



Rediscovering Human Dignity

Advocating and Caring for the Vulnerable in Society

Life Culture

Hello and Welcome!

Welcome and thank you for using our curriculum, this curriculum was developed to help you educate others on life-affirming topics and how to contribute to a culture of life. Through each session you will have time for discussion to engage your group. This resource is meant to be both practical and educational on MAiD and end-of-life care.

We hope that you find this life-affirming curriculum to be encouraging and inspiring!

A special thanks to Life Canada and Compassionate Community Care for their resources which were used to help create this curriculum.

For life,
Life Culture Canada

Table of Contents

SESSION 1

What is Medical Assistance in Dying? Pg. 1

SESSION 2

What is Dignity and What does it Mean to Uphold it? Pg. 8

SESSION 3

The Importance of Advocacy & Finding Meaning
Through Suffering Pg. 11

SESSION 4

Caring for the Vulnerable Pg. 16

What is Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD)?

To know how to approach the topic of MAiD, we first must know what it is so we can engage in a caring, educated, and meaningful way.

What is MAiD?

Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) is the Canadian legislation that allows physicians, nurse practitioners, and pharmacists to carry out euthanasia and assisted suicide. It seeks to allow eligible participants to have a "death with dignity," but directly threatens the belief that every life, no matter the ability or age, is worth protection, care, and respect until its natural end.

What is Euthanasia?

Euthanasia is the direct administration of a substance that causes death, such as an injection of a drug. This substance is administered by a physician or nurse practitioner.

Euthanasia **does not include:**

- Respecting a person's refusal of treatment or request to discontinue treatment.
- Letting someone die naturally by withholding or withdrawing medical treatment when its burdens outweigh its benefits
- The administration of drugs appropriate for the relief of pain and suffering even if one anticipates that the unintended side effect might be the shortening of life.

What is Assisted Suicide?

Assisted Suicide is the provision or prescription of a drug that the eligible person takes themselves, in order to bring about their own death.

What is Palliative Care?

While we should have a healthy fear of euthanasia and assisted suicide which are always morally unacceptable, palliative care is the opposite of these practices.

Palliative Care is a type of health care that aims to improve the situation of a dying person by relieving their pain and discomfort. It should be approached in a life-affirming way to alleviate suffering. To do so it can include a combination of mental, spiritual, emotional and social support measures, involving professionals, family and volunteers. It includes expert pain relief by highly trained and skilled medical professionals who know how to manage pain. This can be done at home or in an institutional setting both approaches demonstrating respect for human needs of the person suffering or dying.

The heart of palliative care is the commitment to neither unnecessarily prolong life, nor do anything that would unnecessarily shorten it.

Although palliative care cannot always eliminate all aspects of suffering, it is an excellent way of affirming the life of the person who is preparing for death.

DID YOU KNOW?

Studies show that only 30% of Canadians have ready access to palliative care. Knowing this, we have far to go to encourage governments to devote more resources towards palliative care in hospitals, homes and hospices and for the education of health professionals and the public in palliative care.

Unfortunately, with the legalization of euthanasia and assisted suicide in 2016, some local governments have sought to force both hospice and palliative care units to provide these practices of MAiD. Attempts to pressure organizations have led to several health care practitioners leaving their positions. This only reduces the access to and quality of palliative care for Canadians.

What About Those Whose Pain cannot be Controlled?

According to the Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention, "*People considering suicide feel as though their pain will never end and that suicide is the only way to stop the suffering.*"

However, experts in palliative care state that only a very small portion of people suffer from intractable pain and even then there are means to keep them comfortable.

DID YOU KNOW?

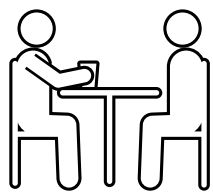
95% - 98% of patients can achieve a degree of comfort they are happy with

We know that when the emotional and physical pain of suffering is addressed, the vast majority of sufferers will retract their wish to die.

"New medical journals are now exclusively dedicated to pain management and palliative care. When pain becomes an argument for ending life, it is pain that must be killed, not the patient."

-Dr. Sherif Emil, Director of Pediatric General Surgery, Montreal Children's Hospital.

There are better methods that we could be using for pain control, it's about alleviating pain, not eliminating the sufferer.



DISCUSS

What is your experience with the topic of MAiD?
What is your experience with Palliative Care?
What has stood out to you the most so far?

What is the Law in Canada Right Now?

Until 2016 both euthanasia and assisted suicide were prohibited by the Canadian Criminal Code.

EUTHANASIA was treated as a form of murder. Under the Criminal Code murder can be first or second degree; with the former, the homicide is more deliberative. The motive in either case was considered irrelevant. In both cases the sentence is for life, but in the case of first degree murder the offender is not eligible for parole for 25 years, and in the case of second degree murder, for 10 years.

In a 1990s euthanasia case, Robert Latimer was convicted of second degree murder for killing his disabled daughter Tracy.

Assisted suicide was a separate offence in the Criminal Code with a maximum penalty of 14 years.

In the 1990s Sue Rodriguez, who had ALS, challenged the law against assisted suicide. The Supreme Court of Canada, however, upheld the law. It stated that "*The policy of the state is that life should not be depreciated by allowing life to be taken.*"

As other countries around the world, in Canada an active lobby sought to decriminalize both assisted suicide and euthanasia. It sowed confusion by playing with words, disguising grim reality with soothing terms such as 'death with dignity,' 'end of life care,' and "assisted dying."

In 2014 Quebec broke new ground by circumventing the Criminal Code, which is under federal jurisdiction. It passed a law allowing doctors under some circumstances to take a dying patients life, and maintained this act was simply a new form of health care, which falls under provincial jurisdiction. This act was termed "medical aid in dying" - **an attractive term for euthanasia.**

In 2015 the Supreme Court of Canada reversed its 1994 Rodriguez decision. It struck down the federal law against assisted suicide, saying it was too restrictive. It called on Parliament to enact new legislation allowing for some form of "physician-assisted dying."

Following public debate, In June of 2016 the Canadian Parliament passed a law "medical assistance in dying." This law permits physicians and nurse practitioners (advance practice registered nurse), to provide assisted suicide or euthanasia when requested by a patient under certain conditions.

Copy and paste the link below and discuss the questions based on the information you find as a group:

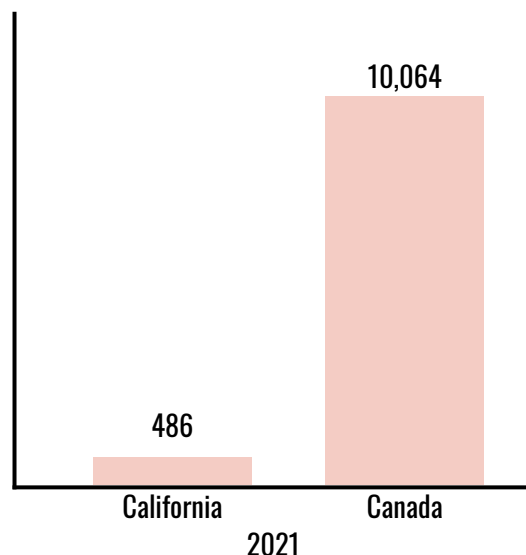
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/medical-assistance-dying.html>



- Who currently is eligible for MAiD?
- What medical conditions allow for MAiD?
- Are there any safeguards for MAiD right now?
- What restrictions are there for MAiD?

We may not even realize the high statistics on the amount of deaths that happens due to MAiD in a year. When we compare the amount of deaths that happen compared from California to Canada.

So why is this number so high?



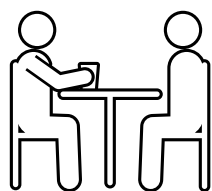
What is the Difference Between Non-treatment and Euthanasia?

Medical Treatment is useful for maintaining life and health, and is not burdensome for a patient. In some cases where the treatment may pose a physical or emotional burden, it ethically may seem unnecessary or disproportionate.

For example, CPR on a frail or elderly person may easily be considered unnecessary. When **disproportionate treatment** is withdrawn or withheld, *the intention is not to cause death*; it allows the person to die of natural causes.

With **euthanasia**, the intention is to cause death - the patient does not die naturally, but before his or her time. This happens through the administration of a lethal substance.

There is a great difference between allowing someone to die of natural causes and killing them. Intention is a key element in distinguishing between euthanasia and end-of life decisions.



DISCUSS

What do you think is one of the leading reasons people choose MAiD?

What is one thing that you learned that you didn't know before? How did that affect your thinking towards this topic?

As an optional add on to this topic, there is a section about how religion and faith speak into the topic.

Feel free to use this if it suits the group you are speaking to.

What are the Beliefs / Biblical Basis for an Approach to Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide?

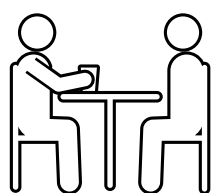
Almost all major religions believe that human life is a gift.

This belief leads the way we live our lives, knowing the author of life, and recognizing that life is both a gift freely given, never earned and freely taken, but never destroyed by our own hands.

Our purpose becomes being good stewards of the beautiful gift of life.

Whatever the legal or ethical distinction, both euthanasia and assisted suicide aim at the willful ending of a persons life. These acts violate the sacred character of human life.

Christians believe that life is a gift from God, and we do not have dominion over this gift. We are stewards, not owners of life. So, the time and circumstances of our birth and death are not ours to choose. Death is an inevitable part of life.



DISCUSS

How does your faith affect the way you view life?

Do you believe that life is a gift?

How is your view on these topics in reference to your faith different from those of the world?

Bible Reading:

-Genesis 1:27

-Job 10:11-12

-Job 33:4

-Psalm 139:13-16

-Isaiah 64:8

What is Dignity and What does it Mean to Uphold it?

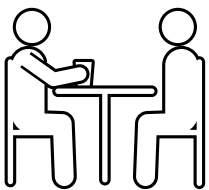
How can we give Dignity to Those who may not have it?

Euthanasia Prevention Coalition recently shared an update about a woman they provided care for:

A 31-year-old woman who was approved for (MAiD) euthanasia, based on her condition (MCS) that causes her to have strong allergic sensitivities to chemicals, has been helped by individual donors who have enabled her to move to a location that does not trigger her allergic sensitivities.

Visit Euthanasia Prevention Coalition for more examples.

It's not that people specifically want to die - it's that they can no longer live in the conditions that they are in. MAiD is seen as another quick solution to an even bigger problem.



DISCUSS

What does the word dignity mean to you?
How can we support the dignity of other peoples lives throughout every stage?
Does suffering have purpose?

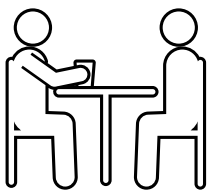
As in the story of the woman that Euthanasia Prevention Coalition shared, there are ways to alleviate the suffering of others to remind them of their inherent human dignity. Dignity is something that is given without conditions. Factors of capacity and ability should not take away from the dignity of others lives.

MAiD is something that strips dignity away from individuals. Instead of creating change, it's only promoting death. It has been masked as a positive decision for those suffering. So many people are being led by lies.

In Canada, the main organization is Dying with Dignity, which states on their website:

"Dying With Dignity Canada (DWDC) is the national human-rights charity committed to improving quality of dying, protecting end-of-life rights, and helping people across Canada avoid unwanted suffering."

They also state their vision as : "Everyone can choose a good death."



DISCUSS

What do you think knowing Dying with Dignity is one of the main organizations in Canada for end-of-life matters? What does dying with dignity mean to you?

Knowing the major role that Dying with Dignity plays in Canada, in some ways that should be a bit frightening to us as individuals. But it should not stop us from standing up for the dignity of those around us.

Dying with Dignity does not support a life affirming ethic. Instead it is pointing out that suffering and death are bad and should be avoided at all costs. Yes, suffering and death are hard things for us to grasp as individuals, but we cannot take away the fact that they are natural things apart of human existence and are not to be feared.

DID YOU KNOW?

54% of people who choose MAiD do it for the reason that they feel as if they have lost dignity

Because of all the messages opposing the dignity of humanity, we need to be able to know how to communicate human value.

DID YOU KNOW?

96% of people say that volunteering increases the sense of purpose in their lives

How can you Communicate Human Dignity to Others?

When people are sick, have an illness or are disabled they need to know and understand the dignity they have. They need to know this dignity is not diminished or taken away just because of their current state. Although many people will try to take away their value and pressure them to make life-altering decisions, we need to remain rooted in the truth that dignity is not limited or diminished by the state in which a person is in.

One of the ways we can communicate to others that we believe others lives have value is by making visits to those who may be sick, lonely, or disabled.

This may not only be a positive experience for the person you are meeting with, but also for yourself as you encourage others about the value of their life through suffering.

Check out Life Culture's "Story of my Life" Interview Workbook for guidance in discussions.

Bible Reading:

-1 Corinthians 3:16

-Micah 6:8

-Philippians 4:13

-Matthew 5:16

-Galatians 2:20

The Importance of Advocacy & Finding Meaning Through Suffering

It starts with drawing out the meaning of human suffering.

"Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of overcoming it."

-Helen Keller

One of the main criticisms that takes place is when people argue that those of us who don't support MAiD still are doing it to their animals when they suffer. To those who hold this view can see that it might be the same for loved family members, would we not also allow MAiD for those we love?

Human Suffering is unique from anything else.

This is not meant to take away value from animals, rather it is meant to celebrate the differences and the complexities that we have as humans. Suffering gives us the ability to demonstrate and experience unconditional love, and allow us to acknowledge and accept the rough realities of life. It can also cause us to question where our value lies in the intentional search for the meaning of life.

What does Culture say About the Value of Life?

Although many cultures have respect for the elderly, in Canada only 30% of Canadians having access to quality palliative care.

Although our culture may not provide the best care for those at the end of their lives, we still have the ability to unleash love.

Some ways to support the elderly:

- Listening to the wisdom of those older than you
- Taking time to listen to the stories of those older by visiting a care home

The Acceptance of Suffering

Through the words of writer Caryl Houselander the willingness to suffer is the "*basic quality of human integrity.*" Meaning when we face hardship and suffering, if we chose to accept it rather than avoid it, we will experience a greater sense of contentment and happiness.

Those are some radical thoughts in todays culture. We are constantly being pushed into choosing the path of less resistance and pain instead of leaning into the hard and gritty side of life. Although we would rather not choose to suffer, we must accept suffering when it comes our way rather than it embittering us and possibly encouraging the thought of MAiD.

Advocating for Life

In Canada, with the laws that allow assisted suicide and euthanasia, people who are sick and vulnerable may feel pressured to end their lives prematurely. Although it might not be said out loud, ideas that those who are going through a certain amount of suffering are considered to have less purpose. This leads to the pressure to end their lives.

But we know that they have immense purpose in their lives. It is our job to advocate and show love to those who are in one of the most vulnerable places in society.

For example:

A mother who receives a terminal diagnosis, and turns to her daughter for guidance, receives the response "It's your choice, Mom." Although it is unintended, this response communicates to the mother that her life doesn't matter. The daughter is leaving the situation to allow her to choose if she wants healthcare workers to save her life, or choose to take her life.

Messages like these in the end are simply depreciating the value of life. People are constantly in the cycle of being told that their life has no value. The emphasis on personal autonomy can result in isolation of the vulnerable person. This also leads to the person thinking that human suffering doesn't matter and death becomes the more viable option.

A Story on the Effect of one Person Choosing Suicide (anonymous story from Euthanasia Prevention Coalition:

My grandmother is 95 years old. She lives in a nursing home in Belgium, and we, her family live on another continent.

Last year, she became critically ill and told us she wanted to ask for euthanasia. Her doctor was against the idea, and then her health improved. We then used technology to better stay in touch with her. After that, she stopped talking about requesting euthanasia.

This year, on her birthday a few weeks ago, when we gave her best wishes, she said that the best wish would be that this was her last birthday. She was quite depressed after spending Christmas and New Years on her own. But we kept in touch with her, with several video calls each week. Her spirits lifted, she was happy, enthused and appeared relaxed on a recent call with her.

Today, she informs us that her only real friend at the residence, a "young woman of 75", had requested euthanasia and her request had been approved on the basis of Parkinson's. She is to be killed tomorrow.

My grandmother is now extremely upset and distressed. She spoke about losing her only friend. She spoke of feeling alone and isolated. She spoke of the fact that maybe it was time for her to look at euthanasia again.

How many other residents in that home are feeling similarly? How many requests for euthanasia will happen in that nursing home in the next few weeks? I have no hard data about the "contagion effect", but I see the very real impact her friend's upcoming euthanasia has on my grandmother. There is no support in this place for the residents. No one to speak to them, or to reassure them, other than the odd group presentation about why euthanasia is a good idea.

Meanwhile, in Canada, there is a Committee looking at how to implement "aid in dying." And so far, we aren't seeing anything about addressing the impact the assisted death of a nursing home resident would have on others, or the impact on the family left behind. We can't let this go unaddressed.

Contagion Effect

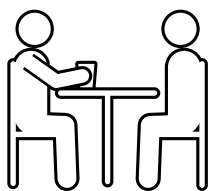
In terms of suicide, when someone chooses to end their own life it generates more suicides. Within a family devastated by suicide, surviving members of that family are at least six times more likely to commit suicide themselves. This affects people in the cases of MAiD as well, others feel compelled to make the same decision.

This can also be known as the Werther effect: cases of suicide can produce clusters of copycat cases, disproportionately affecting young people.

"The results should not surprise anyone familiar with the literature on the social contagion effects of suicidal behaviour. You don't discourage suicide by assisting suicide."

-Dr. Aaron Kheriaty, Professor of Psychiatry USI

Furthermore, the legalization of MAiD sends a message to people suffering from illness, mental illness and debilitating conditions that their lives are not valued in the same way as those of healthy, functioning people.



DISCUSS

How do you understand the purpose of human suffering?
Does your understanding differ from the culture's understanding?
What has helped you deepen your understanding of the purpose and meaning of suffering?

Further Understanding on the Purpose of Suffering:

For those understanding the truths of scripture, there also is further reasons for us to point out the purpose behind suffering.

Edith Schaeffer writes *"Affliction must be recognized as something we all need to deal with. There is no place to go for a vacation from the abnormality of the universe, from the effects of the Fall upon every area of life and from the conflict of the ages."*

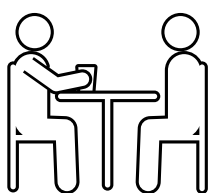
Further Schaeffer says Christian's must search for God's meaning and purpose through suffering.

"We must look at the whole problem of affliction and suffering which includes death - death of a precious body, death of cells which govern parts of the body, death of personal energy, death of a relationship, death of a state or country. We must not talk in trite phrases, but try to search sufficiently in the blend of facts and examples which the Lord has given to help us. It is important never to feel as if we were only talking about someone else's problem of sorrow or affliction without facing the reality of ourselves."

As Christians we should be able to come to terms with the fact that we will all face suffering in our lives. But through our suffering we know there is great opportunity for it to bring us closer to God and allow us to fully understand how he is our comforter and strength.

Although culture around us may not know how to fully grasp the purpose of suffering, we know what it is. When culture may want to avoid it, we know that by leaning into it, there will be a greater purpose. Although it may not produce happiness, we know that these times of suffering are sometimes the most formational seasons of our lives.

Instead we need to choose to journey with those who are suffering and remind them of their value. We need to encourage people to carry on.



DISCUSS

How does your faith change the way you face human suffering?

Do you know of anyone who has experienced conversion through suffering?

How do you see your presence at the bedside of a dying, ill or disabled person?

Bible Reading:

-Job 42:5

-Romans 8:28-29

-John 16:33

Caring for the Vulnerable

A Reflection of a Life Well Lived

For those in a season of suffering or dealing with other hard aspects of their lives, it's important that we remind them of the ways in which they still have value and can offer encouragement to them.

When someone is nearing the end of their lives it is important to remind them to reflect on their lives and the choices they've made.

Starting with acceptance is an important place to start when the weight of suffering can be weighing down on the individual.

This is where walking alongside others can be vital in this stage of their lives. When culture is telling them that their life has no value merely because of their capabilities, it's important to remind them that their life does have value and purpose at every stage.

How do we Love Well?

As an example, Jean Vanier, author and founder of L'Arche communities shows us how important it is to show love to those who are vulnerable. He spent his life going to marginalized communities and started homes for vulnerable people all over the world.

He wrote about a person he supported, Claudia. She was a blind seven year old girl struggling with autism. She was taken from an asylum in a slum of Honduras, Jean explains the mental state she was in as madness "*Madness is an escape from anguish. But there is an order in the disorder that can permit healing, if only it can be found.*"

Further Vanier explains how healing can come through love and can be understood in a few ways, "*Love is a revelation. Just as a mother and father reveal to their children that they have value and beauty, so too did those who worked with Claudia revealed to Claudia her value and beauty... We can express this revelation through our open and gentle presence, in the way we look and listen to a person, the way we speak to and care for someone. Gestures can be filled with a respect that reveals to someone their worth, even if that worth is hidden under anger, hatred or madness.*"

Visiting the Vulnerable and Lonely

Looking for opportunities to visit care homes and speak to residents is one of the life affirming ways you can support the vulnerable.

When we take the time to visit people and encourage them, that is not only a positive experience for those we are visiting, but also a positive experience for ourselves in which we are able to expose ourselves to the vulnerable place some people are in.

Many times we can surround ourselves with people who socially and economically fit into our lives and friendships, but vulnerability and growth may never occur in our lives if we don't also surround ourselves with others who are going through difficult life experiences.

Non-Verbal Behaviour

Although it can seem like a small thing, the way you present yourself can make a big impact on the way your time goes when visiting another individual. One of the main things is making them feel noticed by your body language.

Below are a couple things to take notice of when visiting someone:

- Face Them
- Make Eye Contact
- Lean in
- Respect Silence

Active Listening

Active listening means being present with the conversation that you are having.

Active listening requires:

- Humility
- Calmness
- Listening to Unspoken Messages
- Patience
- Cultural Sensitivity
- Empathy

"We cannot listen until we stop talking."

Our care for those who are lonely is important. Companionship brings hope to people who may be struggling through life. In these situations, advocacy is also important for the individual.



DISCUSS

How do you want to approach caring and listening to those who may be struggling in your life?

Who in your life may be lonely that you could go visit?

What do you see as the main importance of advocacy for the individual who is going through a hard time?

Bible Reading:

-Proverbs 3:5-6

-Psalm 12:5

-Philippians 4:13

OUR MISSION:

LIFE CULTURE'S MISSION IS TO PROMOTE A CONSISTENT CULTURE OF LIFE FROM THE BEGINNING OF LIFE TO ITS NATURAL END.

OUR VISION:

LIFE CULTURE HOPES FOR CANADA TO BECOME A COUNTRY WHERE ALL HUMAN LIFE IS SACRED, WHERE EVERY UNBORN CHILD HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE, AND WHERE PATIENTS RECEIVE PALLIATIVE AND END OF LIFE CARE UNTIL THE TIME OF NATURAL DEATH.



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