



Leaders,

We can't express how thankful we are for your continued investment in the lives of the students at Beachside. The relationships you're building and the culture you're creating are laying the foundation for significant influence down the road.

By now, you've seen how when trust is built, things in the dark get brought to the light. This guide is to help you navigate the conversations when you discover serious issues or problems in your students' lives. We can be caught by surprise when they admit to drug-use, reveal that they have suicidal thoughts, confess that they have recently become sexually active, or even express that they identify as LGBTQ+. If we're not prepared, our response will do more harm than good.

We want to equip you with the tools you'll need to have tough conversations with the students you're growing to love. Life is messy, but with the right game plan, we think we can be the light of Jesus in some of the darkest parts of students' hearts.

Thank you for being brave enough to enter into the mess and love students right where they are. It's an honor to do this with you.

Thank you for partnering with us to inspire students to follow Jesus with all their heart.

OUR GOAL



WE WANT THE CHURCH TO BE THE SAFEST PLACE FOR ANY STUDENT TO TALK ABOUT ANYTHING!

OUR GOAL IS TO MAKE STUDENTS FEEL...

SAFE

SUPPORTED

LOVED

HEARD

ACCEPTED

HELPED

YOU ARE NOT A COUNSELOR,
AND WE DON'T EXPECT YOU TO BE.



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ABUSE



Any volunteers who work in a church with children under the age of 18 are now mandated reporters of suspected child abuse (GA Law HB1176).

PHYSICAL ABUSE is injury to a child under age 18 by a parent or caretaker resulting in bruises, welts, fractures, burns, cuts, or internal injuries.

SEXUAL ABUSE occurs when a parent or other adult uses a child under age 18 for sexual gratification. This includes any activity used for sexual gratification.

NEGLECT is the failure of the parent or caretaker to see that a child is adequately supervised, fed, clothed, or housed.

PLAN OF ACTION

1. Call your Groups Director as soon as possible (by law this call needs to be within 24 hours).
2. Call DFCS. Staff will coach you through this phone call or make the phone call for you.
3. Document the details/conversation and send it to your Groups Director.

If you believe the student is in immediate danger, call 911. Please contact a Groups Director following 911 call.

SELF-HARM



Self-harm is a self-injurious behavior and can be equated with cutting, burning, certain tattoos or piercings, and other forms of self-mutilation. Just because a student is harming themselves does not mean that he or she is suicidal.

POSSIBLE REASONS A STUDENT HARMSTHEMSELVES

- Inability to regulate or express emotions
- Negative view of self
- Feeling dissatisfied, numb, or empty
- Feeling lonely or misunderstood by others
- Experimentation — seeing what the hype is all about
- Showing off — drawing attention to self
- Self-punishment
- Mental issues
- Distraction
- Shock

DURING THE CONVERSATION

1. Assess the severity of the situation.
 - What do you think are the reasons that have caused you to hurt yourself?
 - How often? How deep?
 - Where are you harming yourself?
 - What are you using to harm yourself?
2. Offer alternatives.
 - Running, walking, journaling, etc.

PLAN OF ACTION

1. Call Your Groups Director as soon as possible.
2. Call the parents. See page 16.

DRINKING AND DRUGS



Drinking and drug use are common experiences for many students.

POSSIBLE REASONS FOR DRINKING AND/OR DRUG USE

- Stress/depression
- Peer pressure
- Freedom
- Curiosity
- Experimenting
- Thrill-seeking
- Personality
- Environment
- Mental health issues
- Medicate pain

DURING THE CONVERSATION

1. Assess the severity of the situation
 - What are you drinking or using?
 - How often are you drinking or using?
 - Where are you drinking or using?
 - Are you blacking out?
2. Process the reasons for drinking and drug use with the student.
3. Do your parents know?

PLAN OF ACTION

1. Call your Groups Director if the situation is severe or happening at InsideOut or at events
2. Continue to walk through the issue with the student.

PORNOGRAPHY



Looking at pornography can be a common activity for students. There is a huge difference between an occasional look at porn and having an addiction.

DURING THE CONVERSATION

1. Assess the severity of the situation.
 - How often are you looking at pornography?
 - Do you want to stop looking at pornography?
2. Do you want accountability?
3. Brainstorm ways they can limit or eliminate their access to porn.

PLAN OF ACTION

1. Call your Groups Director if you need extra support.
2. Continue to walk through the issue with the student.

DEPRESSION/ANXIETY/ EATING DISORDERS

Psychiatric disorders can lead to dangerous health risks, including medical complications and suicide risk.

DURING THE CONVERSATION

1. Assess the severity of the situation.
 - How often are you _____ ? (Binging, purging, thinking about your weight, having anxious thoughts, having panic attacks, feeling depressed, having suicidal thoughts)
 - How long has this been going on?
2. Do your parents know?
3. How can I help?

PLAN OF ACTION

1. Call your Groups Director if the situation is severe or happening at InsideOut or at events
2. Continue to walk through the issue with the student.



SUICIDE



The vast majority of those who commit suicide have communicated intentions to do so to another person prior to the act.

If you get the call or someone who is suicidal meets with you, you need to be the person to respond to the situation. Passing them off to someone else communicates that you might not care.

Take seriously every hint or threat of suicide that a person makes, even if you are certain they are just trying to get attention.

POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS FOR SUICIDE:

A student may not use the term “suicide” but use phrase like:

- “I don’t want to live anymore.”
- “No one would notice if I’m gone.”
- “My family or friends would be better off without me.”
- “Life isn’t worth living.”



DURING THE CONVERSATION/PLAN OF ACTION

- Tell them they did the right thing by coming to you for help.
- Verbally affirm their right decisions.
 1. Picking up the phone.
 2. Dialing your number.
 3. Asking for help.
- Speak calmly, confidently, and with authority.
- Show care, concern, and acceptance (ask questions about how they feel and the reasons for those feelings).
- Listen to them with few interruptions.
- Ask: "Do you have a plan to end your life?"
 - If the plan is specific, lethal, and available, and the student is in imminent danger, call or text 911. You can text 911 while remaining on the line with the student. You will need the student's location.
 - Give instructions to stop the plan.
 - If the plan is not an immediate crisis, call your Groups Director and the parents (see page 16).
- If a student mentions they have had suicidal thoughts in the past, talk to your Groups Director.
- Ask the student if they see a counselor. Keep the conversation going.
- Have them make a commitment to you they will not harm themselves (in writing if possible).

SEX



In 2015, 41 percent of high school students reported having sexual intercourse.¹

DURING THE CONVERSATION

Refer to the Three Encouragements:

- Don't sexualize any relationship outside of marriage
- Don't be mastered by anything
- Honor God with your body

PLAN OF ACTION

1. Continue to walk through the issue with the student.
2. Call your Groups Director for extra support, if needed.
3. If a student is pregnant, call your Groups Director.

¹ Kann, L. (2016). Youth risk behavior surveillance—United States, 2015. *MMWR Surveill Summ*, 63(4). Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/2015/ss6506_updated.pdf

LGBT



- It is somewhat common for young adults to experience an incidence, or even multiple incidences, of same-sex attraction during their student years.
- Students who come to you to confess feelings of same-sex attraction need to be met with a loving, accepting response.
- Forty percent of self-identified gay students report having attempted suicide.

DURING THE CONVERSATION

1. Thank them for telling you.
2. Don't deny, dismiss, or discredit their experience.
3. Don't preach/throw Scripture verses at them.
4. Three Encouragements:
 - Don't sexualize any relationship outside of marriage.
 - Don't be mastered by anything.
 - Honor God with your body.
5. Ask them if their parents know.
6. Let them know that God loves them no matter what.

PLAN OF ACTION

1. Call your Groups Director for extra support if needed.
2. Continue to walk through the issue with the student.

CONTACTING PARENTS



IF THE PARENTS NEED TO BE CONTACTED IN ANY OF THESE SITUATIONS, HERE IS WHAT YOU DO:

- Contact your Groups Director.
- Give the student the opportunity to tell their parents and follow up with the parents afterwards to make sure it happened.
- Tell the student that you will go with them to tell their parents if it makes them feel more comfortable.
- If the student wants you to tell the parents instead, you can call or set up a meeting.

THANK YOU!



Thank you so much for your continued investment in the next generation and for making InsideOut a significant part of your personal ministry.

If you've had one or more of these heavy conversations with your high school students, then congratulations—you're winning! It's evidence that you've created a safe space for your students to talk about anything, and that's definitely a win.

We get it . . . these conversations can feel like inconveniences or interruptions to your regularly scheduled personal life. But your students didn't have to reach out to you. They could have kept their thoughts to themselves or only shared them with their peers, yet they chose to share them with you. That's a big deal! You have a voice that matters, and your students obviously value having you in their lives.

We may never know what hangs in the balance of a student's decision to share and your decision to lean into the conversation.

Working with high school students poses a unique set of challenges. The teenage years are filled with rapid growth alongside confusion and pressure from all angles. That's why we want to THANK YOU for positioning yourselves as listeners, mentors, role models, and guides in their lives. The authentic relationships you build with your students allow them to feel more comfortable opening up to you about any difficulties they may be facing. For some students, you may be the ONLY safe person willing to listen and walk alongside them through difficult seasons. Thanks for being intentional!

Our team is praying that God continues to grow your faith through these defining moments in your life and the lives of your students.

“As leaders, we are never responsible for filling anyone else’s cup. Our responsibility is to empty ours.”

–ANDY STANLEY

Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend

For more helpful resources:

INSIDEOUTSTUDENTS.ORG

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A guide to

hard

conversations