
FOR FACILITATORS ONLY

SUICIDE

Every so often, a group participant will talk in language suggestive of suicide.

"I feel so depressed. I wish I would just go away and be with him."

"My wife and I were together always. I can't go on without her. When I go home at night, I feel like ending it all."

What do you do or say? How do you know whether this is a grief talk, depression, or whether your participant is really going to act? The simple fact is that **you don't know**, but you can get a little better idea whether that participant is likely to act upon his/her feelings.

In most cases, you will find that these are natural valid expressions with scant likelihood for execution, but we can never take it completely for granted.

SUGGESTIONS:

Statements such as "John, you know you don't really mean that," or "Mary, think about it. You have everything to live for," frequently cause the participant to suppress his or her feelings, and right now you want to have those feelings elicited and expressed, or you will never get further information as to how serious his or her intent is.

- Acknowledge the validity of the participant's feelings. One approach might be to say, "Many people seem to have these feelings, John. Tell me, how long have you felt this way?"
- Address the group to see if others feel this way. Attempt to steer group comments with regard to these feelings.
- Get John to talk a bit more in the group, if it is appropriate and you feel comfortable handling it. Otherwise, tell John that these are common feelings and you would like to talk with him after the group. But then, you **must** follow up with him immediately after the session. You are doing this to find answers to the following questions:
 - Is there a definite plan for dying by suicide, such as time, place and/or method?
 - How intense are the impulses?
 - How long has the person had these ideas?
 - Are others involved in the plan? If so, how?
 - Was there a precipitating event? Why is suicide being considered now?
 - Is there a history of suicidality in the past?

ACTION TO TAKE

Unless you are professionally trained and certified to handle suicide interventions, do not under any circumstances attempt an intervention.

Your role at this point is to:

- acknowledge the feelings
- elicit information
- pass this information along to a skilled professional

It is important that each incidence of suicidal feelings be passed along to the social worker or clinical supervisor who is trained in handling such matters.