

My Life is In Your Hands
The Catholic Response to Depression, Addiction, and Suicide
Grades 7-9

Goal: Students will learn about depression, addiction and suicide as life issues, from the perspective of faith. They will explore the understanding that God has a plan for each person, and that our responsibility is to respond with respect for ourselves.

Lesson: This lesson touches on sensitive topics that were specifically requested by teachers and administrators who participated in RLW 2013. Clinical depression and mental health problems are serious concerns. This discussion does not seek to solve any medical problems. Rather, it looks at the root cause of much of teen and youth depression and anxiety, which lies in a devalued sense of self and a failure to understand their place in creation. Students who react strongly to this material may need follow-up care.

Please follow whatever protocol your school has in place.

Watch: [How to be Courageous](#) Justin Fatica shares using God's love to make us overcome our fears. 3.5 minutes

Discussion: What does it mean to be courageous?
Why is courage needed in today's culture? Examples?
What does it mean to be a Courageous Catholic?

Discussion: Ask open-ended questions to gauge the students' understanding of concepts.

What is drug use?

What is cutting?

What is depression?

What is suicide?

Do you know anyone who has ever been involved with any of these?

What was their experience?

Do you think God has anything to say about any of these topics? Why or why not?

Watch: [Dealing with Addiction](#) Justin shares the positive attitude that helped him overcome his addiction. Focus on others and God to help us overcome addiction. 5 minutes.

Discussion: What role did addiction play in Justin's life?
Was he able to overcome his addiction? How?
What has he learned as a result of allowing God to shape his life?

Watch: The love of Jesus and the [power of the confessional overcomes the horrible reality of suicide](#). Hear Francesca shares from Ireland her experience of planning, plotting, and eventually confessing her suicide at age 15. 6.5 minutes.

Discussion:

Does Francesca look like a woman who once thought about suicide? Why or why not?

What changed in her life?

Why was she contemplating suicide?

What has happened to her since that time?

What is the reason for her current joy?

Often, it is difficult to understand where we fit in this enormous world. There are always people smarter, richer, more beautiful or more successful than we are. That is just life. So, how do we differentiate ourselves?

How do we find meaning for our lives?

What is the reason for our joy?

Do we have a reason?

Do we have joy?

Christians have a perspective on their place in the world different from anyone else's. We know that Jesus came into the world to personally save each and every one of us and to ensure that we would be with him for eternity in Heaven. This knowledge is sometimes difficult to keep in mind with everything else we have to think about. But it is the key to having joy and hope versus having hopelessness and giving up or turning to drugs and other stimulants to get high.

Activity: Have students research different topics. They can choose to study eating disorders and self-harm (Chiara), overcoming abuse (Catholic wisdom), drug addiction (videos from former addicts), or suicide prevention (TeenBreaks).

Resources for these topics can be found in the list under materials.

Have the students present what they learned about their topic to the class, or write a report on it to be handed in for homework. Ask the students to write or talk about the negative actions or motivations and problems related to their topic and how these can be overcome.

Prayer:

Prayer for Hope

Heavenly father, I come before you today in need of hope.

There are times when I feel helpless.

There are times when I feel weak. I pray for hope.

I need hope for a better future. I need hope for a better life.

I need hope for love and kindness.

Father, thank you for sending your Son to bring me life—

Life to the fullest; life for eternity. Thank you for allowing me to share in Christ's Resurrection.

Christ is alive in me, and His Spirit dwells deeply in my being,

Even when I cannot see you or even feel your presence.

Thank you for making all things possible for those who believe.

Thank you for guiding me right now.

May I continue to receive guidance and hope from you

This hour and every hour.

Amen.

Look at a crucifix next time you feel lost or hopeless. Let it remind you of just how much God loves you. And of how much He wishes to help you secure a place in His Heavenly Kingdom for yourself and others! Still feel useless? Remember this, as best you can. God doesn't want to lose any of us!

Additional classroom resources:

Material:

Videos

Stories

[Videos from former addicts](#) on addiction from a wide variety of drugs. Each video is approx. 8-9 minutes. Highlight [prescription drug use](#) and [marijuana](#).

["Racing for Recovery"](#) Todd Crandell shares his story of overcoming addiction by training for Ironman competitions. 4 minutes.

The love of Jesus and the [power of the confessional overcomes the horrible reality of suicide](#). Hear Francesca shares from Ireland her experience of planning, plotting, and eventually confessing her suicide at age 15. 6.5 minutes.

Informational

["Talking About Suicide"](#) Fr. Mike Schmitz explains Church teaching on suicide and talks about hope being the best remedy for suicidal thoughts. 8.5 minutes.

["Hope in the Face of Suicide"](#) Fr. Mike Schmitz explains the Church's sanctity of life ethic and how important it is that we treat all life as sacred, even when people feel that life is not worth living. 7.5 minutes.

["God Cares About Your Suffering"](#) Mark Hart explains how God cares about our suffering; He suffered worse. 2 minutes.

["God is Bigger Than Our Fears"](#) Mark Hart explains how we shouldn't tell our God how big our problems are, but tell our problems how big our God is. 3 minutes.

["How Do I Build Virtue?"](#) Ascension Presents explains how holiness and virtue go hand-in-hand, and holiness leads to happiness. 6 minutes.

["The Problem of Suffering"](#) Ascension Presents tackles the problem of suffering by recognizing that God is with us in the midst of our troubles. 6.5 minutes.

["Where Are You Going?"](#) Chris Stefanick invites us to think about where we are going and where we will end up. Great as the beginning of a discussion about why this life is not all there is. 3 minutes.

["Why Does God Let Us Suffer?"](#) This is the reason so many people lose faith and hope in God at their darkest moments. Chris Stefanick shares insights that help put suffering into perspective of our faith and the example of Christ. 5 minutes.

["Addiction"](#) Fr. Rob Galea discusses overcoming addiction from a Catholic perspective. 5.5 minutes.

["Looking after Your Body"](#) Fr. Rob Galea highlights the importance of taking care of our bodies, but also of maintaining perspective and making sure that we do not idolize doing so. 3 minutes.

Articles

["What You or Your Friends Need to Know About Suicidal Thoughts"](#) Leah Darrow's inspiring story and insightful advice for people experiencing suicidal thoughts or their friends.

[Stories from Chiara](#), a young woman who suffered with eating disorders and self-harm but has sought help and offers insights for teens on how they can stop the self-destructive cycle. 2013 blog posts on self-harm relate to this lesson.

Catholic wisdom from young [women who have suffered abuse](#), to help with the healing.

Websites

[NDA website for teens with facts on common drugs.](#)

13 Reasons Why

This spring, many students may have watched 13 Reasons Why on Netflix which brings up many topics including suicide, substance abuse, sexual assault, bullying, and others. Unfortunately the

show portrays suicide as the fault of suicide survivors, while in reality the vast majority of suicides are committed by people with mental illness. The show does rightly point out that we all have a role to play in preventing suicide, however it is important that those who are struggling with suicidal thoughts receive the proper help that they need. Here are some resources to help students who have already watched the show or who may be interested in doing so discuss its content from an educated and Catholic perspective.

- ["Before You Watch 13 Reasons Why"](#) Article from Life Teen.
- ["What '13 Reasons Why' Gets Wrong"](#) Video response from Life Teen. 4 minutes.
- FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS: ["Catholic leaders urge extreme caution for new Netflix series"](#) Response of Catholic leaders to 13 Reasons Why.
- Also see the Fr. Mike Schmitz video above: ["Talking about Suicide."](#)

Resources for Teachers and Parents

FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS: Helpguide.org information on [Teen Depression and Suicide](#). Good resource for parents and educators to understand symptoms and warning signs and know how to help.

External Resources

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) offers a hotline and online guidance for anyone suffering from depression or having thoughts of suicide.