

A clinical approach to clients with developmental disabilities and suicidal behaviours

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What are suicidal behaviors?

- Self injurious behaviours
 - Injuries that a person inflicts on one's self in order to cause injury
- Suicidal thoughts
 - Thoughts of wanting to kill one's self
- Suicide attempt
 - An action that one undertakes to try and end one's own life

What are suicidal behaviors?

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 - An action that one undertakes to try and end one's life
- Distinction in made by INTENT not lethality
- Sometimes, lethality is underestimated
- Impulsivity can lead to lethality as well

Are suicidal behaviours different in developmental disabilities

- They do exist, but are often missed
- Hypothesis that low adaptive functioning can act as a “buffer” as it limits the ability to conceptualize and carry out suicide plan
- But it can also act as a risk factor
 - Decreased understanding of lethality of act
 - Decreased understanding of meaning of death
 - ? Decreased screening

It's okay to ask!

- People with Developmental Disabilities are at risk for thinking about, planning, and carrying through suicide attempts
- It is important to screen for suicidal behaviours in high risk populations
- Can act as a therapeutic process
 - Understand and process thoughts
 - Understand and process feelings

Risk Factors For Suicidal Behaviours

- Prior history of suicidal behaviours
- Diagnosis of a mental health issue
- Behavioural disturbances
- Previous abuse
- Lack of support
- Recent stressors/loss
- Poor stress tolerance
- ? Higher IQ

Signs and symptoms that someone might feel suicidal

- Sadness
- Poor concentration
- Impulsivity
- Withdrawn
- Hyperactivity/restlessness
- Poor sleep
- Aggression
- Focus on medical issues
- Change in eating patterns

Questions to assess suicidality

- Does the person currently have suicidal thoughts?
- Has there been past suicidal behaviour?
- Is there a plan to act on these thoughts?
- Does the person want to act upon these thoughts?
- Does the person have the means to act on these thoughts?

Assessing Suicidal Behaviors

- www.hcardd.ca
- Resources
- Videos
- For Healthcare providers

Risk Assessment Tool for Adults with DD in Behavioural Crisis

Utilize risk assessments applicable to the general population. Take into account how the patient's developmental disabilities (DD) affect both risks and protective factors. Note whether recent changes have occurred in any risk or protective factors.

RISK AREA	Flag all areas where there are risk issues – also consider factors which may protect from harm	
	PATIENT WITH DD – RISK FACTORS	CAREGIVERS / ENVIRONMENT <small>(Includes possible protective factors)</small>
SUICIDE	Is the patient verbalizing suicidal thoughts or intent? Is there evidence of suicidal behaviours, poor judgment or mental illness? Is there a history of suicidal or para-suicidal behaviour? Is the patient not able to identify reasons to keep on living?	Is a means available for the person to commit suicide? Are caregivers unable to supervise and protect the person?
SELF HARM	Is the patient engaging in, or is there evidence of, self harm? Is the patient verbalizing intent to self harm? Does the patient have a history of self harm behaviour?	Are means available for the person to harm self? Are caregivers able to supervise and protect the person?
SELF NEGLECT	Is the patient unable to care for self? Is the patient unwilling to accept support from others? Is there evidence of neglect and behaviours that put the patient at risk?	Are others available and able to assist in the person's care?
VICTIMIZATION OR EXPLOITATION	Is the patient being victimized or exploited? Has the patient been victimized or exploited in the past? Is the patient unable to protect self? Does the patient lack insight into possible dangers of the situation? Has the patient failed to show evidence that he/she would ask for help? Has the patient been unable to get help or protection from others in the past?	Are caregivers able to supervise and protect the person?
RISK TO OTHERS	Is the patient verbalizing intent to harm others? Is the patient making physical gestures about hurting others? Has the patient caused physical harm to others? Does the patient have sufficient mobility and strength to potentially harm others? Does the patient's aggression/harmful behaviour tend to escalate quickly and/or unpredictably?	Are there vulnerable individuals in the setting who cannot protect themselves? Can caregivers recognize cues and intervene safely? Can the person be supervised safely in current setting without caregivers being at risk of harm while trying to prevent harm to others?
RISK TO ENVIRONMENT	Has the patient damaged or attempted to damage property in recent past? If yes, what was the nature and extent of damage? Does the patient have sufficient mobility and strength to be able to cause damage to his/her environment? Does the patient escalate rapidly and/or unpredictably?	Are there caregivers able to recognize the escalation, and intervene effectively? Do caregivers feel comfortable about being able to predict and prevent it?

Developed by: *Elsbeth Bradley, Psychiatrist, Surrey Place Centre* and *Yona Lunsky, Psychologist, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health*

Reference

Stein W. Modified Sainsbury tool: An initial risk assessment tool for primary care mental health and learning disability services. *J Psychiatr Ment Health Nurs* 2005 Oct;12(5):620-33.

What is Victor's suicide risk?

- Is Victor verbalizing suicidal thoughts or intent?
- Is there evidence of suicidal behaviours, poor judgment or mental illness?

What is Victor's suicide risk

- Is there a history of suicidal or para-suicidal behaviour?
- Is the patient not able to identify reasons to keep on living?

What's Victor's risk suicide risk?

- Are there means to commit suicide?
- Are caregivers unable to supervise and protect the person

What is the risk for suicide?

- Base your decision on
 - The response to the questions on “Risk Assessment Tool for Adults with DD in Behavioural Crisis”
 - Your comfort level with the client
 - Your comfort level with suicidal behaviour
- It is always ok to ask for help

What should I do if someone is having suicidal behaviours

- Follow crisis plan
- Crisis Centre
- Seek medical attention
- Form 2

Questions

www.hcardd.ca

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References

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