

SUICIDE RISK ASSESSMENT

Recognizing Risk, Building Protection, Responding with Care

01

What Is Suicide Risk?

Suicide risk means a person may be having thoughts about ending their life or may be at risk of acting on those thoughts. Following a traumatic event, those thoughts can become more likely if someone is struggling with hopelessness, intense emotional pain, or major life changes. Recognizing these warning signs early gives counselors and support systems an opportunity to help before the situation becomes more serious.

02

Suicide Risk Factors

- Previous suicide attempt
- Depression or other mental health disorders
- Substance misuse
- Trauma or abuse
- Recent loss or major life stress
- Social isolation
- Access to firearms or medications
- Hopelessness or feeling like a burden

Trauma Note: Survivors of a loved one's suicide may experience grief, guilt, shame, anger, and thoughts that they could have prevented the death (Briere & Scott, 2015, p. 20).

03

Protective Factors

- Strong family and social support
- Trusted adults and healthy relationships
- Access to counseling
- Healthy coping skills
- Problem-solving abilities
- Religious or spiritual beliefs
- Hope for the future
- Feeling connected to school, work, or community
- Reduced access to lethal means

04

How to Assess Risk

Create a safe, private space where the person feels comfortable talking. Use clear, caring questions and listen without judgment.

- Consider asking:
 - Have you been having thoughts about suicide?
 - Have you thought about how you might do it?
 - Do you have access to the things you would use?
 - Have you ever tried to end your life before?
 - Who or what helps you get through difficult times?

05

Additional Assessment Areas

According to Briere & Scott (2015), counselors should also assess:

- Physical safety
- Current suicidal thoughts
- Access to lethal means
- Depression or substance use
- Trauma symptoms
- Family and social supports
- Whether the trauma is ongoing
- Ability to function in daily life

06

Counselor Response

- Stay calm and listen without judgment.
- Take all suicidal thoughts seriously.
- Develop a safety plan.
- Remove access to lethal means when possible.
- Connect the person with emergency or mental health services.
- Call or text 988 if immediate support is needed.

Remember: Someone who appears calm after a traumatic event may still be experiencing significant emotional distress. Assessment should be compassionate, thorough, and focused on safety (Briere & Scott, 2015, pp. 241-242).

References

Briere, J. N., & Scott, C. (2015). Principles of trauma therapy: A guide to symptoms, evaluation, and treatment (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
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