



ASSESSING AND RESPONDING TO SUICIDAL IDEATION

Suicidal ideation is often triggered by a negative life event, like the break-up of a relationship, job loss, or a traumatic experience. Stressors like a disaster, violence, homelessness, or poverty may make people who are already susceptible to depression all the more vulnerable. It is important to assess for suicidal ideation.

What can you do?

Provide assurance that such feelings are not uncommon when individuals feel overwhelmed. Provide the at-risk person with some hope or assurance that things are gradually going to get better each day. If a person acknowledges suicidal ideation and a plan, it will be important to reassure them that you want to work with them to help keep them safe. If they have a plan that involves a weapon, ask them if there is someone who they can give the weapon to until they feel safe.

Resources

If you think someone you know may be feeling suicidal, you should directly ask them. You will NOT be putting the idea in their head. If anyone you know has a plan to hurt themselves and the means to do it, and cannot make a plan with you to stay safe, try to get them to a counselor or call 911 immediately. For more information contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or visit <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>. Veterans and family members can press "1" to reach the VA Veteran Crisis Line to speak with a crisis intervention responder who is also a Veteran.

It is important to assess:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Suicidal (or homicidal) ideation
<input type="checkbox"/>	The lethality of any plan for how they would harm themselves or others
<input type="checkbox"/>	Any history of previous attempts
<input type="checkbox"/>	Medical/psychiatric co-occurring conditions

Assessment of dangerousness can include questions such as:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you had any concerns about possibly harming yourself because life doesn't seem worth living right now?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you ever thought about acting on these feelings?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are there times when you are afraid that you will act on these feelings?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you ever tried to act on feelings like this in the past?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you have a plan for how you would harm yourself or someone?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you have access to weapons?

If the person will create a plan to stay safe:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify 2 or 3 individuals that the person has daily contact with who can help provide them support and help keep them safe.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have the client verbally agree that they will contact this person if he or she has suicidal thoughts and feels in danger of acting on them. Advise them to try to contact you or another provider if possible.
<input type="checkbox"/>	If mental health services are available, please try to refer the patient immediately.

If the person will not create a plan to stay safe:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Under normal circumstances, if a client has a plan AND a means to carry out that plan AND they will not contract for safety they are usually seen at an emergency room and may be hospitalized. This can be accomplished by having someone take the person to an emergency room or by calling 911.
<input type="checkbox"/>	If no medical help is available you may want to have the person remain with you wherever you have been evaluating them.
<input type="checkbox"/>	If no emergency room is available and you do not have the ability to keep the person safe with you, you may have to release the person to a friend or family member who will need to watch them.