

For the Coach: Module 4

OVERVIEW OF MODULE 4

This module teaches the members of the organization how to keep one another safe by “stepping in” when a fellow member is engaging in (or even contemplating) doing something connected to alcohol that puts them at increased risk of negative physical, legal, or personal consequences.

The module emphasizes two aspects of stepping in:

- **Stepping in to interrupt or stop a behavior that puts a member (and the organization) at great risk.** This can happen in situations such as the following: a member wants to keep drinking after they’ve already had more than enough, a member starts making a sexual advance toward someone who is unable to consent due to intoxication, a member is damaging property or starting fights, or a member is handing out alcohol to everyone without considering whether the people accepting it should be given more to drink (or anything at all).
- **Stepping in to prevent a high-risk behavior before it even starts.** Stepping in is most effective when it is done before someone is too intoxicated to understand or appreciate why the other person is taking action. For example, a member might step in when hearing other members talking about getting really drunk at an upcoming party or planning to buy alcohol for underage members. Members can also step in when they hear attitudes or misunderstandings that if unaddressed could lead to a bad outcome. For example, a member may decide to step in when overhearing another member say that it’s not dangerous to drink while using antibiotics or other medications, or when hearing a group of members making plans to get “blackout” drunk later on. A member may decide to step in when another member brags or jokes about their own high-risk drinking (implying that this is the norm for the group), or when one member gives another a hard time because they’ve chosen to abstain or drink moderately.

Stepping in is a simple and very effective strategy. The problem? No one wants to do it.

College students in particular don’t want to do it. They are convinced that the fastest route to destroying their social success is telling someone else what to do. It sounds judgmental, it seems hypocritical, and it feels downright stupid. It might even be frightening, especially if the person is a mean drunk.

All of those objections are valid if we don’t make a commitment to each other to manage our risks, and if we don’t first give each other permission to step in appropriately should the need arise to keep each other safe and regret-free.

Here’s the truth: We are usually greeted with great hostility when we try to interrupt another person doing something that they really want—and feel entitled—to do.

The Stepping In strategy, as the video explains, is about making these agreements in advance. It's best when it follows the Living Policies agreements, because that's where members make commitments to behave in ways that enable the group to continue thriving. Stepping in is about holding each other accountable as well as keeping each other from harm. But it only works if everyone makes an agreement to let others jump in when needed.

There may be special aspects of the Stepping In agreement that need to be negotiated in the group. It may be hard for a senior to have a first-year step in on them, especially in public. It's important to take time to work through these issues, and it may take several efforts before stepping in becomes accepted and expected. Working through the fears and awkwardness of stepping in on each other may need to be done in stages, from stepping in on less flagrant but potentially harmful behaviors to stepping in on the most dangerous behaviors.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- 1. Read through the Module 4 Stepping In Tool before meeting with the student leaders to plan the associated group activity.**
- 2. Confirm with the student leader that he or she has added this activity to the calendar and agenda of a membership meeting, preferably one that occurs in the first month of beginning the FailSafe program.1.**
- 3. Help the student leaders to make sense of the materials.** Make sure the leader understands the point of the strategy, and thinks through before the group discussion which members may have the greatest difficulty with stepping in. It may be worth spending time with known or presumed objectors before the group meeting.
- 4. Make sure that the leaders show the Stepping In video to the group.** It will help to clarify the concept, though it will not make everyone feel comfortable with it right away.
- 5. It is very important that the student leaders be willing to have others step in on them; no one is above the strategy.**
- 6. An essential element of the strategy is helping members to feel comfortable with it.** You may want to suggest having the group role play some stepping in scenarios, demonstrating the different ways someone can step in without drawing attention, acting judgmental, or embarrassing the other person.
- 7. The most important element is true agreement among members about stepping in.** This may not have to happen right away, and it may happen in stages. For example, a member may agree to be stepped in on if he or she is drinking and about to get into a fight, but not if they're drinking and being loud. Another member may agree to have someone step in when they are walking off with someone for sex but the other person is clearly too drunk to consent, but not if they're just drunk-enly flirting or dirty dancing. Let the students decide what they agree to; this cannot be forced.