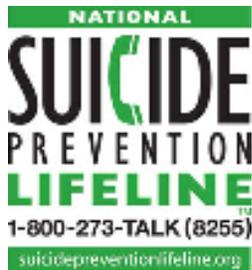




CORRECTIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION TOOL KIT



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PURPOSE:

Suicide is a leading cause of death in jails and prisons. This is a concise suicide prevention resource for corrections personnel who may encounter potentially suicidal inmates or detainees. It presents information for identifying possible risk and intervening to safely help. It should complement suicide prevention training.

No one is immune from suicide risk; the information given here applies to you and those you work with as well as those in your custody.

1. BASIC CONCEPTS:

- A suicide attempt may occur when an individual has both intent to die and the capability for potentially lethal self-harm.
- A desire to die may result from an individual's *belief* that he is a burden to those he cares about and/or is disconnected from those important to him.
- A capability for lethal self-harm may result from past attempts, abuse, trauma, acts of violence, pain, disability, or mentally rehearsing a suicide plan.

2. CHAIN OF LIFE:

- Look for (i) early signs of suicide risk, (ii) warning signs of suicide, and (iii) danger signs
- Screen for suicide intent or desire to die
- If high risk arrange immediate help and seek involuntary psychiatric care
- If low risk (no imminent danger), refer to prison mental health unit/behavioral health provider

3. EARLY SIGNS OF SUICIDE RISK:

- Withdrawing/socially isolating
- Dropping family/others from phone/visitor list
- Cutting, other types of self-injury
- Manifesting anxiety/agitation/sleep problems
- Mood changes, anger, growing pessimism
- Persistent and growing self-criticism, shame
- Cognitive deficit; rigid, black/white thinking

4. WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE:

- Obsessing over sentencing change, divorce
- Marked personality/mood change
- Withdrawing from family/friends
- Indifference to activities/interests
- Being present-oriented/vague on future
- Talking/writing/drawing about death
- Giving away/disregard for possessions/food, etc.

5. DANGER SIGNS OF SUICIDE:

These are earliest detectable indicators of very high suicide risk in near-term (minutes, hours, days):

- Threats to hurt or kill self
- Looking for/acquiring lethal means
- Voicing a specific suicide plan (when/how)

Any of these signs indicate that a inmate may need a psychiatric evaluation.

6. SUICIDE RISK FACTORS:

- U** Unconnected; weak social supports; loss
- N** Negative/pessimistic view of self/future
- S** Shame due to humiliation/victimization/offense
- A** Attempt/abuse history
- F** Family history of suicide; mental illness
- E** Emptiness/depressed/sad/hopeless

7. SCREENING FOR SUICIDE INTENT:

- Do you feel that you are not part of anything?
- Do you feel that people close to you would be better off without you?
- Have you thought of suicide?
- Have you had thoughts about suicide in the last two months?
- Are you thinking about it right now?

8. SCREENING FOR CAPABILITY:

- Have you ever hurt yourself without intent to die?
- Have you experienced abuse, violence, pain, serious injury, or trauma? Are you a Veteran?
- Do you have a specific plan for taking your life?
- Have you mentally practiced a suicide plan?
- Have you tried out a suicide plan in any way?

One or more “YES” answers to questions about both INTENT and CAPABILITY may indicate HIGH suicide risk

9. HOW TO HELP:

- Believe threats; heed hints from other inmates
- Assess situation for safety of all parties
- Listen and say that you can help; be direct
- Assure inmate knows that he/she is not alone
- Make sure inmate knows what's going on
- Do not leave him alone
- Remove anything that can be used for hanging

REFERENCES:

Hayes, L. (1995) *Prison Suicide: An Overview and Guide to Prevention*
Washington, DC: USDOJ National Institute of Corrections

Hayes, L. (2010) *National Study of Jail Suicide: 20 Years Later* Washington,
DC: USDOJ National Institute of Corrections

Joiner, T. (2005) *Why People Die by Suicide* Cambridge, MA: Harvard
University Press.

Rudd, M. et al. (2006) “Warning signs for suicide: Theory, research, and
clinical applications” *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior* 36(3) 255-262

MORE INFORMATION:

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention – www.afsp.org

American Association of Suicidology – www.suicidology.org

National Center on Institutions and Alternatives – www.ncianet.org

Suicide Prevention Resource Center – www.sprc.org