

AMBASSADORS OF HOPE: WORKING TOGETHER TO PREVENT SUICIDE



YOU CAN STRENGTHEN YOUR FRIENDS BY SPREADING THE LIGHT AND HOPE OF JESUS CHRIST.



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In the diplomatic world, ambassadors represent their country to another group of people. But *you* can be an ambassador without even needing a passport! In a world that sometimes seems very dark, you can be an ambassador of hope and light. Just ask Jackson L. (left, in brown pants), from Utah, USA, who is a member of his school's HOPE Squad—a peer-to-peer suicide prevention program. Through an organization called Hope4Utah, he has learned to recognize warning signs, be a friend, and bring hope to his school.

WE NEED YOU

“Being on the HOPE Squad has really opened my eyes,” Jackson says. “There are classmates, friends, and family members who are struggling.”

Jackson has learned that while he is not responsible for the decisions his friends make, there are things he can do to help them get through a crisis. Studies show that 7 out of 10 teens who are depressed or thinking about suicide will tell a friend before talking to an adult.¹ That means that you are in a powerful position to help your friends.

As Sister Carol F. McConkie, former First Counselor in the Young Women General Presidency, has said: “We have a covenant responsibility to look out for one another, to link arms one with another and walk this path together. In other words, put down the phone and look and see who needs your help.”²

You don’t need to be part of a formal organization to make a difference at school or with your friends. Here are tips that can work anytime, anywhere.



WHAT TO DO

To be an ambassador of hope, try to **recognize, reach out, and report.**

1. **RECOGNIZE** the warning signs that someone needs help.³

Look out for those who are:

- Feeling depressed or hopeless.
- Acting recklessly.
- Withdrawing from friends and activities.
- Giving away valued possessions.
- Dealing with stressful situations like loss, major life changes, bullying, etc.
- Changing sleeping, eating, or hygiene habits.
- Talking about or making plans for suicide—saying things like, “I wish I’d never been born” or “Everyone would be better off without me.”

2. **REACH OUT.** Being an ambassador is all about connecting. Find a time when you and your friend can talk openly. You might worry that bringing up self-harm or suicide will make things worse, but that’s a myth. When you have the courage to speak up, you actually give the person a lifeline and let them know you care.

“Don’t be afraid to ask a friend if they are struggling,” says Dr. Greg Hudnall, a suicide prevention expert and founder of Hope4Utah. “Be direct, but don’t lecture or judge.” He recommends using an “I” message, which comes across as caring and concerned instead of



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Carol F. McConkie, former First Counselor in the Young Women General Presidency

lecturing. For example: “I noticed in class today that you were struggling. I am wondering if you’re OK. Are you thinking of hurting yourself?”

Pray for the Spirit to help you know what to say. If your friends are struggling with suicidal thoughts or other serious challenges like depression or anxiety, don’t just tell them to snap out of it! Elder Dale G. Renlund of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “The way we talk to someone who is healthy and maybe just going through a blue spell is different from the way we would talk to someone with mental illness.” He recommends saying something like, “You’re not alone.

We’re here with you. We will help you through this.”

And remember to really listen instead of planning what you’re going to say next. As Elder Renlund put it, “Having people talk and explain how they feel, and encouraging them to talk, is probably more important than giving advice.”⁴

3. REPORT. When you find out that a friend is struggling, you might be tempted to keep these worries to yourself. Your friend might even ask you not to tell anyone. But ambassadors speak up! Offer to go with them to talk to a trusted adult, like a parent, school counselor, or church leader. Refer them



IF YOU ARE STRUGGLING

Don’t give up! You are important and loved. The world is a better place because you are here, and *your life is worth saving*. Talk to a trusted adult for help—a parent, doctor, school counselor, or Church leader. If you are in crisis, call your national suicide help line (look under “Resources”). Jesus Christ can help you find light and hope when all you feel is darkness and despair.

RESOURCES

- befrienders.org
- suicide.org/international-suicide-hotlines.html
- iasp.info
- preventing-suicide.lds.org

to your national suicide help line or crisis text line. If they are threatening to hurt themselves or others, take them to a hospital or call emergency services, and stay with them until they get professional help. If they are not in immediate danger, look for ongoing ways to include and support them. “Create opportunities for them to be part of something,” Dr. Hudnall says. “Try inviting them to do something active with you, like running, riding bikes, or swimming.” Physical activities are good because movement can help improve mood.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE YOUR POWER

Imagine for a minute how different the world would be if every person had a supportive friend. We can't save the whole world, but we can be a friend to those who need one.

Sister McConkie urged us to be “willing to widen your circle of friends” and “accept others, even though they may be different than you.” She pointed out that befriending someone may make the difference between them moving forward with hope or doing something destructive, like suicide. “Be the difference,” she encouraged. “You have that much capacity for good.”

By reaching out, you are following the example of the ultimate source of hope: Jesus Christ.

“Our HOPE Squad adviser tells us that we are ‘ambassadors of hope,’” Jackson says. “I love that, because we are not only ambassadors of hope but also ambassadors of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, He is our hope.”

When we show Christlike love for others, we can help them find hope and healing.

“I know that if Jesus Christ were here on earth, He would be reaching out to others just as we are,” Jackson says. “It brings me comfort to know that I am doing as He would do.” **NE**



“IF WE TRY TO JUST GET THROUGH THE NEXT DAY, AND THEN THE NEXT DAY, AND THEN THE NEXT DAY, . . . THE LORD WILL HELP US WITH THAT. THERE’S THIS PARTICULAR VERSE THAT ISAIAH GIVES THAT IS REMARKABLE. HE SAYS, ‘WHEN YE ARE WEARY HE [THE SAVIOR] WAKETH MORNING BY MORNING’ [2 NEPHI 7:4]. HE’S THERE EVERY DAY. . . . SO IF THE BEST YOU CAN DO IS TO GET UP OUT OF BED IN THE MORNING, JUST KNOW THAT HE IS THERE WITH YOU. . . . COUNT IT AS A WIN, AND THEN GO ON. IF THAT’S THE BEST THAT CAN HAPPEN THAT DAY, KEEP TRYING.”

Elder Dale G. Renlund of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

NOTES

1. See “What Are Hope Squads?” Hope4Utah, hope4utah.com/hope-squad.
2. Interview with Sister McConkie on Jan. 19, 2018.
3. See “The Warning Signs of Suicide,” Befrienders Worldwide, befrienders.org/warning-signs, and “Suicide: What to Do When Someone Is Suicidal,” Mayo Clinic, mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/suicide/in-depth/suicide/art-20044707.
4. Interview with Elder Renlund on Jan. 23, 2018.