

Suicide Assessment Five-step Evaluation and Triage

for all ages

SAFE-T

1	2	3	4	5
IDENTIFY RISK FACTORS Note those that can be modified to reduce risk	IDENTIFY PROTECTIVE FACTORS Note those that can be enhanced	CONDUCT SUICIDE INQUIRY Suicidal thoughts, plans, behavior and intent	DETERMINE RISK LEVEL/INTERVENTION Determine risk. Choose appropriate intervention to address and reduce risk	DOCUMENT Assessment of risk, rationale, intervention, and follow-up

Suicide assessments should be conducted at first contact, with any subsequent suicidal behavior, increased ideation, or pertinent clinical change; for inpatients, prior to increasing privileges and at discharge

1. RISK FACTORS

- ✓ **Suicidal behavior:** history of prior suicide attempts, aborted suicide attempts or self-injurious behavior
- ✓ **Current/past psychiatric disorders:** especially mood disorders, psychotic disorders, alcohol/substance abuse, ADHD, TBI, PTSD, Cluster B personality disorders, conduct disorders (antisocial behavior, aggression, impulsivity). *Co-morbidity and recent onset of illness increase risk*
- ✓ **Key symptoms:** anhedonia, impulsivity, hopelessness, anxiety/panic, insomnia, command hallucinations
- ✓ **Family history:** of suicide, attempts or Axis 1 psychiatric disorders requiring hospitalization
- ✓ **Precipitants/Stressors/Interpersonal:** triggering events leading to humiliation, shame or despair (e.g., loss of relationship, financial or health status—real or anticipated). Ongoing medical illness (esp. CNS disorders, pain). Intoxication. Family turmoil/chaos. History of physical or sexual abuse. Social isolation.
- ✓ **Change in Treatment:** discharge from psychiatric hospital, provider or treatment change
- ✓ **Access to firearms**

2. PROTECTIVE FACTORS *Protective factors, even if present, may not counteract significant acute risk*

- ✓ **Internal:** ability to cope with stress, religious beliefs, frustration tolerance
- ✓ **External:** responsibility to children or beloved pets, positive therapeutic relationships, social supports

3. SUICIDE INQUIRY *Specific questioning about thoughts, plans, behaviors, intent*

- ✓ **Ideation:** frequency, intensity, duration--in last 48 hours, past month and worst ever
- ✓ **Plan:** timing, location, lethality, availability, preparatory acts
- ✓ **Behaviors:** past attempts, aborted attempts, rehearsals (tying noose, loading gun), versus non-suicidal, self-injurious actions
- ✓ **Intent:** extent to which the patient (1) expects to carry out the plan and (2) believes the plan/act to be lethal vs. self-injurious; explore ambivalence: reasons to die vs. reasons to live

* **For Youths:** ask parent/guardian about evidence of suicidal thoughts, plans, or behaviors, and changes in mood, behaviors or disposition.

* **Homicide Inquiry:** when indicated, esp. in character disordered or paranoid males dealing with loss or humiliation. Inquire in four areas listed above.

4. RISK LEVEL/INTERVENTION

- ✓ **Assessment** of risk level is based on clinical judgment, after completing steps 1-3
- ✓ **Reassess** as patient or environmental circumstances change

RISK LEVEL	RISK / PROTECTIVE FACTORS	SUICIDALITY	POSSIBLE INTERVENTIONS
High	Psychiatric disorders with severe symptoms, or acute precipitating event; protective factors not relevant	Potentially lethal suicide attempt or persistent ideation with strong intent or suicide 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. Develop crisis plan. Give emergency/crisis numbers*
Low	Modifiable risk factors, strong protective factors	Thoughts of death, no plan, intent or behavior	Outpatient referral, symptom reduction. Give emergency/crisis numbers*

(This chart is intended to represent a range of risk levels and interventions, not actual determinations)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
*1.800.273.TALK

5. DOCUMENT

- ✓ **Document:** Risk level and rationale; treatment plan to address/reduce current risk (e.g., setting, medication, psychotherapy, E.C.T., contact with significant others, consultation); firearm instructions, if relevant. For youths: treatment plan should include roles for parent/guardian

RESOURCES

- Download this card and additional resources at www.sprc.org or at www.stopasuicide.org
- Resource for implementing The Joint Commission 2007 Patient Safety Goals on Suicide www.sprc.org/library/jcsafetygoals.pdf
- SAFE-T drew upon the American Psychiatric Association Practice Guidelines for the Assessment and Treatment of Patients with Suicidal Behaviors www.psychiatryonline.com/pracGuide/pracGuideTopic_14.aspx
- Practice Parameter for the Assessment and Treatment of Children and Adolescents with Suicidal Behavior. Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2001, 40 (7 Supplement): 24s-51s

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Originally conceived by Douglas Jacobs, MD, and developed as a collaboration between Screening for Mental Health, Inc. and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center.
- This material is based upon work supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) under Grant No. 1U79SM57392. Any opinions/findings/conclusions/recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of SAMHSA

DEVELOPED BY DOUGLAS JACOBS, MD



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