to report ANY form of abuse and that you care about them.
- A report will be filed with Child Protective Services IMMEDIATELY.

Students need to hear...

- Nobody had the right to touch your body without permission
- It's NOT your fault
- Seek help! Don't suffer in silence...
- There is hope
- You care
- God cares

Students need to know that you are willing to talk to them about anything.

React Less, Not More

Feelings of anger, guilt, denial, and confusion are normal reactions to have. However, if you have a strong reaction to a student's disclosure, several things will occur. First, the student will feel guiltier about what happened, because now it has caused you pain. It will also inhibit the student from talking about it further- with you, or the police, because the student will anticipate that everyone will react this way to the disclosure. We want to lessen the trauma, guilt, and shame. Do not be overly surprised, sad, angry, or upset.

Believe the Student

No one wants to believe that a student has been victimized. However, experience in treatment and reporting indicates that students seldom make up such stories. Even if the story is false or exaggerated, there still may be a serious problem that requires exploration.

Reassure the Student

Let the student know that sharing this information with you was the right thing to do. Students fear rejection or abandonment so let them know that they are loved and will be protected.

Relieve the Student of Guilt

Students often believe that they are to blame for the abuse or that they should have stopped the abuse. Explain that what happened was the responsibility of the offender, not the student.

Refrain from saying something like, "Why didn't you tell me about this sooner?"

No matter how many times a parent has told a student to speak up if someone has touched them inappropriately or physically abused them, most students believe that their parents will be mad at them for being the target of the injury. Instead of questioning the manner in which the disclosure was made, encourage the student for discussing it now.

Refrain from making a promise you can't keep

Don't promise them that you won't let it happen again. Don't promise them that you won't tell anyone. Don't promise them that they don't have to go home again. Don't promise them that they do get to go home again.

***You aren't the investigator; You don't have to know every detail
(And shouldn't try to)***

It is your responsibility to find out that there is a problem, not to find out every intricate detail of the problem.

Our feelings must not prevent us from reporting suspected abuse. Reporting suspected abuse is required by law.

Report to Grace Students Staff immediately. Failing to report allows abuse to continue. You are not accusing the family or the parents; your only concern is for the student. Take care of yourself. Don't burden yourself with guilt or worry.

Another resource for assistance would be [Handbook on Counseling Youth](#), by Josh McDowell. You can sign it out of Pastor Nick's or Ben's office.

SUICIDE -----

When a student mentions taking their life...

- Take the student seriously.
- **IMMEDIATELY contact parent and/or Grace Students Staff, whomever you reach first.**
- Serious threats of suicide – get student to an ER or mental health facility for evaluation.
- If a student calls you on the phone to discuss a plan to take his/her life or is threatening to take their life while on the phone, stay on the phone with that student and IMMEDIATELY signal for someone to call the police or get to the student's home IMMEDIATELY. Keep the student talking.
- Speak with the student openly and honestly, this is no time to tip-toe around the issue.
- Do NOT minimize what the student is feeling (ie: "oh, you are just having a bad day").
- If there is no immediate danger (no plan), establish with the student that he/she will phone you when in crisis or considering suicide, and then contact Grace Students Staff and parents.
- Make no promises with the student. DO NOT promise the student to keep their suicidal thoughts or plans a secret. NEVER be the only person to know the threats. Schedule contact with student and follow through.

Ask specific and direct questions.

- If a student is contemplating suicide they will have details.
 - TIME...when they are going to do it.
 - PLACE...where they will do it.
 - METHOD...how they will do it.
- To evaluate the situation remember the word **SLAP**
 - **S:** Specific details
 - **L:** Lethality of method
 - **A:** Availability of method
 - **P:** Proximity of Helping Resources
 - **RECOGNIZE how bad it is.**

SHOW the student that you are **NOT** afraid to talk about it.

Initial questions you can ask:

- ❖ How would you harm yourself?
- ❖ Do you have these means available? Would it accomplish what you want it to?
- ❖ Have you ever attempted suicide?

- ❖ *Why have you chosen to do this now?*
- ❖ *What has been keeping you alive so far?*
- ❖ *What do you want to do in life that you're not doing already?*
- ❖ *If you really did end your life, who would you want to find you?*

Actions to avoid when helping a suicidal student (kidshealth.org)

- ❖ *Don't sound shocked by what a person tells you.*
- ❖ *Don't stress the pain it would cause the suicidal person's family/yourself.*
- ❖ *Don't call the person's bluff – dare to go ahead.*
- ❖ *Don't get in a philosophical debate.*
- ❖ *Don't belittle or try to shame.*
- ❖ *Never physically remove a weapon from a suicidal person – manipulate it away.*
- ❖ *Don't get in an argument with the person – you can never win this type of discussion and may also lose the person as well.*
- ❖ *Don't feel you have to solve the problem yourself or feel you must have all the answers. Trust in the strength God gives both you and the suicidal person.*

What you can say/do to help (kidshealth.org)

- ❖ *Remove the student from harm's way. If there are weapons or pills in the home that the student has considered using, you'll need to discuss with the parent an alternate storage solution for those items.*
- ❖ *Help the student find ways to realize they have value.*
- ❖ *React with empathy and self-control – becoming alarmed can damage trust.*
- ❖ *Ask detailed questions to fully understand how and why the student came to the point of suicidal thoughts. This will give you a better understanding of how to help. More importantly, it will be therapeutic for him/her to reveal their pain to a trusted friend.*
- ❖ *Find out if they've thought about suicide and what caused those thoughts.*
- ❖ *Ask what they hope to accomplish by committing suicide (escape, revenge, punish self, get the attention they deserve/desire). Ask if they've considered how, where, or when they would do it.*
- ❖ *Refer the person to a professional counselor. Then, still care for the person and checkup, but stop counseling him...you don't want to interfere with the work being done by the professional.*

Scripture to Use:

- Psalm 73:4
- Job 3:3, 11
- Judges 16:19-30
- 1 Chronicles 10:4-5
- 2 Samuel 17:23
- Matthew 27:45
- 1 Samuel 2:6
- John 16:33b
- Matthew 12:31
- Psalm 6:4-9; 13:2-6; 34:18; 18,25,27,71,91, 130, 139, 73:28, 143:7-11
- 1 Peter 5:7

DEPRESSION -----

Common signs and symptoms of adolescent depression

- *Persistent sadness*
- *Fluctuation between silent apathy and excited talkativeness*
- *Inability to concentrate*
- *Major change in eating and/or sleeping patterns*
- *Withdrawal from friends or family*
- *Complaining about headaches or stomach aches*
- *Severe weight gain or loss*
- *Declining grades and an unwillingness to work in school*
- *Truancy*
- *Rapid mood swings*
- *Lack of interest in regular activities (sports, music lessons, etc.)*
- *Pessimism about the future*
- *Expressions of helplessness, worthlessness, hopelessness*
- *Preoccupation with death or suicide*

Immediately contact a member of the Grace Students Staff!

CUTTING -----

Cutting is not the issue...it is the underlying pain, the cause.

Definition: the deliberate, repetitive, harming of the body or a body part, not with intent to commit suicide, but as a way of managing emotions that seem too painful for words to express.
(Bodily Harm by Karen Conterio & Wendy Lader 1998)

When a student is cutting...

- ***Immediately Inform Grace Students Staff***
- *Be informed*
- *Listen*
- *Show concern & compassion*
- *Discuss consequences of actions – right away*
- *Help students separate feelings & actions*
- *(example: encourage a student to journal when they have the impulse to cut, this may distract them from taking the action)*
- *Acknowledge improvements frequently*
- *Seek professional help*

Reasons for cutting...

- *Lack of impulse control*
- *Trauma during childhood*
- *Low self esteem*
- *Intense need for acceptance*
- *Rigid 'black and white' thinking*
- *Fear of change*
- *Difficulty forming/maintaining relationships*
- *Poor self-care*
- *Under/over parenting*
- *High functioning & frequent isolation*

Warning signs...

- *Secrecy (hiding it seems more serious)*
- *Frequent unexplained injuries*
- *Wearing long sleeves/pants*
- *Easily overwhelmed*
- *Eating disorder*

- *Excessive drug/alcohol use*
- *Frequent talk about friends who injure*
- *Frequent negative self-talk*
- *Inability to function*
- *Frequent blood stains on clothing*
- *Cutting can be very ritualistic (same time, place, daily)*

EATING DISORDERS -----

Definition: *an eating disorder is an obsession with food and weight that harms a person's well-being. Although we all worry about our weight sometimes, people with an eating disorder go to extremes to keep from gaining weight.*

Anorexia-Nervosa

People with anorexia have an obsession with being thin. They don't want to eat and have an intense fear of gaining weight. They may constantly worry about the amount of calories and fat they are taking in. It is not uncommon for people with anorexia to take laxatives, diet pills or water pills to lose weight. They also may exercise excessively in attempt to shed pounds. They have an altered view of their body, no matter how thin they may be, and see themselves as overweight.

Bulimia-Nervosa

Bulimia is eating a lot of food at once (binge-ing) and then throwing up or using laxatives to remove the food from their body (purging). After a binge, some bulimics won't eat or they'll over-exercise to keep off the weight. It is common for people with bulimia to use laxatives, diet pills or water pills to 'control' their weight. They may hide their food and the fact they are bingeing and purging. They are usually close to normal weight, but their weight may go up and down.

Eating Disorders

Causes

There is not a cut & dry cause for eating disorders. For many, it is an issue of control, especially for teenagers. They may feel that their weight is the only thing they can have control over. For some, it is the fear of gaining the excess weight at puberty, while for others it is the overload of images of extremely thin celebrities. It can also be something that develops because of depression or anxiety, or it may run in their family.

Warning Signs

- *Unnatural concern about body weight*
- *Obsession with calories, fat grams & food*
- *Use of any medicines to keep from gaining weight*
- *Throwing up after meals (going to the bathroom after eating)*
- *Refusing to eat or lying about how much they ate*
- *Over-exercising*
- *Not having periods*
- *Drop to weight about 20% below normal*

- *Eats huge amounts of foods without gaining weight*
- *Withdrawing from social activity*

What to Do

- *Listen & Be Patient*
- *Talk about other things besides food, fat, calories*
- *Avoid talking directly about physical appearance and body shape*
- ***Immediately tell Grace Students Staff to determine the next step (parental conversation or professional help)***
- *Educate yourself*

Substance Abuse, Addictions, and Sexual Behavior

Being an adolescent in America means facing tough issues and temptations like drugs, alcohol, pornography, sex, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases.

As we seek to help students heal from brokenness and deeper issues, here is a plan of action when a student confides in you.

Listen to their story – don't affirm wrong or dangerous behavior, but also don't judge or focus on giving advice (leave the counseling to a professionally trained counselor). Support the student by offering to walk with them through the difficult times and by reminding them that you love them and God loves them. Know your limit when you hear his or her story.

Evaluate the situation by determining if the behavior is perpetual, if the student desires to stop, if the behavior is illegal, and if the student is putting him/herself or others in imminent danger.

Call Grace Students Staff to discuss next steps – Our staff includes trained pastors who will be able to help decide what the best step would be (referral, involving parents, intervention, etc).

DIVORCE -----

What can you do?

BE STABLE. The longer you can stay in their life, the more trust you will gain. Talk about divorce openly. When you talk about pain, you hear about it. Talk about MORE than divorce. Make sure that's not all you are talking about. Talk about forgiveness. Don't take sides.

Divorce is LOSS

- *Of living standards*
- *Of connections to neighborhood and friends*
- *Of identification to schools and church*
- *Of holidays*
- *Of their childhood (more responsibility)*
- *STUDENTS are feeling loss and may not be communicating it*

Common Feelings Associated with Divorce

- Loneliness: mom and dad can't give them enough emotionally.
- Guilt: students take the blame.
- Anger: can be positive and negative. Extreme anger is/can be destructive (ie: cutting).
- Uncertainty: damaged sense of stability caused by dividing into two homes, loss of family traditions, and change in perception of parents.
- Depression: can cause students to withdraw and be embarrassed. May not have friends, or don't feel like they have a family.
- Insecure: they see themselves as being different. Can live with an imaginary audience.
- Unloved: feel unloved, and have a lack of understanding of what love is.

Common Actions associated with divorce

- Inability to trust
- Withdrawal: lack of communication. Find things to hide in: Xbox, TV, Internet.
- Lack direction: there is too much going on, they don't know what to do...so they shut down.

Divorce creates roles for teenagers to play

- Pseudo-mature teenager: students that excel in maturity as soon as parents split. They tend to marry early. Then tend to quit their life (sports) to take care of family (find a job).
- Childish teenager: students stop. They don't move forward, and can regress. They have a tendency to act up. They want to be taken care of.
- Spouse-replacement teenager: They need to make mom/dad happy...and parents make the kids replace the spouse. (you are the man of the house now...or...now that your mom is gone, I need you to learn how to cook)
- Torn teenager: They feel responsibility to be good kids, and believe the best about both parents. They feel torn and hear these types of things at home:
 - "Tell your dad..."

- *"Everything we bought for you this weekend needs to stay at this house. Your mom can buy what you need at her house."*
- *Money conscious teenager: Finances are constantly on their mind. Money is a major conversation in the first two years of divorce. Kids may hide their personal needs because they do not want to stress their parents out.*
- *Misidentified teenager: looking for role models.*
- *Oversexed/under-loved teenager: They long for affection (not sex). They don't know how to get healthy love and attention. They may have attachment issues.*
- *Passive-aggressive teenager: They find ways to sabotage their parent's romances.*

SAFETY

All Grace Students events, activities, and gatherings should be safe. Take initiative to maintain physical, emotional, and spiritual safety for all students. Use your best judgment. Err on the side of caution.

Attendance

Once a student arrives at a Grace Student's event or activity, he/she must remain in the designated area until the event is completed or until parents direct otherwise.

Student Privacy

All documents with any personal information about students or parents (name, picture, address, phone number, email, school, etc.) should never be shared with others who are not screened by Grace Church. When documents are no longer needed, they should be shredded to protect students' privacy. If you cannot shred documents, return them to Grace Students Staff to be shredded.

Physical Touch

Physical touch is very important to developing trusting relationships. Master "the basics" – the art of the high-five, the handshake, and the side-hug – to balance physical touch with safety and boundaries. Use your best judgment. Stay consistent – give hugs to everyone or high-fives to everyone, but don't mix and match. Be very careful, especially with opposite gender. Avoid physical touch beyond "the basics" in one-on-one environments. ANY physical touch that makes a student or you uncomfortable is inappropriate. Err on the side of safety.

Relationships and Activities

Building relationships and spending time with students is an essential part of being an Adult Leader. Here are a few policies to ensure safety and accountability for everyone.

Notify (email or call) Grace Students Staff before any activities with your Grace Group (Date, Time, Location, Details) that are not part of the Grace Students program.

Transportation

Parents must know and consent if their student is riding as a passenger.

Log Electronic Conversations

When you find yourself in the midst of a sensitive conversation with a student, keep in mind that words and intentions can be misconstrued - intentionally or unintentionally. Any time you are engaged in a serious conversation with a student, log your conversations (take screen

shots, save text messages and emails). This may seem excessive, but if you're ever falsely accused of misconduct from a student or parent, you'll be glad you did it.

Reporting

- Whenever there is a crisis of any kind or whenever you suspect *there might be* a crisis, always notify Grace Students Staff IMMEDIATELY.
- Never make any confidentiality promises to students (DON'T promise not to tell parents, pastors, authorities. DO promise not to tell other students.).

One-on-One Interactions

This is very important to building meaningful relationships. Always practice the following policies to ensure the safest scenarios.

- ✓ Same gender meetings only when meeting one-on-one.
- ✓ Have parental consent when spending time with a student one-on-one.
- ✓ When picking up or dropping off a student, always make an attempt to greet parents and remind them of your plans.
- ✓ Always have accountability. Inform the Grace Students Staff of your one-on-one interaction with students.
- ✓ Counseling: Please leave all 'counseling' to the staff of Grace Church.

Good one-on-one interactions

Same gender, phone calls, emails, coffee shop, restaurant, mall, park benches in the open, student's house (with parent home), sporting/extracurricular events

Inappropriate one-on-one interactions

Opposite gender, bedrooms, parked cars, rural areas, secluded park areas, closed doors, any non-public places