

# Leading & Caring for People in Crisis in Your Group

## THEOLOGY of SUFFERING:

*Key question: Why does God allow suffering?*

1. Suffering began in the garden. When sin entered, the world became marked by suffering & death (Genesis 3).
2. Christ experienced suffering and completed His own suffering on the cross (Isaiah 53:3-5).
3. Being one with Christ means we will suffer, too, but God's perfect plan includes an end to suffering when all things are made right (Romans 8:18).

## RESOURCES:

1. [Emergency Response Handbook for Small Group Leaders](#) – email [ACFgroups](#) if you would like a copy.
2. [Counseling Through Your Bible Handbook: Providing Biblical Hope and Practical Help for 50 Everyday Problems](#) – June Hunt
3. [Experiencing Grief](#) by H. Norman Wright
4. [ACF Counseling Referral List](#)

## PRACTICAL TIPS:

1. Pray for them, yourself and the situation.
2. Listen with compassion, not judgement.

Encourage others to open up to the group to be comforted. You alone can't meet their needs; it's the job of the Body of Christ (*2 Corinthians 1:3-4*). Try to understand how they feel about whatever circumstance they are facing.

- When approached by a person in crisis:
  - Be authentic.
  - Take a deep breath with them and ask if you can pray with them.
  - Allow them to feel what they feel and create an environment of emotional safety.
  - Ask open-ended questions: What do you need right now? What would help you feel safe? What can we do for you?
  - Be respectful, not controlling.
  - Express your desire to keep confidentiality. Request permission to share if you need to reach out to a pastor or our groups team for support.
  - When offering resources such as a counseling referral list, encourage them to be empowered to act on their own.
- Responses that don't work or help when someone is hurting (i.e., what not to say):
  - Analysis – "The reason that happened was....."
  - Advice – "If I were you, I would....."
  - Criticism – "If you just didn't....."
  - Comparison – "I know what you mean. One time I...."
  - Facts or logic – "Lots of people go through tough times...."
  - Pep talk/encouragement – "You'll get through this," "God will bring good out of it..."
  - Neglect – change the subject or leave the moment and don't acknowledge what's been shared
- Key phrases that help when people share something hard in the group or in a crisis situation (i.e., what to say to provide comfort):
  - "I'm so sorry you went through that."
  - "I care about you and I'm sad that happened."
  - "I feel compassion for you because....."
  - "I'm sad to know that you....."
  - "My heart is heavy when I think about your....."
  - "I'm glad you shared that with me/us. That was really brave/courageous/hard to do...."

3. Encourage with Scripture.

- Sharing God's Word when ministering to someone that's hurting is powerful.
- Many of the psalms are written as a lament, expressing the fears and grief of the writer. Sharing some of the psalms can give someone hurting the language they need to entrust God with their sorrow.
- God's Word gives life and can bring healing to dark, sad and hurting places. You may not have the right words to say, but God's Word does. Examples:

Abortion: Psalm 139:13	Forgiveness: Ephesians 4:32
Anxiety: 1 Peter 5:7	Infertility: Isaiah 26:3, 55:8; Habakkuk 3:17
Anger: Proverbs 29:11	Loneliness: James 4:8
Death: 1 Corinthians 15:55	Self-esteem: 2 Corinthians 3:18
Depression: Psalm 62:5	Sickness: Psalm 6:2
Finances: Matthew 6:25	Tiredness: Isaiah 40:29

More [verses for specific prayers](#)

4. Create healthy boundaries.

Boundaries draw a line and show what belongs to you and what doesn't (think "property boundaries"). In relationships, boundaries help you recognize what isn't your responsibility:

- Fixing someone's problems.
- Rescuing others from bad choices and the consequences of those choices.
- "You are not God and you are not the Savior for your group. You are just one of the people He chooses to use out of grace."
- Answering texts, calls or emails from group members or ministry leaders during work, family time, or "after hours."
- Investing more time in your group than you are in your family and other primary relationships.
- Doing everything for your group. DELEGATE! Ask for what you need. If no one wants to help or organize it then it may not happen and that's okay.
- Meeting the expectations of everyone in your group...be comfortable saying "no" so you can say "yes" to the most important things.

5. Reach out to others when you're not equipped.

Follow-up and check-ins via text or email can go a long way to let them know they are not alone and you care about them. While we all are ministers of care and reconciliation (i.e., we can show compassion, mercy, kindness), know your own limitations. Unless you are a trained professional counselor, you are not professionally qualified or equipped to offer counseling. Know when to recognize the need for outside help:

- Reports of abuse of any type (physical, sexual, emotional, financial)
- Person is contemplating harming themselves or others
- Thoughts of suicide
- Uncontrollable anger, sadness or hopelessness
- Abusing drugs, alcohol, food, or sex to cope (i.e., escaping rather than solving issues)
- When compulsive or addictive behavior is common
- Loss of someone or something very important to them (break-up, job loss, divorce, death, etc.)
- Something traumatic has happened (i.e., victim of a crime, accident, or other traumatic event)
- Person's ability to function is impaired (i.e., excessive sleeping, inability to work, tension headaches, chronic fatigue, failure in school/work)
- Not enjoying (or even not doing) things they used to love
- Isolation, not responding to messages or calls, withdrawing from social interaction

6. Keep praying.

Sources:

Training Session for ACF Leaders by Carolyn Dixon, LCSW, of Abundant Life Counseling (February 2020)

Ministry to Women by Kelly King, Lifeway (2018)

How to Disciple Men (Short and Sweet) by Jay Payleitner & David Murrow (Eds), The National Coalition of Ministries to Men (2017)