

TIP SHEET 3.1

Suicide risk assessment¹

Consider the following points when raising the issue of suicide with a client:

- talk to the client alone—without any family or friends present
- allow sufficient time
- discuss limits of confidentiality
- introduce suicide in an open, yet general way
- link the subject of suicide to presenting concerns and problems
- be nonjudgmental and empathic.

When considering a client's suicide risk, the following factors should be explored:

- Current thoughts of suicide and what suicide means to the client.
- Suicide plan and method: the more detailed and feasible the plan, the greater the risk; therefore, assess the potential deadliness of the plan.
- Method availability: if the means for carrying out the plan are readily available, the risk increases.
- Possibility of rescue: when someone plans to attempt suicide in an isolated location, with low chance of discovery, the risk for completed suicide increases.
- The meaning of death to the client.
- Previous experience of suicide: for example, whether the client has known people who have committed suicide.
- History of suicidal ideation, suicide threats, attempts, and outcomes.
- Links between suicidal ideation or attempts and alcohol and other drug use.
- Social supports: good social support is a protective factor against suicide.
- Level of depression: depression is a suicide risk. A depression measure, such as the depression anxiety stress scale (DASS) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), is useful here.
- Barriers to suicide: aspects of the client's life that act as deterrents to suicide, things that make them want to live.
- Prescription of antidepressant medication - there is some evidence to suggest that some antidepressants are associated with an

¹ A suicide risk assessment guide is found in Mills et al. (2009) Appendix H Page 157

increase in suicidal behaviour and self-harm, especially in young people.

Explore each of these factors in detail, and encourage clients to talk about the 'part of them that wants to die', and the part that doesn't.

On the basis of the suicide assessment, determine the suicide risk of your client.