

Dear Friends,

I recently read that every fifteen minutes, someone in the United States takes his or her own life. Last fall a friend's nephew chose that path for himself. In the last year two teens at our local high schools have also chosen this path, one as recently as a week ago.

When our high school youth ministry held a listening session in April in preparation for the Church's Synod on Young People called for by Pope Francis, one of the main challenges our teens said they were facing is stress. School, extra-curricular activities, and preparing for college are paths they are working to maneuver, sometimes with success, sometimes not. Other teens report that along with these they are trying to cope with rejection, failure, relationship breakups and family turmoil. Some teens do better dealing with these stresses than others. The ones who do not might not be able to see that they can turn their lives around. According to the Center for Disease Control, suicide is the third leading cause of death among teens. It is a permanent response, not a solution, to a temporary problem.

What are some of the warning signs that a teen may be considering suicide? They include:

- Withdrawing from social contact
- Feeling trapped or hopeless about a situation
- Changing normal routine, including eating or sleeping patterns
- Developing personality changes or being severely anxious or agitated when experiencing some of the warning signs listed above

Some things each of us can do to help teens experiencing anxiety over issues causing them stress over situations that may cause them to consider suicide include:

- Address their depression or anxiety. Don't wait for a teen to come to you. If you notice your teen son, daughter or friend is sad, anxious or appears to be struggling, ask what's wrong and offer your help
- Pay attention to them. If a teen is displaying warning signs, listen to what he or she is saying and watch how he or she is acting.
- Discourage any isolation. Encourage the teen to spend time with friends and family.
- Speak with them regarding the hope Christ gives you in times of stress and anxiety. In our second reading today the author of the 1st Letter of Peter writes: ***"be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope. . ."*** All of us struggle in life from time to time. For many of us our hope and trust in Christ has helped us in our struggles. Share your personal situations of struggle, hope and new life that came because of your faith in Jesus.

Teen suicide is preventable. Prevention includes involvement, talking with teens, seeking help and, of course, praying with and for them.

Peace and blessings,  
Father John