

Considerations When Interviewing Potentially Suicidal Patients

When interviewing a patient about suicidal thoughts, plans, and behaviors, the following should be considered:

1. The presence or absence of suicidal ideation
 - Feelings about living
 - Thoughts of death, self-harm or suicide
2. Prior thoughts or attempts of self-harm or suicide; lethality of past acts
3. The presence or absence of a suicidal plan
4. The degree of suicidality, including:
 - Presence of intent, plan or means; potential lethality
 - Potential for attempt to also harm others
5. Presence of alcohol or substance use
6. Presence of psychotic symptoms, command hallucinations, or severe anxiety
7. Family history of or recent exposure to suicide

Resources:

- Assessing and Treating Suicidal Behaviors, A Quick Reference Guide. American Psychiatric Association, 2003. (See Table 2 for illustrative interview questions.) www.psych.org/psych_pract/treatg/quick_ref_guide/Suibehavs_QRG.pdf
- Practice Guideline for the Assessment and Treatment of Patients with Suicidal Behaviors. American Psychiatric Association, 2003. (See Table 3 for additional examples.) www.psych.org/psych_pract/treatg/pg/SuicidalBehavior_05-15-06.pdf