

Exercise: “Walking in Another’s Shoes”

This exercise was developed by an Elaine Blinn; a social worker addressing the global AIDS crisis. This exercise was highlighted in the book by Donald E. Messer, “Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence.”

This exercise is geared to “help people understand how devastating stigmatization and discrimination are to a person’s emotional and physical well being [by] inviting them to consider imaginatively how they would respond in similar situations.”

- Ask people to write down on five (5) pieces of paper their five (5) most treasured values such as God, family, love, friends, job, church, sex, health, independence, money, happiness, security. Put one value on each piece of paper. No one is to reveal to others their choices.
- Ask them to choose one and tear it up, whereby asking participants to make a choice of what they would give up, when forced, and consequently experience some conflict or pain in doing so.
- Then ask them to tear up another sheet. Again, each is asked to sacrifice another value.
- Each person is then asked to turn to the person seated beside them and share their feelings. It becomes a comfort to talk with someone about how hard it had been for them to give up something they held so sacred. Life is a choice of values, but we are not used to being forced to surrender anything like faith, friends or health.
- Then instruct the group to put in front of their neighbor the three remaining pieces and have that neighbor blindly take one and tear it up. Each watches as sacred values were being forcefully taken from them and trashed.

POINT OF EXERCISE: “People diagnosed with HIV often suddenly discover their life values tumbling out of their control. The person who tests positive for HIV fear that his or her world is collapsing and that the most intimate values-be they faith, family, friends, job, sex are in dire jeopardy. And if it happens to that person, it can happen to any of us.”