

Impact of Suicide

The Indian Health Service (IHS) Division of Behavioral Health

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Objectives

- Gain knowledge on types of lethal behavior.
- Able to assign lethality levels to behavior.
- Able to assign risk levels to suicidal behavior.

The Clinician's Task

- Is not to predict suicide, but rather to recognize when a patient has entered into a heightened state of risk (risk assessment) and to respond appropriately. At its best, risk assessment both estimates the risk of suicidal behavior and explains it when used in a consistent fashion for all patients, providing a template for clinical management of any crisis, as well as short- and long-term treatment targets. (Bryan & Rudd, 2006).

Components of a Suicide Risk Assessment

- Look for Warning Signs
- Identify Risk Factors
- Identify Protective Factors
- Conduct Suicide Inquiry
- **Determine Risk Level/Intervention**
- Document

Lethality

- Types of methods
 - Firearm
 - Suffocation
 - Asphyxiation
 - Poisoning/overdose
 - Cutting/pierce
- Individual concepts of lethality
- Lethality vs. risk

Risk Categories

- Continuum of suicide
- Chronic vs. acute
- Categories
 - Baseline
 - Acute
 - Chronic
 - Chronic with acute exacerbation

Risk Levels

Risk Level	Risk/Protective Factor	Suicidality	Interventions
High	Psychiatric diagnosis with severe symptoms, or acute precipitating event; protective factors not relevant	Potentially lethal suicide attempt or persistent ideation with strong intent or suicide preparation, rehearsal	Admission generally indicated unless a significant change reduces risk. Suicide precautions.
Moderate	Multiple risk factors, few protective factors	Suicidal ideation with plan, but no intent or behavior	Admission may be necessary depending on risk factors. Safety plan, and crisis numbers
Low	Modifiable risk factors, strong protective factors	Thoughts of death or no plan intent or behavior	Outpatient referral, symptom reduction. Give crisis numbers

Clinical Decision-Making

- Admission vs. outpatient treatment
- Safety planning
- Crisis number
- Family education

Citations

- American Psychiatric Association. (2003). *American Psychiatric Association Practice Guideline for the assessment and treatment of suicidal behaviors*. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.
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