



RAILWAY OF HOPE



DISCUSSION GUIDE

Hello!

My name is Sophie Clark, and I'm the producer of the film "Railway of Hope". The film was created my senior year of high school through the Alaska Association of Student Governments, after multiple years of working on a suicide prevention idea that would be both engaging for young adults, and easily accessible for those in rural areas.

I've attended several suicide prevention events, and noticed that many of my peers fell asleep or didn't pay attention, so I wanted to create something that would be sure to capture the attention of young adults, yet still provide information and discussion points to increase suicide awareness and then prevention.

This film isn't meant to be used on its own, though. The purpose of the film isn't to provide complete suicide prevention training. The film is designed to start discussion. I want people to be aware that suicide is NOT a taboo topic, and it's ok to reach out for help when necessary. That is why the discussion and resource guide was developed. This guide is meant to introduce the topic, offer discussion topics after the film has been shown, provide activities for extended experiences, and offer resources that are available if the students need help. The most important thing to keep in mind when presenting this topic is that suicide has affected everyone in one way or another. Whether they've had a loved one commit suicide, have thought of suicide themselves, or had a friend affected by a suicide of someone they weren't close to, suicide is a tough topic to discuss.

The film plot involves Landon, a boy who has a seemingly perfect life, and the struggle he undergoes after his father dies in an accident. I hope that this film will not only raise suicide awareness for those that see the film, but that you will gain understanding as you present this topic. Enjoy and if you have any further questions, visit www.aasg.org. Thank you.

SOPHIE CLARK

Viewers,

My name is Emily Sexton, and I served on the Executive Board of the Alaska Association of Student Governments for two years, and as President from 2012-13. During my time on the Board, I was lucky enough to be able to take part in AASG's life-saving Suicide Prevention efforts. I met some extraordinary individuals whose passion fueled real change in Alaskan high schools. AASG recognized a problem and found solutions. Students wrote resolutions to get legislation passed so that suicide prevention training is now required for high school educators; worked to get the Kognito Program available for Alaskans, and worked to get educational materials available for student training. The "Railway of Hope - The Movie" is the essence of the powerful student leadership displayed throughout my time with AASG. The movie faces real issues, asks the tough questions, and engages youth in much-needed conversations.

I am proud to have been a part of a group of young leaders that were brave enough to bring the issue of suicide to the table. Thank you for having the same bravery and passion for others by bringing this movie to your community.

EMILY SEXTON, President

Alaska Association of Student Governments 2012-13

Student at Monroe Catholic High School 2010-2014



Greetings:

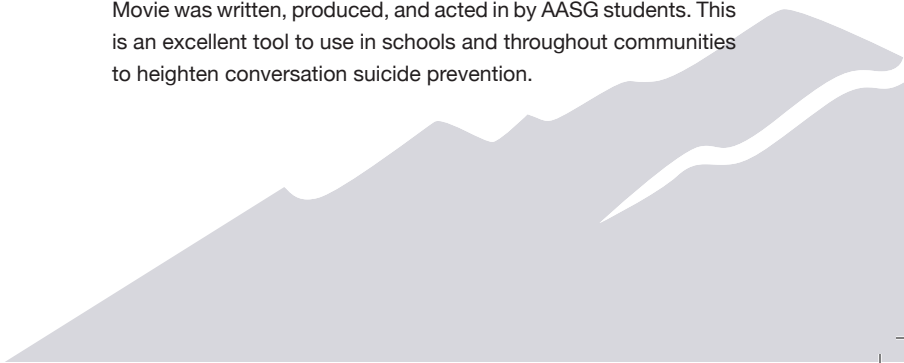
First of all, please allow me to acknowledge those whose lives have been touched by suicide – it is a bond that automatically connects you with so many people across the world.

The last Saturday before Thanksgiving has been dedicated to an opportunity for people across the world to spend time with others who are on their healing journey, please look at www.afsp.org to find out more about what is now known as International Suicide Prevention Day. It offers people ways to help each other.

The stigma and taboo attached to suicide has one myth, “If you talk about it, you will give them the idea.” Well, I am here to share that it is not true; we need to change that mindset. We need to talk about our feelings and our needs, and we need to listen to each other.

The Alaska Association of Student Governments is a fabulous group of youth leaders that is making a difference in suicide prevention. This Organization helped change legislation to include suicide prevention training in our schools. Nationally AASG has been recognized for their service in suicide prevention.

To raise awareness of suicide signs and to help everyone develop skills to help each other when in need, The Railway of Hope- The Movie was written, produced, and acted in by AASG students. This is an excellent tool to use in schools and throughout communities to heighten conversation suicide prevention.



I am in total support of the students' work in suicide prevention! I am proud of their compassion and how they reach out to their peers. I urge you to take the time to sit with youth, discuss what might help, and to take action. Our young people are present AND future leaders and we owe it to them to respect, acknowledge and listen to them as they advocate for saving lives.

Join me.

Sincerely,

BARBARA J. FRANKS

From a mother whose son died by suicide

DOB 5/13/97 – DEATH 12/14/97



ALASKA NATIVE TRIBAL HEALTH CONSORTIUM
Behavioral Health-Suicide Prevention Programs



From AASG Executive Director:

Railway of Hope - The Movie is the culmination of 4 years of work by eight Executive Boards of the Alaska Association of Student Governments. When Board Member Megan Murphy told her personal story of losing a friend to suicide, I doubt that anyone predicted that AASG students would have impact on state law, travel all over Alaska leading workshops in schools and communities, be recognized with a national service award, receive funding and support from many organizations and businesses, present at national and statewide conferences on the suicide prevention campaign, and produce a movie!

I have witnessed a transformation of many student leaders as they found their voice in meetings, presentations, and in the Legislature. I am so impressed by these students' perseverance, creativity, vision, and unflagging optimism. They have supported each other, and trusted each other, and worked as a team as students graduated and others stepped up to continue the campaign.

This has been an amazing journey, from students being met with skepticism and distrust by adults to being sought after for their perspectives and talents. These are amazing young people who are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but the leaders of today.

A standing ovation to all the youth who took charge of a challenging issue and showed how to make a difference.

CAROL WATERS

Executive Director

Alaska Association of Student Governments

2004-2013

HOW TO USE RAILWAY OF HOPE

INTRODUCING SUICIDE PREVENTION

Suicide prevention can be an emotionally-charged topic. The Railway of Hope offers a non-threatening approach to discussing the topic of suicide prevention.

To prepare for the group viewing the film and participating in activities, please watch Railway of Hope and read this Discussion Guide. It is helpful to check out the resources at the back of the Discussion Guide, and display the CareLine number and text line for all to see.

Please alert the counselor, nurse, or other helper that you are introducing the topic of suicide prevention. Tell the participants that if they want to talk privately, they can come to see you or (name others they can go to).

Here are some suggestions for introducing the topic of suicide prevention and preparing the audience (students and adults):

1. You can share the story of how this film came about: Several years ago a student in Fairbanks who lost a friend to suicide told her friends that all these adults came into the school for one day after the death of their friend, and then we are supposed to be ok. She said she thought more needed to be done to save lives. The friends, students from the Alaska Association of Student Governments, listened and then decided to step up and address her concerns. They got help from CareLine staff, and offered trainings and workshops at the AASG Conferences. Tessa Baldwin, who was on the Executive Board, took on the challenge of the work to prevent youth suicide. She told her personal story (which you can read on the AASG web site) and was awarded grants and formed

Hope For Alaska and travelled to schools all over Alaska to lead suicide prevention activities. Emily Sexton and Corey Butler continued as the chairs of the Suicide Prevention Committee the next year. Then Sophie Clark decided that a film developed by students and acted by students would be a valuable tool for schools. Railway of Hope was born.

2. Ask the participants to raise their hand if they have been affected by suicide. Note that many of us have been affected by suicide. You may ask if anyone would want to share how they were affected.
3. Share some statements with the audience and ask if they agree or disagree:
 - Suicide mostly happens with few or no warning signs.
 - Asking someone if they are thinking about suicide puts the thought in their heads.
 - When someone says they are going to kill themselves they just want attention. It's not for real.
 - There is no way to stop someone from committing suicide.

Then say that we will be discussing these statements further, because these are all myths about suicide. None are true.

4. Ask the participants to respond to a short pre-assessment (download at www.aasg.org) about their understanding of suicide issues. Questions include: What are three warning signs of suicide? What would you do if you were concerned that a friend would try to hurt themselves? How comfortable do you feel about asking a person if they are thinking of hurting themselves? very comfortable.....very uncomfortable.
5. Share most important facts about suicide: suicide is preventable; suicide can happen in any community, at any age, among any group; 90% of people who have died by suicide had an emotional issue; you can learn warning signs; each person is responsible for their own life. You can listen, offer help, and show you care. However, if a person takes their own life it is their decision, you are not responsible for their behavior.

INTRODUCING RAILWAY OF HOPE - THE MOVIE

1. When introducing the film, cueing can help the participants focus. Here are examples of cues you can give prior to the film:
 - Landon is the main character in Railway of Hope. Watch for signs that he is in distress as the movie progresses.
 - There are several people in the film who make choices about Landon. Be ready to share one choice a character made that affected Landon.
 - Pay attention to the tone of the film as it goes along. When were there changes in the tone?
2. Remind the participants that there are many resources that can help when you or a friend feels distressed. (Careline, counselor, other trusted adults and friends)

AFTER THE MOVIE:

1. Review any cueing you used prior to the film.
2. Use the discussion questions and activities to deepen understanding, build skills, and apply the knowledge and skills to help others.
3. The Kognito Programs listed in the Resources is an excellent practice tool.
4. Discuss the handout available at www.aasg.org: "Get the Facts about Suicide".
5. Reiterate that each person is responsible for their own life. You can offer caring, listening, and resources, but you cannot make a decision for another person. Ask the participants what they think about this.
6. Have participants complete the post-survey which is posted on the AASG web page.

The students of AASG thank you for using our materials to help save lives in Alaska.

THE 'WALL OF HOPE' PROJECT 2013

Alaska may have the highest rate of suicide per capita in the country, but thousands of people across the state have vowed to work toward reducing that figure and creating a healthier, happier, and brighter Alaska for future generations.

Students from across Alaska have decided to create a "Wall of Hope" at their schools during Alaska Suicide Prevention Week held September 9-15 to identify positive aspects in their lives that highlight why living is important to them.

It is important that students work together with their peers, teachers, counselors, and administrators in order to conduct a safe, informative, meaningful, and memorable "Wall of Hope" in their schools.

Creating a "Wall of Hope" is simple and there is more than one way to do it. The importance of this activity is to promote hope and optimism for the participants, along with a sense of purpose and reason for living.

The basic premise of the project is for each student to identify three things in their life that make them want to live. They could be as straightforward as "my dog," "my family," or "basketball," to the more complex, such as, "graduating college," "visiting France someday," or "writing music." The importance of the exercise is for the students to identify three things to be hopeful for going into the future. It is also important for school officials to monitor for potentially harmful or hateful words or phrases.

As previously stated, there is more than one way to create a “Wall of Hope.” Some examples include:

- Provide each student with three colored pieces of paper or three index cards to write their reasons to be hopeful on, which can then be taped onto an identified wall.
- Tape up a large piece of Butcher Paper along a wall and have students write their three reasons to be hopeful on the paper with colorful markers.
- Provide students with three pieces of Caution Tape and have them write one of their reasons on each piece. Then tape them together into a chain that is then interlinked with the other students’ pieces and hang them along a wall.

There is no right or wrong way to create a “Wall of Hope,” as long as it promotes healthy living and a hopeful future. It is encouraged that each school make their wall appropriate to their community and its student body.

It is recommended that this be done as a school-wide activity and that school counselors are on hand to identify and assist any students that may find the exercise overwhelming or traumatic.

Please encourage the students to take photos of their “Wall of Hope” to share with the student body, student publications, the Alaska Association of Student Governments, and parents. Also, please encourage the students to be helpful, respectful, and hopeful in creating their “Wall of Hope.”

The project is a collaboration between the Alaska Association of Student Governments, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium, the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, the Alaska Mental Health Board, the Division of Behavioral Health, the Department of Health and Social Services, and numerous schools and school districts throughout Alaska.

THE 'WALL OF HOPE'

FACILITATOR GUIDE

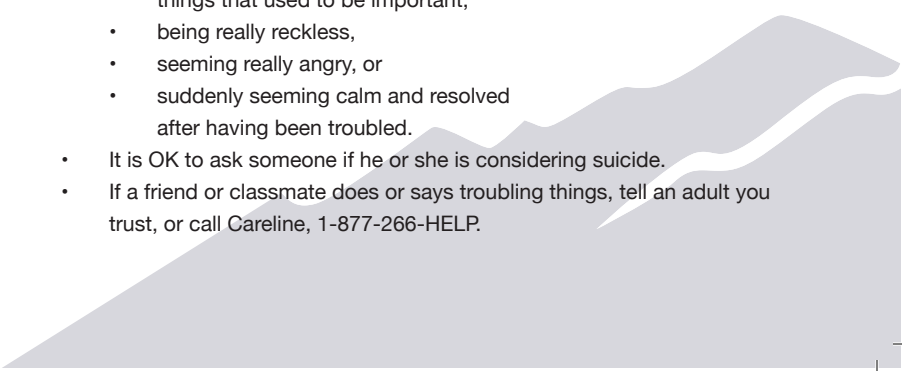
COUNSELOR/TEACHER REMARKS:

I'm going to share some facts with you about suicide.

The number one fact to remember – if you don't remember anything else today, remember this:

SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE.

The next things to remember are that:

- We all can help prevent suicide.
 - Suicide can happen in any community, at any age, among any group of people.
 - 90% of people who've died by suicide had an emotional health issue. (since people are hearing this, not reading it, short simple language will probably sink in more easily).
 - You can learn warning signs, and you can act to make a difference.
 - Warning signs include someone...
 - hurting him- or herself,
 - talking about having no hope,
 - seeming depressed & losing interest in things that used to be important,
 - being really reckless,
 - seeming really angry, or
 - suddenly seeming calm and resolved after having been troubled.
 - It is OK to ask someone if he or she is considering suicide.
 - If a friend or classmate does or says troubling things, tell an adult you trust, or call Careline, 1-877-266-HELP.
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- You absolutely should speak up if you are worried about someone, but you are not responsible if someone chooses to hurt him- or herself.

In case you didn't hear it the first time I said it, the most important things to know about suicide are

1. that it's preventable,
2. it's almost always the result of a treatable emotional health issue, and
3. we can all help prevent suicide.

If you want more information about learning warning signs & how to react, there are classes & programs available. Come ask me later.

People care about you more than you know. If you're having a tough time, please reach out for help, because it is available. We want to help. If your first attempt to reach out doesn't work, please try again. Things can and will get better.

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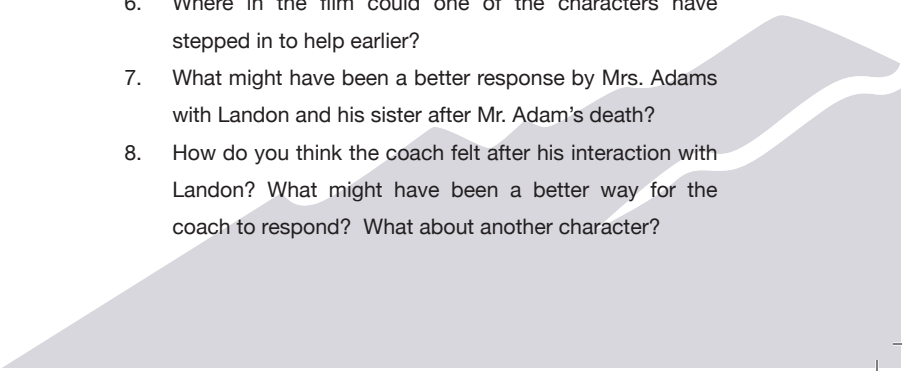


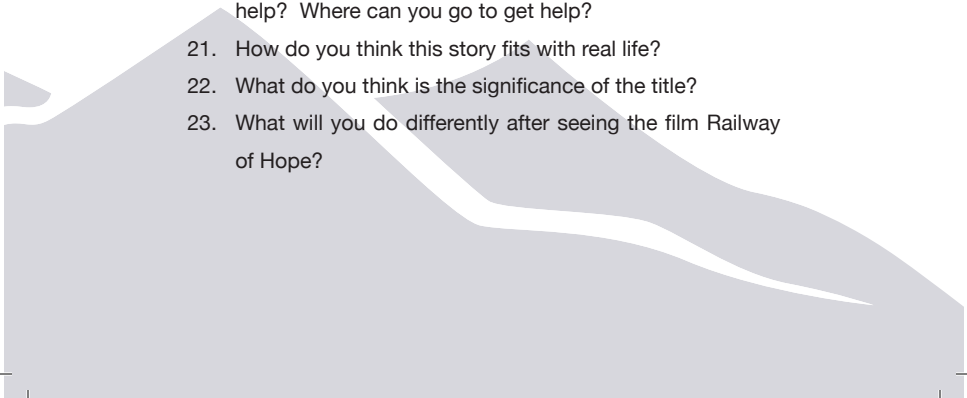
RAILWAY OF HOPE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions can lead to a valuable discussion about *Railway of Hope* and the issues and skills addressed. AASG will also have handouts and other materials available starting at the Fall 2013 AASG Conference.

If you need further help, please call Careline at 1-877-266-4357 or text4help to 839863. For further resources, email Executive Director at ma2tna@acsalaska.net.

1. In *Railway of Hope*, what was going right for Landon and his friends at the start of the film?
 2. What changes did you see in Landon's life throughout the film that indicated that things were going downhill for him?
 3. What changes did you see throughout the film that indicated that things were challenging for people close to Landon? (family, friends, coach, teacher)
 4. What are some feelings that Landon felt at different times in the film?
 5. What do you think his friend meant when he talked with Landon after class about how he must be feeling uncomfortable?
 6. Where in the film could one of the characters have stepped in to help earlier?
 7. What might have been a better response by Mrs. Adams with Landon and his sister after Mr. Adam's death?
 8. How do you think the coach felt after his interaction with Landon? What might have been a better way for the coach to respond? What about another character?
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9. What signs did Landon show that he was in trouble?
 10. How did his friends decide to get help? What do you think led them to that decision?
 11. What was the result of Landon's friends talking with the teacher?
 12. How did his family react to this intervention?
 13. What happened as the film ended? What do you think helped Landon?
 14. Sometimes when a person talks about suicide, others don't "hear" the message. Why do you think that is so? What can you do to be sure you hear the message?
 15. What are some warning signs or signals of teenage thinking about suicide?
 16. What behaviors should be warning signs to friends and family to reach out to help?
 17. What do you think would have happened if Landon's friends had asked him if he was thinking of hurting himself? How do you feel about their plan?
 18. What's the difference between everyday sadness and suicidal sadness?
 19. In the film *Railway of Hope*, what was the result of addressing the topic of suicide prevention in class? How might it have helped?
 20. How do you think that suicide prevention training can help? Where can you go to get help?
 21. How do you think this story fits with real life?
 22. What do you think is the significance of the title?
 23. What will you do differently after seeing the film *Railway of Hope*?
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RAILWAY OF HOPE

ACTIVITIES

EVERY LIFE COUNTS

The “Every Life Counts” t-shirt activity contains a powerful message. It requires t-shirts, perhaps yellow, the color of suicide prevention. The t-shirts represent the average number of Alaskan students that are lost to suicide each year.

This activity is designed to be a visual for students to realize how much of a problem suicide is. For “Every Life Counts” you’ll need to do a little research. Find the statistics for the annual suicide rate in Alaska (stopsuicidealaska.org is a good resource if you’re in Alaska). This will give you the number of t-shirts you’ll need. In 2011 there were 140 youth suicides in Alaska, so when AASG did the activity at its Leadership Conference, we had 140 shirts hung up around the gym representing youth thru age 25 who had taken their own lives.

After you’ve acquired shirts, determine a good location to display them. If you’re holding your presentation in a gym, you can request permission to string a rope between the basketball hoops and just use clothespins to hang the shirts. They make a dramatic backdrop if you have a speaker presenting the topic. However, don’t put any signs or indications that these shirts represent the number of suicides in your state.

As your presentation comes to a close, ask if any students have counted the shirts. Note that it seems like a large number of shirts though, right? Then tell the students that each shirt represents one youth who took their life that year in Alaska. As students leave the presentation, ask them to leave quietly and reflect thoughtfully. As they leave, invite each student to remove one shirt from the clothesline to represent the fact that they can save their own life.

When the students take the t-shirts, you can have a place and time for them to decorate with inspirational quotes and reasons to live. After the t-shirts are drawn on, they can be displayed. Many students found this activity moving, because they could then visualize the number of students lost each year and realize that each person matters.

MEDIA BY STUDENTS

AASG sponsors a media contest each year, and this has produced many excellent thirty-second spots that have been shown thousands of times on GCI Cable Network. These can also be used on school-wide and district-wide TV channels as well as in-house systems. They remind students and staff that they can make a difference when someone is in distress.

The spots can be used as discussion talking starters in classes. Some questions to use are: ***What do you think the message is in this video? How might you use the idea presented here?*** These videos are available at the Alaska Association of Student Governments' web site, www.aasg.org.

Students may be inspired to make their own videos. They can submit videos to the contest, which has been running since 2010. Information is on the web site.

THE COLOR OF SAVING LIVES

Yellow is the color for suicide prevention awareness. You can have students wear yellow, or make yellow ribbons to pass out as a reminder that it's ok to ask for help or tell someone if you're concerned about a friend. This is a meaningful activity to include for "Spirit Days".

CHAIN OF LIFE

The Chain of Life is a variation on the Wall of Hope. The goal of making this chain is to encourage positive thinking and help students realize all the reasons they have to live.

The materials needed include: caution tape (available at your local hardware store or ordered online), scissors, tape/staples, and lots of permanent markers. Cut the caution tape into strips. The length of two "cautions" seems to be about right.

Each student should receive three strips of the caution tape, along with a permanent marker. They should each write one appropriate reason to live, on the tape. After all the caution tape has been collected, loop them together in chain link fashion, and there you go! You have a Chain of Life. Be sure to display the chain so that students will be reminded of all the things they have to live for.

When AASG did this activity, we draped it all around the gym. When this was done on Prince of Wales Island, it was hung along the highway for a mile, along with information on the purpose.

FUNDING

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Discussion Guide distributed October 2013



RESOURCES FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

ALASKA CARELINE CRISIS LINE

1-877-266-4357 (24/7/365) or Text "4Help" to 839868
blog and resources at www.carelinealaska.com

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE · 1-800-273-8255

Alaska Association of Student Governments

www.aasg.org for handouts to print for classroom use, pre- and post- surveys, media contest winners, and other tools for effective use of the film *Railway of Hope*.

KOGNITO AT-RISK FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

15-minute online role-playing game for youth ages 13 to 18, provides practice in identifying risk signs and speaking up when concerned. Users take on the role of Michael who needs to talk with his friend Anna who lately seems to be struggling. Michael knows what it's like – he's been there. www.kognito.com

KOGNITO AT-RISK FOR HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATORS

A 2-hour training that uses practice in making choices when concerned about students. Go to <https://highschool.kognito.com/alaska>; enrollment key ak126.

WWW.IKNOWMINE.ORG · sexual health for youth

WWW.STOPSUICIDEALASKA.ORG · website that pools people and resources

WWW.SPRC.ORG

Suicide Prevention Resource Center offers resources,
best practices, safe messaging





WWW.RAILWAYOFHOPETHEMOVIE.COM