

The 25 Stephen Minister Training Topics



Stephen Ministries St. Louis supplies congregations enrolled in the Stephen Series with 25 training modules in section T of the *Leader's Manual* and in the *Stephen Ministry Training Manual*. Eighteen of these modules are used in the initial 50 hours of training and the other seven in continuing education.

Initial Training

1--The Person of the Caregiver

This module introduces Stephen Minister trainees to one another, to Stephen Leaders, to the resources that the Stephen Minister trainees will be using, and to the topic of caregiving. They learn about the Caregiver's Compass, which defines the character of a caregiver and guides their learning and caring. They also match up with a prayer partner for the duration of initial training.

2--Feelings: Yours, Mine, and Ours

A big part of a Stephen Minister's caregiving is concerned with helping care receivers recognize, accept, and express their feelings, and inviting them to trust God to give them healing and wholeness. This explains why the topic of feelings comes early on in training. Stephen Minister trainees learn of the benefits of expressing feelings and the harm that can come when feelings remain unexpressed. The Stephen Series mud hole diagram teaches a model for understanding good and bad ways to relate to the feelings of another: sympathy, over identification, and empathy. Trainees are taught to create a "Safe House" for care receivers, founded on grace-based acceptance and structured around listening, empathy, trust, and confidentiality.

3--The Art of Listening

Listening is how Stephen Ministers go about discovering what feelings are in action in their care receivers. Trainees learn to distinguish between open and closed questions and why it is better to rely on open-ended questions in caregiving. They learn and practice the skill of reflecting as a valuable listening tool and respond to a listening quiz as a way of exploring the many facets of this skill. Talking about their own experiences helps to sharpen their understanding of when listening is effective and when it feels fake or makes them uncomfortable.

4--Distinctively Christian Caring--Parts 1 and 2

Stephen Ministry caregiving is distinctively Christian in character and thus warrants intense emphasis on using the tools of faith in caring for another. The training modules up to now have been 2½-hour sessions. This one occupies two such periods of 2.5 hours each. The book *Christian Caregiving--a Way of Life* provides the Preclass Reading material for both sessions. The second session includes another Preclass Reading: "Resource of Biblical Stories and Promises." Many congregations center a one-day retreat around these four hours of instruction, which are strongly relational and experiential.

5--Process versus Results in Caregiving

If ever there were a time for Stephen Minister trainees to say "Aha!" this module would be it. They learn the key understanding that they do not have to (and indeed cannot) fix whatever problem it is that their care receiver faces. This session is a time for a collective sigh of relief. God is the cure giver; the Stephen Minister is the caregiver. This establishment of roles is what makes Stephen Ministry possible. The concept runs counter to the strong results-oriented approaches of present-day society. But in caregiving, the more one pushes for results in another, the faster and farther they flee.

6--Assertiveness: Relating Gently and Firmly--Parts 1 and 2

Assertiveness has gained a bad name for itself in some circles of the church. It has been taken to mean "getting my own way," which is erroneous. In fact, assertiveness is about relating to others gently and firmly. The Pre-class Reading for this two-session training module is *Speaking the Truth in Love: How to Be an Assertive Christian*, which takes Jesus as the model for assertiveness throughout. Stephen Minister trainees learn skills, practice them in classroom settings, and are urged between sessions to use their newfound skills in their own real-life settings. They report on the results at the next session.

7--Maintaining Boundaries in Caregiving

The importance of maintaining boundaries is emphasized to protect Stephen Ministers from manipulation and to guard them against their own controlling impulses. The Stephen Minister trainees learn the signs that indicate problems with maintaining appropriate boundaries and the consequences of boundary infringements. They briefly explore the difference between servanthood (good) and servitude (bad). This is a one-hour module, and in the typical 2½-hour training session it is combined with another one-hour module, "Crisis Theory and Practice: Danger versus Opportunity" (T-8).

8--Crisis Theory and Practice: Danger versus Opportunity

Crises affect every area of a person's life, and their certainty is what makes Stephen Ministry necessary. (No church staff could conceivably care for all the crisis needs in any congregation.) Stephen Minister trainees learn the effects of crises on people's faith and learn the course that a crisis can take. The key image of the caregiver is presented as being a "triangle tipper," a person who encourages the care receiver to move toward wholeness. Stephen Minister trainees identify what needs people in crisis have, learn appropriate ways to care for those needs, and practice those caregiving skills. This one-hour module is usually taught in concert with another one-hour module, "Maintaining Boundaries in Caregiving" (T-7).

9--Confidentiality

Stephen Ministry works because Stephen Ministers take confidentiality with utmost seriousness. If congregation members were not utterly convinced that their needs for care were kept confidential, few would ever agree to accept the care of a Stephen Minister. The trainees learn some simple rules and ways to apply those rules that cover most of the situations they will run into in the caring relationship, in supervision, with well-meaning friends and family, and elsewhere. Trainees also learn important exceptions to the hard-and-fast rules, and how to respond if they occur.

10--Telecare: The Next Best Thing to Being There

Caregiving by telephone is not as good as caregiving in person, but it's not bad, either, provided you have learned some basic differences in techniques. Stephen Ministers typically visit with their care receivers about an hour a week in person, but this is not the limit of their contacts. They also care over the phone. In this module trainees learn when use of the phone is right, and they practice ways to respond to the challenges of caregiving by phone.

11--Using Mental Health Professionals and Other Community Resources

In preparation for this module, trainees will have read *When and How to Use Mental Health Resources*. They will also view the video *Stephen Ministry and Mental Health Issues* during their in-class time. Trainees learn when and how to refer their care receivers to mental health professionals, how and when it is okay for a Stephen Minister to continue caring for someone who is seeing a professional caregiver, and what other resources are available for people in crisis. For the first class of trainees, an important output of this training session is the *Community Resources Handbook*, which the class as a whole researches and assembles. It consists of a listing of available community resources for all sorts of special needs. Each subsequent group of Stephen Minister trainees adds to this book as Stephen Ministry matures within your congregation.

12--Ministering to Those Experiencing Grief

Stephen Ministers learn the stages of grief and what forms of caregiving are right at each stage. They widen their understanding of grief to include loss of any kind--loss of a job, of independence, of children who go off to college or their own lives. As always, a Learn-It-From-Experience (LIFE) component of the training allows trainees to bring their own experiences of grief in its many forms to the instruction process.

13--Dealing with Depression: The Stephen Minister's Role

Stephen Ministers have no business caring for those suffering from severe depression, certainly not when there is no mental health professional involved. They may, however, care for people who are mildly to moderately depressed. Through reading, simulation, and lecture, trainees learn the characteristics and symptoms of mild, moderate, and severe depression. When they need to involve mental health professionals, they learn how best to do that and practice the skills they learn, including skills appropriate to their own caregiving of those who are mildly to moderately depressed.

14--Helping Suicidal Persons Get the Help They Need

Stephen Ministers are never knowingly assigned to someone who is or might be suicidal, but they may nonetheless find themselves in a caring relationship with someone who is suicidal. If so, they need to know what to do. This module teaches them how to determine the level of risk and how to refer the care receiver to a qualified professional. Expressions of suicide are not to be taken lightly, and the trainees learn right up front that this behavior, along with homicidal and abusive behavior, is an exception to the principles of confidentiality.

15--Bringing the Caring Relationship to a Close

Stephen Ministry relationships go on until the crisis is past, the need for care is diminished (not necessarily completely over), and the care receiver is able to cope on his or her own. As important as learning how and when to close a caring relationship is learning how to head off premature closure. The trainees practice these skills and share times from their own experience when relationships have been helpfully and unhelpfully brought to a close.

16--Supervision: A Key to Quality Christian Care--Parts 1 and 2

Supervision is such an essential part of Stephen Ministry that the trainees receive training in two separate sessions of 2.5 hours each. They learn what tools they have available for supervision and how to use them, with special emphasis on the Focus Question Sets. Two videos add to the learning. *Stephen Ministry Small Group Peer Supervision: A Demonstration* is used with Part 1 of the module. *Focus on Specific Supervision Skills* is

used with both parts. Additional instruction on preserving confidentiality in supervision helps ensure that Stephen Minister trainees maintain the trust of their care receivers at the highest levels. A practice supervision session reinforces the skills.

17--How to Make a First Caring Visit

Stephen Series training is never abstract, but the nitty-gritty of caring suddenly looms large when commissioning time approaches. It is fitting, therefore, that in this module they have in one place a chance to review and put together all they have learned about caregiving. The trainees learn how to use the Contact Record Sheet and the Referral Form. They practice setting up and conducting a first caring visit and explore their personal feelings about beginning caring relationships.

18--Follow Me

This module is a time for review and inspiration as Stephen Minister trainees get ready for commissioning. The module includes a video, *Follow Me*. During all the training, trainees have been working with the Caregiver's Compass as a way of summarizing their learning in each of five qualities they are developing: compassion, faith, skills, trustworthiness, and remaining Christ-centered. Now they review these five elements. The trainees create a personal emblem that synthesizes their expectations of Stephen Ministry. They meet with their Supervision Group for the first time and begin building community with that group. They close their initial training with a worship service.

Continuing Education

19--Ministry to the Dying and Their Family and Friends

A welter of emotions and practical needs rise up in one who dying as well as those is connected to the dying person. Stephen Ministers explore their own feelings about dying. They learn specific ways to care for dying persons at each separate stage of the dying process. The Stephen Ministers work with using distinctively Christian tools--for example, prayer and the Bible--in caring for dying people, and they practice these skills in simulated interactions.

20--Caring for People before, during, and after Hospitalization

At the heart of this module is a field trip to the hospital or a panel discussion by experts on the routines of hospital care and the needs of hospital patients. Stephen Ministers learn the challenges that patients face and how best to minister to them and their families and friends. There are many practical dos and don'ts they learn and practice.

21--Ministering to Those Experiencing Losses Related to Aging

Differing needs for care accompany each category--young old, middle old, and frail elderly--of aging. Stephen Ministers learn those differences and practice caring skills related to each. Part of their education includes considering themselves as aging persons and what that means for them.

22--Ministering to Persons Needing Long-Term Care

Stephen Ministers learn about the variety of afflictions that can result in a need for long-term care and the special needs long-term care receivers may have. Stephen Ministers learn how to apply Stephen Ministry skills to these needs. They also explore some barriers to effective ministry and evaluate their own gifts and commitments to care for long-term care receivers. They come to recognize that this particular ministry is not one that all are able to do effectively, but for which some are uniquely gifted.

23--Ministering to Those Experiencing Divorce

Stephen Ministers are not marriage counselors, and this continuing education module has no pretensions to make them into any such thing. Rather, they learn to care for the pain and suffering people experience when they are going through divorce, including their spiritual needs. They learn what the stages are in the divorce process and what the Bible has to say about divorce. They also examine their own attitudes about divorce, which can help them avoid pitfalls in their caregiving.

24--Crises of Pregnancy and Childbirth

Even with a normal pregnancy resulting in a healthy baby, parents can experience crises. This module describes possible crises and how to care for people experiencing them. The module also explores the crises of abnormal pregnancy and birth, including high-risk pregnancies, miscarriage, stillbirth, infertility, premature birth, and infant death. Stephen Ministers learn how to minister to new parents and to parents where one or more of these difficulties or crises have arisen.

25--Providing Spiritual Care

Stephen Ministry is distinctively Christian care. Concern for the spiritual well-being of care receivers is obviously of prime importance. This module teaches skills and gives practice in using them to identify spiritual needs in oneself and in others and then to provide gospel-centered caring for those identified needs.