

Working with the Suicidal Patient

A Guide for Health Professionals

Any patient and/or client threatening suicide, self-injury or reporting an attempt, must be considered high risk for completing the act.

Any patient threatening suicide should not be left alone for any reason.

Warning Signs – Red Flags

Actions

- Withdrawal (family, friends, school, work)
- Loss of interest in life in general
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Extreme behavioral changes
- Impulsivity
- Self-mutilation

Feelings

- Desperate
- Worthless
- Sad
- Hopeless
- Helpless

Physical

- Lack of interest in appearance
- Change/loss in sex interest
- Disturbed sleep
- Change/loss of appetite/weight
- Physical health problems

Thoughts

- 'I just can't keep my thoughts straight'
- 'I just can't take it anymore'
- 'I wish I were dead'
- 'No one can do anything to help me'

Stressful Events

- With FEELINGS OF LOSS (almost anything depending on how the person feels about it)



YOU have to ask the question – **Ask the question directly**

‘Are you having thoughts of suicide?’ ‘Are you thinking of killing yourself?’
If answer is **YES**, assess risk by asking the following questions:

- A) Do you have pain (*emotional and/or physical*) that at times seems unbearable?
- B) On a scale of one to 10, how would you rate your pain?
- C) Do you have a plan? How do you intend to do it? (*Is there means available, and has time been decided?*)
Note: The more lethal the means, the more available the means, and the more definite the time frame, the greater the risk.
- D) Have you tried to kill yourself before? When? How many times? What did you do?
- E) Do you know anyone else who has attempted suicide or have taken their life?
- F) Do you have family and friends you can go to for help? Would you go to them if you needed to?
- G) Has anyone close to you suggested that you need help?
- H) Have you experienced challenges with your mental health and/or addictions?
- I) Have you ever been prescribed medication for your moods or your nerves?
- J) Have you ever used alcohol and/or drugs to make you feel better?

WHAT to do

The following is a list of contacts for supports:

- Child and Youth Crisis Service (*for clients under the age of 18*) – 1-866-327-3224
- CAST – Crisis Assessment and Support Team (*for age 16 and over*) – Crisis line – 1-866-487-2278
- Emergency Psychiatric Team – St. Joseph’s Hospital Hamilton – after 4:30 p.m. 905-522-4941
- Children’s Hospital of Western Ontario – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Care 519-667-6640
- London Mental Health Crisis Service – 519-433-2023
- COAST Hamilton Crisis line – 905-972-8338
- Brantford General Hospital – for 16 years and older 519-752-CARE
- Ontario Provincial Police – 1-888-310-1122
- St Leonard’s Mobile Crisis, Brantford – 519-759-7188 (*for local calls*) 1-866-811-7188