

# The Indian Health Service (IHS) Division of Behavioral Health

## Understanding Suicide

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# Objectives

- Importance of common definitions.
- Gain knowledge on warning signs versus risk factors.
- Gain knowledge on utilizing protective factors.
- Effectively identify warning signs, risk factors and protective factors.

# Definitions

- What is “Suicide?”
  - Issues in nomenclature
    - Commonly used terms
- Suicide related nomenclature
  - Suicide Attempt
  - Suicide
- Suicide as self-directed violence.
- Suicide thoughts versus behavior.

# Suicide

- Suicide and suicide attempts are a frequently encountered clinical crisis, and the assessment, management, and treatment of suicidal patients is one of the most stressful tasks for clinicians (Jobes, 1995).

# Warning Signs

- Threatening to hurt or kill self
- Looking for ways to kill self
- Seeking access to pills, weapons, or other means
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide

# Biopsychological Risk Factors

- Mental Disorders, particularly mood disorders, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, and certain personality disorders
- Alcohol and other substance use disorders
- Hopelessness and helplessness
- Impulsive and/or aggressive tendencies
- History of trauma or abuse
- Major/terminal physical illness and/or disease
- Previous suicide attempt
- Family history of suicide

# Environmental Risk Factors

- Job or financial loss
- Relational or social loss
- Easy access to lethal means
- Local clusters of suicide that have a contagious influence

# Socialcultural Risk Factors

- Lack of social support and sense of isolation
- Stigma associated with help-seeking behavior
- Barriers to accessing health care, especially mental health and substance abuse treatment
- Certain cultural and religious beliefs (i.e. the belief that suicide is a noble resolution of a personal dilemma)
- Exposure to, including through the media, and influence of others who have died by suicide

# Protective Factors

- Positive social support
- Spirituality
- Sense of responsibility to family
- Children in the home, pregnancy
- Life satisfaction
- Reality testing ability
- Positive coping skills
- Positive problem-solving skills
- Positive therapeutic relationship

# Protective Factors

- Effective clinical care for mental, physical and substance use disorders
- Easy access to a variety of clinical interventions
- Restricted access to highly lethal means of suicide
- Strong connections to family and community support
- Support through ongoing medical and mental health care relationships
- Skills in problem solving, conflict resolution and handling problems in a non-violent way
- Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support self-preservation

# Citations

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# Selected Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  - Uniform Definitions for Self-Directed Violence
  - [http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/selfdirected\\_violence.html](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/selfdirected_violence.html)

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