



Steps for Life

Discussion material on suicide based on the Steps for Life campaign

Introduction

This discussion material has been developed by SPIV as part of the Steps for Life suicide prevention campaign. The campaign, which was initiated and funded by Region Västra Götaland, also includes the Steps for Life video, a website, leaflets, and posters for download. The purpose of the material is to start a conversation about a subject that is often perceived as difficult and sometimes frightening. The more people talk about suicide and feel confident in facing it, the greater the chance that a person in a suicidal crisis can get support and help from people around them to continue living. Suicide is an umbrella term that includes thinking about, planning or taking/attempting to take one's own life.

The material should be easy to use and is aimed at groups in a wide range of settings. It can be used as a basis for a workplace meeting, when interacting with clients in, for example, residential services, or during meetings for club members. It can also be incorporated into regular instruction in schools/adult education colleges/universities as part of health promotion and disease prevention work.

For the moderator:

The material is based on the Steps for Life video, which can be viewed at www.stegforlivet.se or on YouTube. The video is five minutes long, and is subtitled in both Swedish and English.

Remember that discussions about life and death can evoke strong emotions. This is not dangerous; it is perfectly normal. If anyone seems sad after the discussion, it is a good idea for the moderator to follow up and ask how the person is feeling. A few days after the meeting, it is also a good idea to follow up with all the participants individually or in groups to see how the discussion was received and perceived. Let them know in advance that this will be done so that everyone knows that a follow-up is part of the plan.

If you are worried about someone close to you or unsure about how they are feeling, ask them about suicidal thoughts. It's the only way to find out.

Procedure:

We have developed three different discussion models. Choose the one(s) you think are best suited for the group you are meeting. The first model is based on each of the participants sharing how the Steps for Life video affects them based on their reflections and experiences. The second model centres around discussion questions based on myths discussed in the video, and about how we can understand and maybe help each other. The third model is reflection questions based on the 4 steps – what do they mean in practice?

Model 1. Discussion about the video

Group discussion with about 6–8 people per group.

Guidelines that provide a sense of security for the discussion:

- Appoint a discussion leader who makes sure everyone gets a chance to talk, respects the time limit, and follows the guidelines.
- Show respect for each other: Everyone must be given a chance to speak without being interrupted. No one should question or make comments about what the speaker is saying, unless they ask for this.
- Pledge of confidentiality: What is said in the group, stays in the group.
- The group works in rounds, with each person speaking 2–3 minutes per round.

Follow these steps:

- Round of introductions, if necessary.
- Go through the guidelines of the discussion.
- Watch the video together.
- Divide into discussion groups, and appoint a discussion leader for each group.
- Then do one round per question, with each person giving their answer.

- Question 1: Describe a feeling or mood that the video evoked in you. Please provide your reasons.
- Question 2: Was there any scene in the video that struck you in particular? Please provide your reasons.
- Question 3: Was there any character in the video that struck you in particular? Please provide your reasons.
- After the three rounds, the floor is open to anyone who wishes to answer (max. 10–15 minutes): How did it feel to share your thoughts with the group? Does anyone want to comment on anything someone spoke about? What did you learn from the discussion – any reflections, insights?
- Closing: Remind everyone about the pledge to keep things confidential, and that everyone has contributed a precious gift in the form of their story.

Model 2. Beehives – discussion about myths based on the video

Group discussion in beehives, with 2–4 people per hive, starting and ending as a whole group.

Guidelines that provide a sense of security for the discussion:

- Show respect for each other: Everyone must be given a chance to speak without being interrupted.
- The leader is responsible for ensuring that the hives keep to the maximum time of 2 minutes per participant in the groups. For example, if the beehives are made up of 3 people, the discussion lasts a maximum of 6 minutes.

Myths are created when a subject is sensitive, and we are not very used to talking about it. We call them taboos, and suicide is one of them. But myths often have a grain of truth. What is true and what is false in the following statements about suicide?

Follow these steps:

- Begin by informing the group about myths and that they should talk about them in beehives, i.e. in small groups of 2–4 people, where they are sitting.
- Watch the video.
- Assign one myth per group (i.e. beehive). Depending on the size of the group as a whole, it may be necessary to assign the same myth to more than one beehive.
- Discuss the myths in the beehives.
- Then go through one myth at a time, one group at a time, letting each group say what they talked about and what they came up with. Let the group speak freely when talking about their reasoning. Contribute with facts as outlined in the commentary for each myth. Current statistics and facts on suicide and suicide prevention can be found on the websites on the last page.

Myths: True or false about suicide?

1. **“You can never help someone who is considering suicide. Once they have made up their mind, you can't change it.”**

Answer: – False: 85–90% of people who attempt suicide die of completely different causes. BUT we cannot be with a person all the time. It is hard to know how serious the situation is. Ask questions and encourage the person to talk about how they are feeling. What usually helps them get back on their feet? Refer to the four steps. Did you see anyone in the video offering help? Who? What does Moa mention in the video?

2. **“You can tell if a person is considering suicide.”**

Answer: – False: It is usually not visible from the outside. We are all very good at keeping our mask on. You have to ask the person how they are feeling and whether they are having suicidal thoughts. BUT: Sometimes we can see signs that the person is giving up, such as talking about hopelessness, loneliness or death, or withdrawing or being angry and irritable a lot of the time. Did you see or hear any signs like these in the video?

3. **“A person who talks about suicide will not take their own life.”**

Answer: – False: We can never know whether a person will go from thought to action. We should instead view all communication about suicide as a cry for help and take it seriously. When someone talks about their thoughts or plans, it makes it easier for us to offer help and support. If a person survives a suicide attempt, it should be seen as a

traumatic event even if the person was not seriously injured. Always see it as a cry for help from a desperate person and offer your support.

4. “Anyone who thinks about suicide wants to die.”

Answer: – False: The person rarely wants to die, but the situation is sometimes so overwhelming that they cannot take it anymore and see no other solution. BUT: The will to live is high and constant, while the desire to die is often sudden and short-lived, as in a crisis. So, staying with the person is often helpful. Support them in seeking help from, for example, school health services, occupational health services or a healthcare centre. ALWAYS call 112 in an emergency situation.

5. “Talking about suicide is contagious.”

Answer: – False and true: Compassionately and respectfully asking a person if they are thinking about suicide will not give them ideas to take their own life. BUT: Talking about it romantically or positively can trigger suicidal thoughts in a fragile person who has already thought about ending their life.

6. “It is too hard to help a person who I suspect is considering suicide.” Answer:

False: Sometimes it is hard – the person may be facing great difficulties. But we know that people who have been suicidal have found it a great help to have someone in their life who stayed, listened and validated their feelings and experiences. This has actually saved lives. Small things can often make a big difference. BUT the person may also need urgent help from the healthcare system. If you suspect that is the case, stop and call 112, or go with them to a psychiatric emergency room. What forms of help does Moa mention in the video?

Model 3. Reflect on the 4 steps and what they can mean in practice

Group discussion in small or large groups. The discussion can be split up and conducted in multiple sessions if there is a need to delve deeper.

Guidelines that provide a sense of security for the discussion:

Group discussion with 3–8 people per group.

- Appoint a discussion leader who makes sure everyone gets a chance to talk, respects the time limit, and follows the guidelines.
- Show respect for each other: Everyone must be given a chance to speak without being interrupted. No one should question or make comments about what the speaker is saying, unless they ask for this.

- Pledge of confidentiality: What is said in the group, stays in the group.
- The group works in rounds, with each person speaking 2–3 minutes per round.

Follow these steps:

- Round of introductions, if necessary.
- Go through the guidelines of the discussion.
- Watch the video together and ask the participants to read through the four steps in the leaflet or poster individually.
- Divide into discussion groups and appoint a discussion leader for each group.
- Then perform one or more rounds for each step.
- Let the group speak freely after each round, so the exercise is more dynamic and feels more like a conversation.

The Steps for Life campaign is based on 4 steps to take when we are worried about someone close to us. Reality is, of course, more complex and challenging, and it can be difficult to know what to say and do to move forward in a conversation with someone who may not want to talk, or who expresses a strong wish to die, for example.

Examples of questions to ponder and reflect on:

Step 1 – Make contact

How do we make contact and approach a person we are worried about? – Give suggestions on how to make contact. Are there times that are not suitable for talking about difficult topics? What does it take for someone to have the courage to open up to us?

Step 2 – Listen

What does it mean to listen to another person? What conditions are needed for good listening and conversation? Are there times when you have felt seen and heard? How did it feel?

Step 3 – Ask about suicidal thoughts

Are there other examples of how we can talk about and ask questions about suicidal thoughts? If the person clearly expresses suicidal thoughts, how can we ask about the severity of the situation? Is there anything that should not be said? Conversations about death can evoke strong emotions, including in the person who wants to help. How can we take care of and soothe ourselves so that the situation is as safe as possible?

Step 4 – Seek help

What does it mean to seek help? And when is it urgent? If the person is expressing suicidal thoughts and perhaps even describing their plans for how and when this will happen, you need to try to help the person find a way of coping. How can you go about this? What help is available in your local area? What responsibility do you have towards another person as a fellow human being?

During the discussion, refer the participants to www.stegforlivet.se for further reading.

More information and facts about suicide and suicide prevention are available at:

Pages in English:

www.ki.se/nasp

www.suicidprevention.se

www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide

Pages in Swedish

www.suicidprev.se

www.spes.se

www.mind.se

www.respi.se

For questions or comments on the material, please contact SPIV:

Info@suicidprev.se

Good luck!