

Ten Commonalities of Suicide

In his book *The Suicidal Mind*, Edwin Shneidman (a co-founder of the American Association of Suicidology, www.suicidology.org) outlines what he calls "the 10 psychological commonalities of suicide":

1. The common **purpose** of suicide is to **seek a solution**: A suicidal person is seeking a solution to a problem that is "generating intense suffering" within him or her.
2. The common **goal** of suicide is **cessation of consciousness**: The anguished mind of a suicidal person interprets the end of consciousness as the only way to end the suffering.
3. The common **stimulus** of suicide is **psychological pain**: Shneidman calls it "psychache," by which he means "intolerable emotion, unbearable pain, unacceptable anguish."
4. The common **stressor** in suicide is **frustrated psychological needs**: A suicidal person feels pushed toward self-destruction by psychological needs that are not being met (for example, the need for achievement, for nurturance or for understanding).
5. The common **emotion** in suicide is **hopelessness-helplessness**: A suicidal person feels despondent, utterly unsalvageable.
6. The common **cognitive state** of suicide is **ambivalence**: Suicidal people, Shneidman says, "wish to die and they simultaneously wish to be rescued."
7. The common **perceptual state** in suicide is **constriction**: The mind of a suicidal person is constricted in its ability to perceive options, and, in fact, mistakenly sees only two choices—either continue suffering or die.
8. The common **action** in suicide is **escape**: Shneidman calls it "the ultimate egression (another word for escape) besides which running away from home, quitting a job, deserting an army, or leaving a spouse ... pale in comparison."
9. The common **interpersonal act** in suicide is **communication of intention**: "Many individuals intent on committing suicide ... emit clues of intention, signals of distress, whimpers of helplessness, or pleas for intervention."
10. The common **pattern** in suicide is **consistent with life-long styles of coping**: A person's past tendency for black-and-white thinking, escapism, control, capitulation and the like could serve as a clue to how he or she might deal with a present crisis.