

## RESOURCES

- Download this card and additional resources at <http://www.sprc.org>
- Resource for implementing The Joint Commission 2007 Patient Safety Goals on Suicide <http://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 [http://www.psychiatryonline.com/pracGuide/pracGuideTopic\\_14.aspx](http://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

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**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**  
**1-800-273-TALK (8255)**



<http://www.sprc.org>



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# SAFE-T

## Suicide Assessment Five-step Evaluation and Triage

**1**

### IDENTIFY RISK FACTORS

Note those that can be modified to reduce risk

**2**

### IDENTIFY PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Note those that can be enhanced

**3**

### CONDUCT SUICIDE INQUIRY

Suicidal thoughts, plans, behavior, and intent

**4**

### DETERMINE RISK LEVEL/INTERVENTION

Determine risk. Choose appropriate intervention to address and reduce risk

**5**

### DOCUMENT

Assessment of risk, rationale, intervention, and follow-up



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

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, global insomnia, command hallucinations
- ✓ **Family history:** of suicide, attempts, or Axis I 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) vs. 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 FACTOR	SUICIDALITY	POSSIBLE INTERVENTIONS
<b>High</b>	Psychiatric diagnoses 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
<b>Moderate</b>	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
<b>Low</b>	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.)

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