

Pastoral Care Triage

Quick Checklist

A concise guide for pastors and church leaders in moments of crisis

1. Is this person in immediate danger of harming themselves or others?

- ⇒ **Ask directly:** “Are you thinking about hurting yourself or someone else right now?”
- ⇒ **If YES** → Call **911** or local emergency services. If suicide risk, call **988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline)**. Stay with the person until help arrives.
- ⇒ **If NO but concern remains** → Stabilize, monitor closely, and consider referral.

2. Do I need to call 911 or a crisis hotline?

- ⇒ **Call 911:** Active suicide attempt, violence, or severe medical/mental health emergency.
- ⇒ **Call a crisis hotline:** Distress or suicidal talk without immediate danger → **Dial 988**.
- ⇒ **Pastoral role:** Encourage support but intervene if safety is at risk.

3. Can I offer immediate stabilization (presence, prayer, calm environment)?

- ⇒ **Immediate actions:** Sit calmly, use a steady tone, avoid panic. Use active listening.
- ⇒ Offer a brief prayer if appropriate: *“Lord, bring peace and safety in this moment.”*
- ⇒ Encourage slow breathing: *“Let’s take a few deep breaths together.”*
- ⇒ **Reminder:** You are a stabilizing presence; you don’t have to fix everything.

4. Who can I refer this person to (counselor, doctor, hotline)?

- ⇒ **Suicide risk:** Crisis line, emergency services, and/or a licensed therapist.
- ⇒ **Abuse disclosure:** Follow **mandatory reporting laws** immediately.
- ⇒ **Depression/anxiety:** Refer to a licensed Pastoral Counselor or primary care physician.
- ⇒ **Referral language:** *“I want to walk with you, and it’s also important to connect you with someone trained to help in this area.”*

5. How will I follow up in the next 24–48 hours?

- ⇒ **Follow-up ideas:** Call or text within 24 hours → *“I’m checking in. How are you feeling today?”*
- ⇒ Pray with them and engage supportive community (small group, care team).
- ⇒ Confirm they connected with referral resources and have a next appointment.
- ⇒ **Do NOT:** Become the sole counselor or carry long-term responsibility.

Print and keep nearby | Crisis support (U.S.): 988