

## PROCEDURE FOR SUICIDE THREATS

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### I. When a disclosure of suicidal intent is brought forward to the guidance counsellor:

1. the guidance counsellor gathers supporting information around the disclosure from appropriate resources i.e. friends, teachers, parent;
2. the guidance counsellor will meet with the potentially suicidal student. During the interview the discussion will be governed by the following principals:
  - **Engage** the person in talk that focuses on feelings about known or suspected disruptive life events and reactions to these events.  
**Ask:** How are you feeling about the things that have happened to you?
  - **Identify** if the person is thinking about suicide.  
**Ask:** Are you thinking about suicide? Are you planning to kill yourself?
  - **Inquire** about the reasons for and against suicide at this point in time.  
**Ask:** Part of you feels suicide is the only answer, but another part wants to find another solution. Do I understand correctly?
  - **Estimate** the level of risk for suicide and check to see if the person agrees with your estimation. (See Estimation of Risk)  
**Ask:** I see the risk of harming yourself as (high, medium, low) right now. Does that fit with what you are feeling?
  - **Contract** to reduce the immediate risk by getting the person's agreement with a plan of action which includes a no self-harm contract.  
**Ask:** Are we agreed then that you will do a, b, and c, and I will do x and y to prevent the immediate risk of harming yourself?
  - **Implement** appropriate response based on estimation of risk, (see Suicide Risk Response).

### II. Estimation of Risk

If the person has thoughts of suicide, gather the following information to determine the level of risk. The factors that are used to estimate suicide risk.

#### 1. Current Suicide Plan

A suicide plan includes choice of a method, preparation to carry out the plan, and a time framework for completing the act. When asked directly, most people who are thinking about suicide will openly and honestly share the details of their plans. The more detailed the plan, the greater is the risk that the plan may be carried out. If the person will not tell you the details of his plan, assume that he has planned in great detail.

When you want to know about current plans for suicide, **ask**:

- i. how the person plans to do it;
- ii. how prepared the person is;
- iii. how soon it may happen.

**Ask:** Have you thought about how and when you would do it? What have you done about carrying out your plan?

## 2. Prior Suicidal Behavior

People who have previously tried to kill themselves are more at risk of suicide than someone who has never tried before. A prior attempt may indicate the individual's acceptance of suicide as an alternative to life.

When you want to know about prior suicidal behaviors, **ask** directly:

- i. what happened;
- ii. how it (or they) happened;
- iii. when it (or they) happened;
- iv. why he/she is still alive?

**Ask:** Have you ever tried to harm yourself before? How did you do it? What happened?

People may also be affected by others close to them who have tried to kill themselves or have killed themselves.

**Ask:** Do you know others who have tried to kill themselves?

## 3. Resources

Personal support systems can sustain an individual in times of great personal troubles. Resources might include a satisfactory job; adequate finances; a place to live; caring family or friends; access to psychological or medical help; or memberships in churches, clubs, or other social behavior. The absence or perceived absence of supportive resources can greatly increase the risk of suicide. The person most at risk is someone who is feeling alone and unconnected to others. In order to determine whether the absence of resources is increasing the risk of suicide, ask directly if the person is feeling alone. Find out if there are resources (including yourself) that would be acceptable if connections could be made with them.

**Ask:** Are you feeling alone with these thoughts of suicide? Are you getting support from anyone? Is there anyone you might turn to for help?

\*\*\* Whenever there is a current suicide plan, the risk is immediately high. If there is no current suicide plan, their risk is based on the relevancy of "prior suicide behavior" and "resources". (i.e. low-moderate risk)

## SUICIDE RISK RESPONSE

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### **LOW RISK**

If the student is determined to be at low risk of suicide:

- i. establish a supportive resource connection i.e., guidance counsellor, mental health worker, clergy
- ii. counsellor will strongly encourage notification of parents; subject to student agreement

### **MODERATE RISK**

- i. establish a supportive resource connection, i.e. - professional contract
- ii. if appropriate, the student will be accompanied to hospital for assessment.
- iii. parents will be notified in accordance with the laws governing safety disclosures

### **HIGH RISK**

- i. student will not be left alone
- ii. student will be accompanied to hospital for assessment and adolescent mental health worker will be contacted
- iii. parents will be notified in accordance with the laws governing safety disclosures

In all instances, the student's safety and best interests will be taken into account. If student or parent refuses to comply with the request for hospital assessment, RCMP will need to be contacted.