



# LIVING LIFE POSITIVELY

**A Facilitator's Manual  
for  
Conducting Workshops in the  
Domain of  
Life-Skills Education  
Stress Management  
And  
Sensitization Program for Suicide Prevention**

*(In collaboration with Directorate General of Health Services, MOHFW)*



**The National Institute of Health and Family Welfare  
New Delhi**

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जगत प्रकाश नड्डा  
Jagat Prakash Nadda



सत्यमेव जयते



स्वास्थ्य एवं परिवार कल्याण मंत्री  
भारत सरकार  
Minister of Health & Family Welfare  
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### Foreword

Stress is an inevitable and necessary component of life to a degree. Excessive stress can become a disease promoting agent and constitutes a major health concern today. Stress coping strategies, acquired through experience, vary individually. Many of these coping strategies, however, are learnt during the formative years of development. In essence, how appropriate an individual deals with stressful life events at various stages of development is determined, to a large extent, by what was learnt and reinforced during the previous stages of development.

2. It is necessary, then that timely and effective Life Skills Education is provided and continued during childhood through adolescence to ensure positive coping responses as adults. Life Skills can be taught to assist individuals successfully to deal with stressful life events, even before they occur. Successfully coping with stressful events at an early age can minimise acquisition of unhealthy stress coping responses which could promote illness and disease.

3. I am happy to note that the Mental Health Division of Directorate-General of Health Services, Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, is bringing out guidelines for conducting sessions in Life Skills Education, Stress Management and Suicide Prevention. It will go a long way in scaling up interventions under District Mental Health Programme for prevention and promotion of mental health.

4. I congratulate the team for this important initiative.

(Jagat Prakash Nadda)

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दिनांक/Dated.....

MESSAGE

Stress is what you feel when you have to handle more than you are used to. Some stress is normal and even useful. Stress can help if you need to work hard or react quickly. But if stress happens too often or lasts too long, it can have bad effects. A good balance of stress in one's life can be healthy, and growth promoting in terms of one's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development.

Stress management is all about taking charge: of one's lifestyle, thoughts, emotions, and the way one deals with problems. No matter how stressful one's life seems, there are steps that one can take to relieve the pressure and regain control. Through the implementation of a comprehensive life skills approach, individuals can learn to cope and handle stressful life events. The goal of Life Skills education is not to shelter individuals from stressful situations, but to help them develop the ability to respond to stressful events in a positive, constructive way.

I am happy that the program division is bringing out guidelines for conducting sessions in Life Skills Education, Stress Management and Suicide Prevention. I hope that it will provide much needed impetus in planning and implementing various interventions for prevention and promotion of mental health under District Mental Health Program.

I congratulate the team for this important initiative.

(Dr. Jagdish Prasad)



## Preface

'Living Life Positively' is a facilitators' manual for conducting workshops and sensitization programs in the domains of 'Life-skills', 'Stress management' and 'Suicide prevention.' The manual is divided into four parts. Part I provides a brief orientation to the basics of conducting an interactive program; for example, how to introduce a topic, improve involvement of participants in a program, keep the group discussions focused, improve the learning environment, have effective time management in a program of short duration and what qualities a facilitator should possess. Thus, this part helps a facilitator in conducting a program effectively in a relatively short span.

Part II deals with 'Life-skills.' The World Health Organization (WHO) has postulated ten core life-skills which are generally clubbed into three major domains – thinking skills, interpersonal skills and personal/self-management skills. This part of the manual gives a brief outline of these skills (so that the facilitator has an understanding of these skills) and how to conduct a 5-6 hours workshop in this domain. The primary target audience for this module is school students; however, with some modifications it can be used for other groups as well (e.g., college students). Though the module provides brief outline about various life-skills and their applications, facilitators are advised to gather as much information as possible about these skills so that they are able to help the participants in having in-depth understanding of Life-skills.

Part III focuses on 'stress management.' Similar to module II, this module also provides a brief outline about what is stress, why we get stressed and how stress can be managed. It is followed by a guideline about how to conduct a stress management workshop. This module has been written in a generic manner and can be used for various groups of people such as those facing stress at work place, students having examination related stress and so on.

Part III of the manual is about 'Suicide prevention.' This component is somewhat different from the other two modules. This is primarily meant to conduct sensitization and awareness programs in the domain of suicide prevention for different groups of

people (such as teachers, employers, individuals working with farmers etc.) so that they work as '**gatekeepers**' to identify vulnerable people and guide them in seeking timely and appropriate help.

The whole manual has been written in simple language and technical jargons have been avoided as far as possible. The manual has been designed in a manner that a facilitator can run small half-day workshops/sensitization programs; however, these materials with some changes can be used for longer duration programs also (e.g., a 12 hours program to be conducted in 8 days having 90 minutes sessions on each day). The facilitator can use Power-Points as an aid in conducting programs (based on the background information given in various sections). However, the Power-Points should not be used in a manner that the program takes the shape of a didactic lecture!

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# **PART-I**

## **HOW TO CONDUCT AN EFFECTIVE WORKSHOP/ SENSITIZATION PROGRAMME?**





## 1. Background

Communicating a correct message to a learner is one thing, communicating it effectively is another thing. Effective communication depends on various factors such as the knowledge, attitude and enthusiasm of the communicator; motivation of the learner and the environment in which the learning is taking place. We describe here components of effective communication. Having an understanding of these factors will help the facilitator in shaping the workshops and sensitization programs towards better outcome.

## 2. The Facilitator

A group's involvement in a program, to a large extent, depends on the facilitator; for example, the facilitator's attitude towards the program, the style of conducting the program and preparation for the program.

### 2.1. Qualities of Facilitator

A facilitator is supposed to work cohesively with participants of different backgrounds and personalities. Moreover, different participants may have different levels of motivation for being involved in the program (e.g., one individual can participate in a stress-management workshop because he feels stressed at his workplace and is interested in knowing about the methods of tackling stressors. On the other hand, in the same workshop another individual may participate because he has been deputed by his organization. However, he perceives it as an extra burden because after attending this workshop his organization will require him to conduct such programs for other staff in addition to his routine work). The facilitator needs to bring all the participants to relatively same level in terms of motivation and participation so that the learning environment remains conducive and everyone learns. Thus, a **facilitator needs to:**

- **Have a proactive attitude:** He or she should actively try to shape the program in such a manner that participants find the program interesting. Further, the facilitator should ensure that no participant remains passive.

- **Present himself or herself in a pleasant manner to the group:** It is important that the facilitator presents himself to the group as a warm and friendly individual who believes in teamwork.
- **Have insight into group dynamics:** A facilitator of any group should have reasonably good understanding of group dynamics. For example, groups may have sub-group formations in which instead of individuals, the sub-groups start interacting and, many a times, unnecessarily contradict each other. It negatively affects the communication in the group and, in turn, the learning process. Likewise, one or more members of the group can be very domineering and obstruct others from expressing their views. It is, therefore, important that the facilitator moderates the group in a manner that every participant gets opportunity to express views and contributes to the discussions.
- **Be experimental in devising interactive activities:** As stated earlier, effective communication does not depend only on its content but also on the method of communication. Thus, if a message is given in an interesting manner, it is received well and remembered longer by the learners. For example, instead of just telling that one should involve others also in discussion and finding solutions, if the examiner involves them in a task that can be done more effectively if people work together, it gives a strong message about group work in an interesting manner. Also, involving fun, joke and other such things keeps the environment easy and participants accept the message readily. For example, instead of telling, *“Please switch off your mobile”* if it is said, *“Please keep your mobile switched off as we do not want outsiders to participate in our program!”* helps in presenting the message in a light manner.

### 3. Participants

To conduct a program in an effective manner, as far as possible, there should be uniformity among participants in terms of age, education, socio-economic backgrounds etc. It helps the participants to relate with each other and facilitates

communication. Though sometimes variance in the background of participants helps in gaining insight into differences in perspectives of people from different backgrounds, more often than not, it creates hindrances as participants may perceive the perspectives of others as not applicable to them. For example, a stress management workshop for information technology professionals will have different perspective from that of a stress-management workshop for health professionals (even if the basic paradigms remain same). Hence, mixing these two sets of people will be counterproductive. Likewise, elderly individuals may have a different take on an issue as compared to young people and both groups can negate the perspectives of each other because they are not able to relate with others' viewpoints.

#### **4. Environment**

A conducive learning environment plays crucial role in determining the success of a program. Therefore, the place where program is being held should have:

- Proper space where around 25 people can sit comfortably, form groups and have interactions in circular siting arrangements.
- Proper lighting, ventilation, temperature.

Further, the facilitator should ensure that there is availability of stationery (as per the requirements; e.g., pens, pencils, sketch-pens, white boards, chart papers, chart paper stands, clips etc.). Also, it is important to ensure that if the audio-visual medium is to be used (e.g., power-point presentation), the requisite support is available (e.g., computer and LCD projector). Doing last minute arrangements and dropping out activities because of lack of arrangements reflect poorly on the facilitator and demotivate the participants.

#### **5. Ground Rules**

It is important for the facilitator to set the ground rules for participants in the beginning of the program. These are:

- **There should be respect for everyone's opinion.** There can be differences in opinion but one should not misbehave with a participant because s/he is expressing a differing opinion.

- **Everyone should get chance to express his/her opinion.** Only, if a group has been asked to choose a representative to express the opinion of the group, one person should speak; otherwise, everyone should get a fair chance to speak.
- **One person should not speak over another.** Thus, if one person is speaking, others should listen patiently.
- **The participants should express their opinion succinctly** so that within a limited period everyone gets chance to express opinion.
- **The participants should maintain confidentiality**

Two things help in setting the ground rules:

1. **Involve participants in setting the ground rules.** Ask the participants to specify the rules for smooth conduction of program and then summarize it. If any required rule is not indicated by the group, the facilitator can put it.
2. **Brief activities** can help the group to learn ground rules more effectively. A few examples have been given in the next section.

## **6. Activities Suitable for Initiation of a Program**

To make the group cohesive and active as well as to break the initial hesitation in interacting with unknown people, a few interesting activities can be very helpful. A few have been described here. The facilitator can develop any other similar activity of his or her choice.

### **6.1. Introduction of Participants**

A simple way of introduction of participants to the group could be asking the participants to tell their names and places they have come from. However, making this activity more interesting is important for two reasons – first, this is the first formal activity of the program and second, it gives opportunity to participants to know each other. Therefore, doing it through any interesting activity helps in setting the right tone of the program and makes the participants comfortable with

each other. For example, one interesting way of introduction could be to ask the participants sit in a circle and each participant should introduce the person sitting on his/her right side. The facilitator can say, *“Now we will get acquainted to all the participants. Usually, we are asked to introduce ourselves. However, I would like all of you to introduce someone else and get introduced by someone else. You have to introduce the person sitting on your right side. Thus, you will introduce the person on your right side and get introduced by the person on your left. I am giving you 10 minutes to interact with the person on your right side to know about his/her name, place of residence, place of work, hobbies, why he is attending this program etc. After 10 minutes the introduction will start. Once a person is being introduced he/she can add anything which he/she wants. Ensure that introduction of an individual does not go beyond 2 minutes.”*

## **6.2. A few activities for explaining the ground rules**

Similar to the activity for introduction of the participants, there can be interesting activities to set the ground rules. The facilitator can use one or two such activities to introduce the ground rules and then involve the group to state other rules. Examples of a few activities are being given here:

### **6.2.1. What is the colour of the box?**

This is an interesting activity to communicate to the group that different people can have different perspectives about a given thing because of their unique experiences and it is important that we respect others' opinion.

*Invite four participants to sit on four sides of a table. In the middle of a table keep a big square (made of a cardboard) with four side walls of different colors. The top and bottom can be white. Ensure that the participants are able to see only their side of the square. Now ask each of them to tell the colour of the square. When each participant tells a different colour, ask them why everyone is telling a different colour. The group will, naturally, respond that different sides of the square may have different colours and since they are not able to see the other sides they are not able to tell the other colours. Now ask the group (and other participants who are watching) what message this activity communicates? Moderate the discussion so that the message goes to the group that different people can have different opinion about something because their experiences are*

*different and everyone can be correct. Therefore, we must respect others perspectives and integrate it for a holistic understanding of something.*

### **6.2.2. Who Said What?**

This activity helps participants in understanding why everyone should not talk simultaneously.

*Ask three participants to sit in a circle. Give each participant a piece of paper. Each paper should have two simple sentences about a given topic. Ensure that all the papers have sentences related to same topic (e.g., climate of a city) and no two papers have same sentences. Now ask the participants to read aloud those sentences when the facilitator indicates. Instruct that everyone should start reading the sentences simultaneously when the facilitator indicates. Once their reading is over, ask them what others said and ask other participants what three of them said. The group members would tell that they couldn't hear others as they were reading their sentences and other participants would tell that they couldn't understand much as everyone was speaking simultaneously. Now ask the group members to read their papers one by one. **This exercise, in an interesting manner, will make the participants understand that they should not speak simultaneously.***

## **7. Conclusion**

A workshop should be conducted in a manner that the participants find it interesting and learning happens in a conducive environment. An active facilitator with reasonable understanding of human behaviour and group dynamics can conduct workshops effectively.

# PART-II

## LIFE-SKILLS





## **1. Purpose**

This guideline is to help mental health professionals to conduct brief workshops in the domain of Life-skills for adolescents studying in schools. The workshop should enable the participants to understand:

- What Life-skills are
- Why Life-skills are important
- How Life-skills can be improved

## **2. Background**

Human beings are full of potentials which manifests in our ability to do exemplary things; for example, ground-breaking scientific investigations, commendable social services, excellent achievements in various walks of life and so on. Psychologists believe that all of us are endowed with capacities to excel. Life-skills help in realization and utilization of our potentials. Sometimes, with all the capacities, goals and determinations, we fail in realizing our dreams because of the hindrances created by poor life-skills. In fact, life-skills not only help in realization of our potentials but also in living life in a contented and meaningful manner.

Let us understand what life-skills are? The World Health Organization defines life-skills as, “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.” Thus, life-skills are basic skills that help individuals in leading a meaningful life and better adjustment in the society. They involve myriad of positive aspects of our life such as the values and ethics we possess, the proactive attitude that we keep towards the society we live in and various interpersonal and psychosocial skills that we have.

## **3. Core Life-skills**

The World Health Organization has proposed a set of life skills. These are:

- Self-awareness
- Empathy
- Creative thinking
- Critical thinking

- Problem solving
- Decision making
- Coping with stress
- Coping with emotions
- Healthy interpersonal relationship
- Effective communications

Going by the list of these skills, it is obvious that they are global in nature, encompassing both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. These skills are usually clubbed into three major categories:

- Thinking skills (critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, decision making)
- Personal skills (self-awareness, self-management)
- Interpersonal skills (communication skills, empathy, cooperation etc.)

## **4. Skills and their Application**

It is important to note here that these sets of skills are not all inclusive. Depending on the need, an individual may require any other life-skill. Also, various life-skills are interdependent as they affect each other. For example, critical thinking is required for effective problem solving as well as understanding an interpersonal situation from wider perspective.

Now, let us understand all these skills in detail and ways to enhance them.

### **4.1 Self-awareness**

It refers to the ability to recognize own strengths, weaknesses, likings, disliking and so on. Often, we do not bother to identify our strengths and weaknesses. This may lead to underutilization of our strengths and remaining unaware how our weaknesses obstruct our progress. Self-awareness is very important for being comfortable with one-self, to recognize the ways by which one can handle his/her stresses and to have optimum utilization of own potentials. For example, if an individual recognizes that he procrastinates a lot and due to this his efficiencies do not get reflected, he can work on better time management.

## **4.2. Empathy**

Empathy refers to understanding others' emotional states and perspectives. It helps in understanding other peoples' concerns and reactions to a given situation. Thus, empathizing with others helps not only in having a balanced understanding of the behaviour and reactions of an individual but also facilitates a deeper insight into human behaviour.

To empathize with others, it is important that in an interpersonal situation we don't jump to conclusions without understanding the whole context of behaviour of an individual. We often get tempted to form impressions about others based on our preconceived notions, ideas and hearsay. But it has an inherent danger of coming to conclusions without giving proper attention to all relevant information. Hence, it is important that before forming any impression, we should gather sufficient information, should try to understand the context of a given emotional state (e.g., anger) of an individual and try to understand the perspectives of others (e.g., by discussing about the situation with the other individual). This helps in having better interpersonal relationships.

## **4.3. Creative Thinking**

Creative thinking refers to seeing and analysing things in novel ways. It helps us in having new perspectives about things and allows us to have out-of-box thinking. Creative thinking requires flexibility, so that while attempting to solve a problem we are not stuck to a given way of solution whether or not it is working. Creative thinking does not always require identification of a new problem and finding out its solutions; it also refers to finding novel solutions to an existing problem. All the seminal experiments and innovations that changed our life exemplify creative thinking. For example, thinking that one can communicate to others sitting miles away through a device (phone) is an example of creative thinking.

## **4.4. Critical thinking**

It refers to the process of analysing a problem or information in an objective manner. A critical thinker shows inquisitiveness to understand things in detail and while doing so, keeps himself unaffected by his biases by having an open minded

approach to assimilate and evaluate new information. Critical thinking is an important life-skill as it inculcates the tendency to evaluate information objectively and from wider perspectives.

#### **4.5. Problem Solving and Decision Making**

Problem solving and decision making are interrelated skills. When a problem arises, one needs to objectively understand the problem which involves clearly defining the problem. Once the problem has been defined, various possible alternative to solve the problem should be explored followed by weighing the pros and cons of all the possible solutions. Based on this analysis, the best possible solution is chosen and applied. Once the decision to use a given solution is reached, the solution should be given a fair trial before accepting or rejecting it as the final solution.

Myriad of problems arise in our daily life. Some are simple and some are complex problems. It is important that the skill of effective problem solving is learnt in a manner that it becomes a natural way of approaching a problem/an issue. It helps us in having an objective approach towards a problem and also facilitates the process of selection of those solutions that are most economical (highest gain and lowest losses). Poor problem solving skill makes the solution of the problem difficult to reach for many reasons and the first is unawareness about the real problem due to lack of clarity about the exact nature of the problem. For example, a student can report that he does not like his school. However, it is highly unlikely that the whole school is a problem. He needs to define the exact nature of the problem such as 'does he have problem with the quality of the teachers', 'does he have problem with the fellow students' etc.

*Note: Problem solving skills have been described in the 'stress management' section in detail.*

#### **4.6. Coping with Stress**

Effective dealing with stresses of everyday life is important for our physical and mental health. Identifying what makes us stressed, what are the ways to counter those stresses and how to prevent stresses are important skills. It is said that stress largely depends on the way we perceive an event and it gets compounded by the ineffective ways of dealing with those stresses. Having a proper

understanding of an event, use of proper problem solving approaches and healthy life style can ward off stresses in significant ways. Also, once stressed, it is important that proper stress reduction techniques are used. It includes both balanced understanding of the stress inducing situation and use of specific stress inoculation methods.

*Note: We have described these methods in detail in the section on stress management.*

#### **4.7. Dealing with Emotions**

Emotions are integral part of our life. We feel happy, sad and angry on different occasions and in different situations. Understanding our emotions in a given situation and managing it properly is important for successful life. Managing emotions does not mean suppressing emotions. Bottling up emotions does not solve problems; rather it leads to various other problems. Coping or dealing with emotions means a better understanding of the situations that arise negative emotions and to explore the aptness of our emotional reaction to a given situations (i.e., to see if there could be other ways of dealing with problems that could have prevented genesis of negative emotions). Determining the aptness of emotional reaction also involves judging whether or not the intensity or the target of negative emotion to a given situation was justified. There is a famous quote by Aristotle, *“To be angry is easy. But to be angry with the right man at the right time and in the right manner, that is not easy.”* If we pay attention to our emotional reactions, more often than not, we fail in any one or more components. For example, either we get angry with the wrong person (annoyed on differences with boss and showing irritability on wife), or show anger as per our state of mind at a particular juncture and not according to the situation.

#### **4.8. Effective Communication**

It is again a very crucial life-skill which pertains to expression of thoughts and feelings clearly. Proper communication is important and it does not only involve communication of the content of our thought but also effective ways of communicating them. For example, if an adolescent has to refuse something (such as an offer by peers for taking drugs), he should not only be able to say ‘no’ but he should be able to say it assertively. Likewise, having logical sequence in

expression of thoughts impresses others. Also, effective communication involves proper use of both verbal and non-verbal languages. Thus, just telling that 'I am confident' is not sufficient; telling it with a body language that oozes confidence is important.

#### **4.9. Healthy Interpersonal Relationship**

Maintaining a healthy interpersonal relationship is crucial for our growth. It requires many other life-skills as pillars. For example, compassion, empathy, emotional reciprocity, effective communication and similar other factors are vital for developing and maintaining a healthy relationship with our family members, neighbours and colleagues. Poor interpersonal relationships lead to poor support system which can be a major source of stress as well as hindrance in tackling stresses.

Life-skills must be an integral part of learning system. Schools, through various methods, should ensure that children are exposed to various life skills (what, why and how). Further, the schools should not only impart life-skills training in a generic way (e.g., empathy, critical thinking and stress management) but also their application in specific areas of social life, personal growth, health and so on. For example, children should know:

- Why critical thinking is required to understand their rights and duties in the society,
- How application of these skills in the domain of health can protect them from diseases like HIV,
- How critically understanding the effect of use of alcohol, cannabis and other substances can save them from the fatal effects of these substances and therefore which life skill they should use to avoid succumbing to peer pressure to use them.

### **5. Workshop**

**Required Time for the Workshop:**      Approximately 4 -5 hours

**Number of Participants:**                      18-21

**Methods to be used:**

- Psychoeducation
- Discussion and brainstorming
- Group work

**Materials required:**

- Chart papers and chart paper stands
- Marker pens
- Note books
- Pens and pencils
- Power-points presentation facility

**5.1 SESSION – 1: Introduction**

This session should be for introduction of the participants, establishing the ground rules and orienting the participants to the program.

**Time:** 45-60 minutes

- The facilitator welcomes the group
- Introduction of the participants (the facilitator can use the ‘introduction of participants’ procedure described in Part I of the manual or use any similar other procedure)
- Asks the participants their expectations from the program
- Gives an overview of the workshop
- Sets the ground rules (the facilitator should use the procedure for setting the ground rules described in Part I)

**Break:** 15 minutes

**5.2. SESSION 2: What are life-skills?**

This session should be focused on orienting the participants to life-skills

**Time:** 45-60 minutes

Facilitator to the group, *“What do you understand by the term ‘life-skills? Have you heard the term earlier?”* (Facilitator notes down the responses from the participants on the chart paper or white board. Most of the times, either the participants will list various life-skills if they have any previous exposure to this topic or name various skills which may be related to one or other life-skills mentioned by the WHO). Facilitator further speaks, *“I am really happy to see that you could identify so many skills. The World Health Organization has proposed 10 core life-skills which are generally clubbed into three major domains- thinking skills, interpersonal skills and self-management skills. I will briefly make a presentation on these 10 skills and would like you to discuss these skills”* (At this point, distribute a hand-out which briefly describes all the life-skills and then start the PPT presentation. For making the PPT and the hand-out, use the material given in the ‘Background’ section of this part).

### **5.3. SESSION 3: Activity and group discussion (Role of life-skills in our life)**

The purpose of this session is to make the participants learn the role of life-skills in daily life.

**Time:** 60 minutes

The facilitator says, *“In the last session we learnt about various life skills. Now, I would like you to form three groups. We will start counting from him/her (Indicate a particular participant). In the sequence of 1, 2 and 3, the participants will go to three groups; thus, one will go to first group, 2 to the second group, 3 to the third group, 4 to the first group and 5 to the second group. We will follow the sequence till all the participants are placed in groups. The three groups will be – thinking skills group, interpersonal skills group and self-management or personal skills group. The three groups will work on the skills coming under the major heading of skill-sets their group title reflects.”*

Once the groups are formed, the facilitator says, *“Each group has to do four tasks:*



1. *Discuss and list the advantages of having the skills that come under the major heading, e.g., various thinking skills. Each group should focus on the skills-set they have been assigned.*
2. *Discuss and list the disadvantages if someone lacks these skills*
3. *Each group will be given a vignette and the members have to decide which life-skill or skills will help the person described in the vignette and how?*
4. *After completion of first three steps, each group has to choose one representative who will present the opinion of the group to the larger group.*

*Please ensure that during the group work, the ground rules that we previously discussed are properly followed.”*

### ***Vignette for the thinking group***

Ramesh runs a small shop in a rural area. One day, around noon, when he is about to shut the shop to deposit some money in bank and go for lunch, a lady comes and tells him that her husband is very ill and needs to be admitted to nearby district hospital immediately; therefore, if he could help her. She says that there is no vehicle available that can take her husband to the hospital. Her son knows driving but he does not have any vehicle. While he is listening to her and thinking what to do, a man comes running towards them and tells that on the nearby road there is an accident in which a car has hit another car. One of the cars is badly damaged and the driver needs immediate care and probably needs to be shifted to district hospital immediately. There is not much damage to the other car but the driver's left hand is fractured. Villagers are removing the drivers and thinking of taking them to the hospital on bullock-cart. However, the district hospital is quite far and if one of the drivers does not get immediate medical attention he may die. Also, the villagers are afraid that the cars may catch fire as petrol is leaking from the damaged car and the other car is still on.

What Ramesh should do?

*Note: The group should analyse various aspects of situation critically; e.g., what is Ramesh's role in the whole situation and what would be the most effective way*

*of solving this problem. In the scenario the most effective solution is that the son of the lady, who knows driving, should use the car which is in working condition to take all the individuals, requiring medical attention, to the hospital. Ramesh should assist him and other villagers in shifting the patients into that car after moving it away from the damaged car so that it does not catch fire. Also, the engine of the car which is still on should be, as soon as possible, switched-off and the car is moved away from the damaged car without being switched on.*

### ***Vignette for the interpersonal skills group***

Manoj is studying in class 10. One day a few of his batch-mates met him in the school ground when he was going to play football. They told him that they had something which gave more pleasure than playing football. They took him to a corner of the ground and showed him a pouch which had a powder like material. They told him that it was 'drugs' and its small amount of consumption gives great kick. Manoj had heard this term 'drugs' and he knew that it was addictive and so he refused to take. However, these class mates offered him 'drugs' again next day. This time also he refused gently, but those boys kept insisting. He does not know what to do. He does not want to take 'drugs' but at the same time does not want to be rude to the class mates.

*Note: The group should discuss why and how Manoj can be assertive in refusing wrong demands of his batch-mates. Why it is not only important to say 'no' but also an assertive 'no' with proper body language is important.*

### ***Vignette for the self-management/personal skills group***

Rishi is an engineering graduate. He is good in studies and recently joined a job. The job requires multi-tasking in which he has to look after a certain section of production line of a factory, supervise staff and report to superiors. He has also been kept in a team which is supposed to research, survey and propose the management for implementation of newer technologies and improvements in the existing technologies so that the products of the company remain relevant in the market. Rishi feels that he is capable of doing all the jobs but it is quite difficult for him to manage so many things together. Also, he feels that he works more

efficiently when he does the job of researching for improvement of technologies then the administrative job of managing the staff. Of late, he has started feeling that the burden has started showing negative effects on him. He remains irritable and feels lack of concentration in job.

What self-management skills Rishi can use?

*Note: The group should discuss how and why Rishi should analyse his strengths and weaknesses, likings and disliking etc. For example, should he opt for a work as per his strengths and likings? He should also explore whether or not he is employing some of the personal skills such as time-management to be effective in managing the work. Further, the role of healthy life-style in reducing stress should also be discussed.*

**Break:** 30 minutes

#### **5.4. SESSION 4: Activity and group discussion: How to enhance life-skills?**

The purpose of this session is to help the participants in identifying the ways for improving the life-skills. After a better understanding of various life-skills (through presentation by the facilitator in session 2 and group works in session 3), it is imperative that the participants learn in detail the ways of improving all the life-skills.

**Time:** 90 minutes

The facilitator says, “*Nice discussions happened in last sessions and now we have fairly good understanding of various life-skills. Now, we will move to the next step. All the groups (previously formed groups) have to do two things:*

- 1. Discuss and list ways to improve a given skills-set*
- 2. Discuss and list, at least, five situations in which a skills-set can be applied*

*You have 30 minutes to discuss and then one of the representative of each group will present the group ideas. See that this time a different person represents your group.”*

*Note: The facilitator should interact with all the groups when they are discussing about the ways to improve a skills-set and, if needed, give them some ideas. For example, the 'thinking skills group' should discuss about how and why one should think divergently and critically to decide the most effective solution of a problem, how sometimes we get stuck to a given method of solution of a problem whereas more simpler solutions may be available etc. Likewise, the 'self-management group' should think about methods of analysing one's strengths and weaknesses, how to utilize the strengths and work on the domains that are weak. They should also discuss how emotions are managed in a manner that they do not overwhelm our decisions and we take decisions weighing their pros and cons properly. The 'interpersonal skills group' should discuss how and why clear and effective communications should be done, how one can express assertiveness in his/her decisions especially when a non-desirable demand is being put on them.*

## **6. Closing**

At the end of the session, the facilitator should conduct a wrap-up or closing exercise by:

- Having a brief recap of all the discussions (Note: Involve the participants in this activity).
- Encouraging participants to use life-skills in their daily life and motivate others to do so
- Thanking the participants for their participation

# **PART-III**

## **STRESS MANAGEMENT**



## **1. Purpose**

This guideline is to help mental health professionals working under DMHP to conduct brief workshops in the domain of 'Stress management.' The workshop should enable the participants to understand:

1. The nature of stress
2. Causes of stress
3. Effects of stress
4. Identify different ways of managing stress

## **2. Background**

### **2.1. Nature of Stress**

Stress is defined as demands that are considered personally important but taxing or exceeding ones capacities and resources. Thus, stress is a reaction to a demanding situation or any change that occurs in our life. The demanding situations and changes can be either positive (e.g., marriage, promotion, winning a lottery) or negative (e.g., loss of any kind, illnesses). Both kinds of stressors increase demands for readjustment and adaptation. Positive events such as marriage and birth of child also cause changes, but these changes are welcoming and therefore called 'eustress'. The word 'stress' is primarily used for the changes that are unpleasant for the individual.

### **2.2. Causes of Stress**

Various things can cause stress in our life. However, whether or not a factor will lead to stress depends on many factors. That is why instead of considering various factors as definitive causes of stress, they are considered risk factors for stress; that is, exposure to these factors increases the risk of stress in people. The stressors could be continuous or episodic. Examples of continuous stressors are- poverty, malnutrition, prolonged illnesses, migration and chronic strain. Examples of episodic stressors are - major life events (e.g., job loss) and catastrophic events (e.g., earthquake, floods), which do not occur regularly but are beyond our control.

There is nothing like severe stressor and mild stressor. Rather a seemingly milder event or situation can have severe impact (e.g., mood disturbances) because of its continuous presence. For example, daily hassles such as traffic jam, power cut, noise and pollution can be significant source of stress.

Further, whether or not an event or situation will be a source of stress depends on our perception (i.e., our outlook) and appraisal (i.e., our evaluations) of the situation also. The perception and appraisal of an event can be determined by many factors such as our past experiences, personality and so on. Thus, a seemingly simple event may be stressful for some people if not for all. Also, a situation that has the likelihood of causing stress for most of the people can be enjoyed by some. For example, frequent job changes can be stressful for most of us but an individual who likes novelty can enjoy it.

However, some situations are stressful for everyone. For example, loud noise at traffic, pollution, a work place with faulty management, peer conflicts, and situations that restrict our choices are unwelcoming for everyone and cause stress.

### **2.3. Effects of Stress**

Works of two prominent psychologists Walter Canon and Hans Selye have provided important insights into the effects of stress and the underlying mechanisms. Canon proposed that stress forces us to mobilize bodily resources to either fight in the situation or run away. This is known as 'flight or fight' reaction. Though the reaction is useful to avoid harmful situations, continuous state of fight or flight is not healthy because it consumes lots of our psychological and physiological resources. Hans Selye conceptualized three stages of stress, which are very important for us to understand in the context of stress management. They are:

**Alarm stage:** The body responds to an emergency or threat (for example, giddiness is a common response when we continuously work without eating or taking adequate breaks. Thus, in this case giddiness indicates a need to



take a break as something is happening with us that needs some attention or actions).

**Adaptive-resistance stage:** This involves swinging into action in response to alarm, which happens mostly without our conscious awareness. The body may use its reserves to cope with the situation; that is, the body may mobilize glucose to the brain in the above case to continue working. But after a point this may not work as we definitely need to pause to eat and take rest.

**Exhaustion stage:** Body gets exhausted of resources if the stressor prolongs. There may be a complete breakdown of the system and various illnesses develop. For example, diabetes, hypertension, substance use, depression, anxiety etc. could be a likely consequence when person cannot deal with prolonged stress. On the other hand, if one uses adaptive methods to manage stress, it will lead to healthy adjustment to the situation.

To sum up, in the first stage organism's body responds to the stressful situation, and in the second stage the body returns to the calm stage when the stressor is no longer present. However, if the stressor is prolonged, the third stage ensues in which due to the long term effects of the stressor the individual becomes exhausted. All these are indicative of arousal of our body to fight with the stressor. However, prolonged arousal of our psychophysical system can lead to exhaustion of various systems such as cardiac system, digestive system and nervous system.

#### **2.4. How do we know we are stressed?**

As explained in Hans Selye's model, the stress may manifest differently at different stages. Initially it may manifest as changes in sleeping and eating pattern, and mood changes (e.g., not feeling well, irritability, anxiety or sadness, palpitations). If stress persists, eventually we may witness problems related to various bodily functions as well as significant behavioural and mood changes

(e.g., not interested in meeting people, highly dependent on or avoidant of others, not interested in pleasurable activities).

## **2.5. Dealing with Stress**

All of us have our own ways of dealing with stresses. How an individual manages his/her stress is known as coping. Coping can take several forms, such as, problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping refers to problem solving approach to a given issue. Emotion-focused coping refers to the efforts to deal with emotional distress arising from a frustrating situation. Both problem- and emotion-focused coping can be adaptive or maladaptive. For example, an individual can approach a situation with problem-focused approach but his interpretation of the problem and the determination of solutions can be unrealistic which may compound the stress. On the other hand, if an individual follows the acceptable problem-solving approach (defining the problem, identifying options, choosing best possible option, applying the option, monitoring and so on), the likelihood of solving the problem effectively and getting rid of the stress related to that problem increases. Likewise, an individual can use denial as emotion-focused strategy which will be ineffective. On the other hand, if someone interprets his emotional reactions to a stressful situation and works on reinterpretation of events, correcting maladaptive behavioural patterns and tailoring emotions accordingly, emotion-focused strategy can be effective.

Moreover, some methods may work better in one situation than the other. Likewise, a method that suits one person in reducing his/her stress may be ineffective for another person. Thus, it is important to understand what works for whom. Here a list of stress management techniques has been given. You may find many of these techniques familiar even if you do not know them by specific terms. However, before listing the scientifically accepted stress reduction techniques, it is also important to highlight some of the faulty steps people take to ward off their stress.

## **2.6. Faulty ways/methods people use to reduce stress**

### **2.6.1. Consumption of alcohol and other substances**

Sometimes, people start consuming alcohol and other substances to decrease their stress. However, it can never decrease stress. For the time being it may give some relief from the outgrowths of stress, such as anxiety, but ultimately it will increase the stress. In fact, it can bring other sources of stress in life such as financial problems, severe physical illnesses and so on. People may also become dependent on substances and it can develop into an additional problem before they realize.

### **2.6.2. Avoiding situations**

Though sometimes avoiding a stress arising situation can be effective, most of the times it increases stress. For example, avoidance of going to workplace because of the tensions does not solve problem. Rather use of proper methods to deal with such situations (which have been described in the next section) will be useful.

### **2.6.3. Remaining aloof**

Remaining aloof, not sharing feelings with others and decreased interpersonal interactions compound the effects of stress. It may also lead to feeling lonely and eventually isolated.

### **2.6.4. Wishful thinking**

A student who is not studying well may simply wish if he were a bright student so that he would not fail the examination or hoping that the question paper was easy. But it is any body's guess that this may only help the student to relieve his stress temporarily and cannot be a long term solution.

### **2.6.5. Blame**

A person who resorted to alcohol or smoking may blame his boss or spouse for the troubles. In some cases, people may blame God, fate or any other external force. However, it does not solve the problem.

### **2.6.6. Aggression and Self-harm**

Instead of dealing with stress, people may vent their frustration on self or others in the form of aggression and self-harm. All such acts will have negative consequences instead of alleviating the stress.

## **2.7. Healthy ways of coping with stress**

### **2.7.1. Cognitive efforts/ changes in thought processes**

Stress can be output of faulty interpretation of events. For example, we may interpret something in extremely negative manner or become worried by imagining the worst possible outcome of an event. These interpretations, instead of the event, may make us worried. We may feel that imagining the extreme negative consequence will help us in remaining prepared for worst possible, but we forget that such things seldom happen. Therefore, a realistic evaluation of an event helps in reducing stress. For example, we can simply tell ourselves that we should behave in a manner most of the people behave in a given situation.

Likewise, we may pay attention to only the negative aspects of an event/situation (or even magnify the negatives) and overlook the positives. It creates distress. Sometimes we may feel stressed only because we predicted harm whereas there is none indicated (or very remotely possible) or we were unnecessarily blaming ourselves for everything that was either remotely or least connected to us. Again a realistic evaluation of the situation combining both positive and negative is important.

### **2.7.2. Problem solving**

Use of an effective problem solving strategy can be the crux of stopping an issue to become a stressor. Effective problem solving has following stages:

**Identification of or defining the problem:** It is interesting that often people feel overwhelmed by a problem but they may have vague understanding of what is bothering them. Therefore, it is important that, first of all, the problem is identified (e.g., reaching late to office or school) and then its specific nature (e.g., it is mostly happening on Mondays), and genesis of the problem (e.g., got up late

because partying hard on Sunday evening). Hence in this case, instead of labelling Monday as a 'bad day' it would be better to take measures to get up in time so as to reach the office or school in time.

**Generating alternate solutions to the problem:** The next stage requires generating as much solutions to the problem as possible. It can involve 'brain storming' with others, thinking about all possible solutions (even the weirdest of solutions). The reason for thinking about various solutions is that if we just think about one or two solutions and start working on them, the likelihood of missing more suitable solutions is high.

**Evaluation and selection of best possible solution:** Once all possible solutions have been thought about, the next step is to evaluate all the solutions and find out which solutions are feasible and among them which one has highest gains and least losses. Based on this the best suitable solution is chosen.

**Implementation of solution:** After selecting the best possible solution, it is time to implement the solution. It is important that once a solution is chosen, it should be given sufficient time and resources before evaluating its success or failure.

**Review:** Finally, the applied problem solving should be reviewed and if it is found that the solution did not work then the next possible solution can be evaluated afresh and if it is found suitable at that moment then it should be applied.

### **2.7.3. Life style changes**

Healthy life style can significantly help in preventing and reducing stress. A few things which can be done:

**Regular physical exercises:** Physical exercises such as jogging, swimming etc. rejuvenate us. Physical health and mental health go hand in hand. Therefore, regular physical exercise should be integral part of our daily routine.

**Managing time for hobbies and interests:** Spending time on activities that you like can be quite relaxing and pleasant.

**Healthy food:** Healthy food rejuvenates our body and decreases the effects of stress.

**Relaxation:** Practicing various relaxation methods such as yoga, meditation, swimming, stretching exercises, muscular relaxation and breathing exercises; engaging in calming activities such as listening music, focusing on or remembering pleasant events, imagining positive situations and similar other things help in reducing arousal levels and bring a state of calmness.

#### **2.7.4. Time management**

To avoid getting overwhelmed by various tasks, it is important that we manage our time effectively. Effective time management is indispensable for managing stress and following points can be useful:

- Having a list of activities one has to do and arranging them according to the priority
- Sticking to the schedule as far as possible and avoiding procrastinations
- Avoiding clustering too many things at a given time

#### **2.7.5. Professional help**

Don't we see a doctor if we have a physical problem? Similarly, we can approach professionals to deal with our stress. For better results it is important to consult at the beginning of the symptoms (problems with sleep and appetite or mood disturbances are the early indicators of stress and psychological disorders). Definitely consultation is warranted if there are other symptoms such as persistently low mood, suicidal ideas, death wishes, unprovoked aggression etc.

#### **2.7.6. Other things**

Many other things (apart from the ones described above) can be crucial for reducing stress. For example,

- Being assertive when required
- Identifying own strengths and using them appropriately
- Seeking help of friends and if required of professionals

- Developing an attitude that some amount of stress is inevitable but it will go away when we are calm and not rattled by it.

The above techniques are helpful to minimize the stress. But there are certain strategies that are helpful in preventing the stress. For example, seven health habits, commonly referred to as '*Alameda 7*,' can be effective in preventing stress. These are:

- Sleeping seven to eight hours a night
- Not smoking
- Minimizing the alcohol use
- Doing regular exercises
- Not eating between meals
- Not skipping breakfast
- Maintaining desirable weight.

### **3. Workshop**

**Required time for the workshop** : 4- 5 hours

**Number of participants** : 20 -25

**Methods to be used:**

- Psycho-education
- Brainstorming
- Discussion
- Group work

**Materials Required:**

- Chart papers and chart paper stands
- Marker pens
- Note books
- Pens and pencils
- Power-points presentation facility

### **3.1. SESSION – 1**

This session should be for introduction of the participants, establishing the ground rules and orienting the participants to the program.

**Time:** 45-60 minutes

- The facilitator welcomes the group
- Introduction of the participants (the facilitator can use the introduction of participants procedure described in Part I of the manual or use any similar other procedure)
- Asks the participants their expectations from the program
- Gives an overview of the workshop
- Sets the ground rules (the facilitator should use the procedure for setting the ground rules described in Part I)

**Break:** 15 minutes

### **3.2. SESSION 2 (Understanding the nature of stress)**

This session should focus on orienting the participants to the nature of stress, risk factors and manifestation of stress

**Time:** 45-60 minutes

Facilitator to the group, *“What do you understand by the term ‘stress’?”* (Facilitator notes down the responses from the participants on the chart paper or white board). Most of the times, the participants will list various aspects of stress. Facilitator further speaks, *“I am really happy to see that you could list so many things about stress.”* (At this point, distribute a hand-out which briefly describes various aspects of stress and then start the PPT presentation. For making the PPT and the hand-out, use the material given in the ‘Background’ section of this part). The PPT should be used for guiding discussion about types of stress, manifestation of stress, risk factors of stress and so on. The participants should be encouraged to generate examples for the manifestations and risk factors for



stress. The outcome of the discussion is that participants understand that there are no specific causes of stress but there can be many risk factors and whether or not an event becomes a stressor depends, to a large extent, on the perception of event as well as the type of strategies an individual uses to deal with the event or situation.

**Break:** 15 minutes

### **3.3. SESSION - 3 (Activity and group discussion: Stress management)**

The purpose of this session is to make the participants learn about stress management techniques.

**Time:** 60 minutes

Facilitator to the group, *“We discussed the nature of stress, its manifestations, and risk factors. Now let us list the ways people manage the stress.”* Facilitator may invite a volunteer to note down the responses from the participants on the chart paper or white board. Most of the times, the participants will list various ways by which people manage stress. The list may include either faulty and adaptive ways of dealing with stress or only one kind. Facilitator may encourage more responses by saying, *“Oh! That is fine. Can we think of a few more?”* Or, he may give specific clues like, *“what people do when they have troubles related to .....?”* or, *“Do people use.....also to tackle their stresses in life?”* Once a fair number of responses are generated, the facilitator can acknowledge the participants and distribute hand-outs for discussion. The hand-out should contain information on adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. This could be followed by a PPT presentation. For making the PPT and the hand-out, use the information given in the ‘managing stress’ section of this part. The outcome of this session is to enable the participants understand that people employ various methods to manage stress but not all of them are healthy or adaptive. Therefore, it is imperative to strengthen the adaptive strategies and reduce the maladaptive strategies as much as possible.

**Break:** 30 minutes

### **3.4. SESSION 4** **(Understanding the nature of stress)**

Purpose of this session is to analyze a few case vignettes in the context of stress management.

**Time:** 45- 60 minutes

**Case 1:** Chinnappa is in Class X. He does not prepare for studies regularly. He keeps his homework pending. While returning from school he promises to himself that he would study but gets engrossed in playing video games. He would sleep late and gets up late. He does his laundry, shoe polishing and checking for books in the morning. There is often power cut in the morning that interferes with his morning routine and as a result he hardly has any time for his breakfast. He wishes there was no power-cut or traffic jam when he is rushing to the school. He is becoming irritable and losing interest in studies and of late he is not even enjoying his videogames. He drinks lot of coffee to manage his mood but it is not working. On the insistence of his friends he has occasionally started smoking to feel better. Discuss the following in this case:

1. *What are the signs of stress in this case?*
2. *Which factors played a role in the stress- personal or environmental? And what are they?*
3. *What are the faulty ways of managing stress in this case?*
4. *How Chinnappa could manage his stress in a better way.*

**Case 2:** Syed works in a company. He recently got promoted. The new job involved delegating responsibilities and supervising. But being a perfectionist he likes to do most of the work by himself. As a senior he thinks he should lead by example. To meet the targets he often skips his lunch and tea-breaks. When anyone points about this, he jokes he never had any serious problem other than feeling giddy at times and missing out on family life. But people have told him that he is working more than required and need to take break. He ignored it all until he collapsed while working and got hospitalized.

Discuss the following in this case:

1. *What are the signs of stress in this case? What stage of stress reaction he is at?*
2. *What cognitive factors played a role in causing the stress?*
3. *What methods could we suggest in this case to prevent his breakdown in future?*

**Case 3:** Sheeba is a 55 years old homemaker. Her husband is a businessman and comes home late. Her only daughter got married recently and is living with her husband. When her daughter was around, they would discuss many things. Now she has no company. With the daughter gone, there is less work to do and as a result she has lots of free time. She tries to sleep during the day as there is no company or any activity but is unable to sleep. She also notices that her daughter is not available for talking over phone as she is busy with her own life. Sometimes she feels like crying as there is no one for her. She never told her problems to her husband thinking that he would not understand her. Her extended family members invite her to come over for general talk but she does not feel like going. She thinks others should not know about her boredom as she thinks she is the only one facing such a situation.

Discuss the following in this case:

1. *What are factors involved in causing the stress in this case?*
2. *What resources she could use to manage her stress?*

**Similarly, ask the individual groups to generate hypothetical cases and discuss stress management techniques.**

#### **4. Wrap up**

At the end of the session conduct wrap-up or closing exercise.

- Have brief recap of all the discussions. Involve the participants in this activity
- Encourage participants to use the stress-management techniques in their daily life and motivate others to do so
- Provide addresses of centres (e.g. mental health facilities) where people facing severe effects of stresses (e.g., depression) can consult.

- Thank the participants for their participation

Facilitators can also teach '**Deep Breathing**' and '**Progressive Muscular Relaxation**' techniques to the group.

# **PART-IV**

## **SENSITIZATION PROGRAM ABOUT SUICIDE PREVENTION: A GATEKEEPER APPROACH**



## **1. Objectives**

The participants should be able to:

- Have a basic understanding of suicide
- Identify warning signs of suicide
- Know about risk and protective factors of suicide
- Know various myths about suicide
- Have some basic understanding about how to interact with an individual expressing intent for suicide
- Know how and where to refer an individual at-risk for suicide.

## **2. Note to Facilitator**

Suicide is a sensitive topic. While discussing with a group about various aspects of suicide we should not forget that there can be group members who have undergone the pain of facing this reality due to suicide of a family member or friend. The discussion may instigate the memories. Therefore, the topic should be presented in a sensitive manner with ample opportunity to group members to ask questions, express concerns and so on. Further, the discussion should be done in a way that it communicates and instils a sense of hope.

## **3. Understanding Suicide**

Suicide is a problem for all societies – be it developed, developing or underdeveloped countries. It is prevalent among people of all socioeconomic status and walks of life. The term ‘suicide’ generally leads to a negative feeling and the perception about people who attempt suicide can be, at times, quite negative such as being weak, passive, deranged and so on. Thus, many-a-times, people who express their suicidal intents are seen from these perspectives which can affect the attitude towards them. Also, it is not uncommon to feel that an individual expresses the intents of suicide to gain something or to manipulate a system. Though, in some cases it can be true; however, jumping to this conclusion and neglecting an individual’s expression of suicidal intents can be fatal.

An individual can attempt suicide due to some immediate events (for example, failure in examination, feeling of intense shame or guilt due to any event in life etc.) or due to hopelessness caused by prolonged stressors (such as continuous loss in business or chronic disease). Also, addition of a stressor can cross the limits of stress tolerance for an individual and he/she can decide to take the fatal step of suicide.

Conceptually, suicide is a way to escape from psychological pain which can be acute or prolonged. When the stressor (and the resulting psychological pain) crosses an individual's limits of coping, he/she may decide to end his/her life. This psychological pain leads to various behavioural and mood changes (different people can have different manifestations) and identifying those indicators is critical to saving people from committing suicide. Proper psychological help in the crisis situation assists people to use healthy methods of coping.

Thus, the most important aspect of helping someone who is at-risk of suicide is to identify him or her at the right juncture and assist in seeking help. This important work can be done by anybody in society and they can work as 'gatekeepers' provided they have been sensitized to a few aspects of suicide:

- Warning signs of suicide
- Risk and protective factors of suicide
- Myths and facts about suicide
- Some basic steps to help people in crisis and
- Where to refer a person at-risk for suicide

#### **4. Warning Signs**

People who have intents for suicide, usually, give warning signs and if these signs are identified he/she can be helped. A few signs are:

- **Talking (or other modes of expression such as writing, drawing) about desperate and hopeless conditions:** Though it is quite non-specific; however, an individual who talks and/or writes about his desperate conditions and sees no hopes can think about suicide to get rid of the overwhelming condition. For example, an individual may express



that he has exhausted all the possibilities and resources to come out of his desperate condition and does not see any ray of hope.

- **Talking (or other modes of expression such as writing, drawing) about suicide:** People who have intents to attempt suicide, usually, talk about ending life. Therefore, these talks and threats should be taken seriously. Sometimes, the statements can be indirect; for example, “Don’t worry, you won’t need to tolerate me anymore.”
- **Talking (or other modes of expression such as writing, drawing) about meaninglessness in life:** People who express an absolute meaninglessness in life or lack of reasons to live are vulnerable to end life. For example, an individual can express that his existence does not make any difference. In its extreme form, due to presence of severe guilt or similar other things, an individual can express that the world will be better off in his absence.
- **Preparations:** Preparing for death, such as arranging means (e.g., rope, kerosene, pesticides etc.), trying desperately to put things in order (e.g., writing will) so that their family members face less problems after their death and similar other things can be important indicator of suicide.
- **Giving away things:** Another important warning sign of suicide is an individual’s giving away personal possessions especially things of his/her extreme likings (such as a watch that he was gifted by someone and he loved using it).

All these warning signs become more serious if there is presence of one or more RISK factors for suicide.

## 5. Risk Factors

Though anyone can have thoughts about suicide, a few factors make people more vulnerable. For example:

- **Presence of depression:** Severely depressed individuals have higher chances of attempting suicide than others. Hence, individuals who have been diagnosed to have depression or show signs of depression should be given proper attention for the presence of intents for suicide, especially if they are showing warning signs (mentioned above) also. A few important signs of depression are:
  - Persistent low mood
  - Feelings of worthlessness
  - Frequent crying
  - Loss of interest in usually pleasurable activities
  - Pessimistic attitude towards future
  
- **Any recent significant stress** such as death of loved one, break-up in relationship, significant monetary or other losses can be risk factors.
  
- **Poor social support:** People, who have poor family support, are loners and lack trusting relationship with one or more persons have higher risk for attempting suicide.
  
- **Impulsivity:** All risk factors become stronger if an individual is impulsive by nature. Thus, a farmer's risk to attempt suicide increases if he is known to act on impulses and there is availability of pesticide in his home.
  
- **Previous suicide attempt:** Any individual with a history of previous suicide attempt is at higher risk for attempting it again.
  
- **Family history of depression and suicide:** The likelihood of suicide attempt in a person increases if there is history of depression and/or suicide in family. However, it should not be misconstrued as if there is specific suicide gene that is inherited. A complex set of biological, psychological and social factors can play role in determining the effect of anything.

- **Substance abuse:** People who abuse substances (such as cannabis) are at higher risk for attempting suicide.

## 6. Protective Factors

The way risk factors increase the vulnerability of an individual to attempt suicide, a few factors act as protectors (i.e., the likelihood of an individual attempting suicide decreases if there is presence of one or more protective factors). Some of these factors are:

- **Life-skills:** Various life-skills such as problem solving, stress tolerance, resilience, creative thinking and control of emotions work as strong support in the face of crisis and the person may not resort to suicide.
- **Supportive environment:** A supportive environment both at the family level as well as at wider community level (such as work place) is a significant protective factor as it helps the individual to share his feelings as well as gives courage to face adversities with the support of others.
- **Availability of facility for mental health care:** Both preventive and interventional mental healthcare facilities act against suicide. Hence, preventive steps such as Positive Mental Health programs in school and workplace enable people to first of all not get stressed easily and if stressed, then to face the stressors effectively. Further, availability of mental healthcare facilities in the area of residence is an important protective factor.
- **Non-availability of means to commit suicide:** As stated above, an individual's impulsive decision to attempt suicide can be successful just because at the spur of the moment, he got a readily available means (such as large amount of pesticide). Therefore, precaution that a vulnerable individual does not get access to lethal means can save many lives.

## 7. Myths and facts about suicide

There are various myths about suicide. Understanding these myths and the related facts is important as the decision about paying attention to ones'

likelihood of attempting suicide may get influenced by these myths. Some of the common myths are being stated here:

**Myth:** Those who are serious about suicide do not give any warning.

*One of the most common myths about suicide is that people who have serious intents of attempting suicide do not give any hint.*

**Fact:** The fact is that most of the people, before attempting suicide, show one or more warning signs. If these warning signs (e.g., the ones stated above) are identified, an individual can be saved.

**Myth:** It is not a good idea to talk about suicide with a person who might be at-risk.

*Many people think that talking about or exploring the presence of suicidal ideations may instigate the suicidal thoughts or give an idea to the individual about this act. Therefore, one should not explore about the possibility of presence of thoughts about suicide with an at-risk individual.*

**Fact:** Again it is a disturbing myth which leads to loss of opportunity frequently. Talking about suicide does not make someone more vulnerable to attempt suicide. Rather it provides an opportunity to the individual to talk about suicide with an individual who is not overwhelmed with emotions and can think more rationally. Talking to a person about the possibility of the presence of thoughts related to suicide in a non-judgmental manner and with empathy may give a sense of relief to the individual and ward off the eminent danger.

**Myth:** People talk about suicide to seek attention.

*Another myth is that people who verbalize their intents to commit suicide do so to seek attention of others and they are really not serious about it.*

**Fact:** The fact is that most of the individuals who attempt suicide, talk about suicide with someone. Therefore, expression of suicidal ideations must not be taken as mere manipulative behaviour. Though there can be some individuals who may use the threat of suicide for some gain; yet, instead of becoming judgmental it is better to seek a trained mental health professional's help to assess such individuals.

**Myth:** No matter what, if someone has decided to die will kill himself

**Fact:** The fact is that suicide is a highly preventable condition. If proper attention is given to risk factors and warning signs, the chances of someone's attempting suicide can be decreased significantly.

**Myth:** An individual who has attempted suicide in past will not do it again.

**Fact:** It is true that everyone may not have repeated attempts of suicide; however, a sizable proportion of people who commit suicide have history of previous attempts of suicide. Thus, previous attempt of suicide is a risk factor not a protective factor.

## 8. What Gatekeepers Can Do?

As stated, a gatekeeper can be anyone in the society and he/she can play major role in prevention of suicide. Similar to CPR (Cardiopulmonary resuscitation) which saves life if an individual has stopped breathing, a simple method has been suggested which can save numerous lives from suicide. This method is known as QPR (Quinnet, 1995; <https://www.qprinstitute.com>). QPR refers to **Question, Persuade and Refer**. Thus,

- **Exploring** if someone has thoughts and plans about suicide
- **Persuading** him/her to seek help and
- Making an adequate **referral** so that the individual gets timely help can make a big difference.

In this context it is important that:

- One should convey to the individual that he is being taken seriously. For example, if someone has expressed the thought of committing suicide, a statement like this can be helpful ***"I understand that you are quite upset about.....and thinking of killing yourself. I am concerned and would like to assist you in seeking professional help for this."***
- If someone is showing warning signs, a simple (but non-judgemental) inquiry can be of help. For example, ***"Since your exam results, I am finding you quite down. Am I right? Would you like to talk to me about this?"*** If he gives hints about having thoughts related to suicide or

expresses clearly that he/she is thinking of attempting suicide, a direct question such as, ***“Do you have thoughts about harming yourself?”*** can be asked.

- It is important that the individual is sincerely persuaded for seeking professional help. For example, ***“I understand your situation. There are professionals who can help you and it is important that you take help.”***
- The person who is persuading the individual having suicidal thoughts to seek help should have information about various mental health facilities where such help is available. Referring the individual to any such centre, ensuring that individual having suicidal thoughts and his significant others (e.g., family members) seek consultation and, as far as possible, facilitating consultation (e.g., talking to the professional to whom the referral is being made) are crucial.

## **9. Cautions while talking to an individual who may have thoughts about suicide or has expressed intentions of attempting suicide**

- **Ask but don't be judgmental:** As stated previously, asking an individual whether or not he/she is having intents or plans to attempt suicide does not increase the risk of suicidality; however, it is important that while asking about it, the individual is not judgmental (for example, psychologically weak individual resort to suicide).
- **Don't impose moralities:** Decision to attempt suicide is an example of extreme crisis. Debating or questioning someone's morality can add to guilt. Therefore, do not impose moralities (e.g., committing suicide is right or wrong) and just talk to the individual in a calm and non-argumentative manner.

- **Don't express shock:** It is important that one remains calm when an individual expresses his thoughts about suicide. Also, talk in a manner that the individual feels he is being taken seriously.
- **Don't minimize:** Judgmental statements such as, "*How can you think of committing suicide for such a trivial issue*" must be avoided. Remember something which is trivial for one person can be very significant for another person.
- **Don't trivialize:** It is important to be non-judgemental and also not to trivialize things. For example, a statement such as this should not be made, "*Seema, this is not good that you keep talking about cutting your wrist. I have heard it so many times and you must stop talking this non-sense.*"

## **10. Carrying out the sensitization program**

As stated in the beginning, the facilitator must exhibit sensitiveness and objectivity when carrying out an awareness program in the domain of suicide prevention. Also, it is important that participants are sensitized about need for early identification and proper referral. As this module is primarily meant to make people aware about basics of various aspects of suicide, if someone identifies an individual having thoughts of suicide, instead of getting into detailed counselling (as mere sensitization does not make them skilled in counselling people in crisis), as soon as possible individual should be persuaded and referred to trained mental health professionals.

**Required time for the program:** 2-3 hours

**Number of participants:** Maximum 20

**Methods to be used:**

- Psycho-education
- Discussion

**Materials required:**

- Chart papers and chart paper stands
- Marker pens

- Note books
- Pens and pencils
- Power-points presentation facility

### 10.1. SESSION – 1: Introduction

This session should be for introduction of the participants, establishing the ground rules and orienting the participants to the program.

**Time:** 45-60 minutes

- The facilitator welcomes the group
- Introduction of the participants (the facilitator can use the introduction of participants procedure described in Part I of the manual or use any similar other procedure)
- Asks the participants their expectations from the program
- Gives an overview of the workshop
- Sets the ground rules (the facilitator should use the procedure for setting the ground rules described in Part I)

**Break:** 15 minutes

### 10.2. SESSION – 2

This session should focus on discussion on risk factors, protective factors, warning signs, myths and facts about suicide and the role of a ‘gatekeeper.’ The facilitator can start with an example of **Don Ritchie** of Australia. *Don is known to have saved numerous lives by just being a cautious and caring person for someone contemplating suicide. There is a cliff known as ‘the Gap’ from where many people jump to death. Don lives nearby and whenever he finds someone standing on edge and might be contemplating jump from there, he goes near that individual, starts a conversation and invites him for coffee in his home. This way he saves many people from acting on their impulses.*

Encourage participants to list

- Various warning signs
- Risk factors



- Protective factors
- Myths and facts

*The facilitator should ensure that all the warning signs, risk factors, protective factors and myths (mentioned in this manual) are discussed in detail. Further, it is important that the participants get objective information. It is better to provide them a hand-out based on the information provided in this manual*

**Break:** 30 minutes

### **10.3. SESSION – 3**

This session should be focused on DOs and DON'Ts, how to talk to a person at-risk of suicide, how to persuade him or her for seeking help and where to refer him for further help. Discuss in detail how questions are to be framed and what precautions they should take when they are talking to an individual who may have suicide related thoughts (as given in sections 8 and 9).

## **11. Wrap-up**

At the end of the session conduct wrap-up or closing exercise.

- Have brief recap of all the discussions. Involve the participants in this activity.
- Provide addresses of centres (e.g. mental healthcare facilities) where people at-risk of suicide can be referred.
- Thank the participants for their participation.