

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO

# SUICIDE & SELF-HARM PREVENTION



Connecting Parents, Teens & Jesus  
in a Disconnected World

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Anyone strong enough to kill  
himself is more than strong enough  
to live, ought to let himself live, and  
is very much needed among us.

**JENNIFER HECHT, *STAY***

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# A LETTER FROM AXIS

*Dear Reader,*

We're Axis, and since 2007, we've been creating resources to help connect parents, teens, and Jesus in a disconnected world. We're a group of gospel-minded researchers, speakers, and content creators, and we're excited to bring you the best of what we've learned about making meaningful connections with the teens in your life.

This parent's guide is designed to help start a conversation. Our goal is to give you enough knowledge that you're able to ask your teen informed questions about their world. For each guide, we spend weeks reading, researching, and interviewing parents and teens in order to distill everything you need to know about the topic at hand. We encourage you to read the whole thing and then to use the questions we include to get the conversation going with your teen—and then to follow the conversation wherever it leads.

As Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen point out in their book *Difficult Conversations*, “Changes in attitudes and behavior rarely come about because of arguments, facts, and attempts to persuade. How often do *you* change your values and beliefs—or whom you love or what you want in life—based on something someone tells you? And how likely are you to do so when the person who is trying to change you doesn’t seem fully aware of the reasons you see things differently in the first place?”<sup>1</sup> For whatever reason, when we believe that others are trying to understand *our* point of view, our defenses usually go down, and we’re more willing to listen to *their* point of view. The rising generation is no exception.

So we encourage you to ask questions, to listen, and then to share your heart with your teen. As we often say at Axis, discipleship happens where conversation happens.

Sincerely,  
Your friends at Axis

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen, *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 137.



**YOU'RE NOT  
ALONE**

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**LET'S ACKNOWLEDGE** the elephant in the room: This is a scary topic that no parent wants to even *think* about. Which is completely understandable. After all, God created us for flourishing, abundant life, and relationship with Him, not pain, sadness, or the desire to no longer live.

Unfortunately, our broken world is full of dysfunction, disorder, and sin, all of which disrupt and decay the beautiful world God lovingly created for us. So what do we do when that reality hits home, when our children struggle with very real issues? How do we help our kids find physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual healing?

First, let us assure you that if you or a loved one is struggling, you're not alone. In 2020, there were an estimated 1.2 million suicide attempts in the US.<sup>1</sup> With the

exception of accidents, suicide is the leading cause of death among young adults, teens, and children as young as age five, and 1 in 5 females and 1 in 7 males engage in some type of self-injury each year.<sup>2</sup>

But there is hope. Now more than ever, behavioral health providers are studying and learning about teen mental health issues, and new resources are created every year. God talks about it and deals with it directly in His Word. So, with deepest concern for your fears and sorrow for your struggles and losses, let's talk about it too.



# **AN IMPORTANT NOTE**

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**THIS GUIDE HELPS PARENTS** learn more about the troubling incidence of suicide and self-harm among young people. Like other parent guides in this series, it's a tool that provides knowledge, references, and faith-based encouragement on the subject to help parents connect with their kids. However, we do not pretend to be physicians, health-care providers, or even experts on these difficult matters. As such, this resource is *not* a substitute for medical advice or treatment. It can accompany and support steps recommended by a qualified health-care professional, but it is not meant to replace or preclude any diagnosis or treatment. Axis cannot be responsible for actions taken without professional medical guidance.

We cannot say it loud enough or often enough: **If you even suspect your child has suicidal thoughts or plans, STOP**

**READING THIS AND TAKE ACTION NOW.** Contact your family physician and tell them your teen is at risk of suicide and must be seen immediately. If a doctor cannot see them right away for whatever reason, do not leave your child alone until they can be seen and evaluated by a health-care professional qualified to assess adolescent behavioral health. If necessary, take your child to the nearest emergency room or urgent care center, demand priority, and do not leave the physician's office until next steps are in place (such as referral to a specialist, assessments, evaluations, treatment plans, outpatient/inpatient programs, etc.).

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your child has suicidal  
thoughts or plans, STOP  
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