

Risk Assessment Levels

Lieberman, Poland, and Cassel (2008) propose a model interview that asks three direct questions, evaluates the presence of personal and ecological factors to suggest a risk level (low, moderate, and high) and appropriate interventions for each risk level.

Low Risk (ideation)

Sample student question: Have you ever thought about suicide...?

Other indicators: Current or recent thoughts; signs of depression; direct or indirect threats; sudden changes in personality, friends; behaviors; evidence of self-harm in written or artwork; dark Internet websites and chat rooms.

Actions: Reassure and supervise student; warn parent; assist in connecting with school and community resources; suicide-proof environments; mobilize a support system; develop a safety plan that identifies caring adults, appropriate communication, coping skills, and resource numbers.

Moderate Risk (current ideation and previous behaviors)

Sample student question: Have you ever tried to kill yourself before?

Other indicators: Previous attempts, recent mental health hospitalizations, recent trauma (losses, victimization), recent medications for mood disorders, alcohol and substance addiction, running into traffic or jumping from high places, repetitive self-injury.

Actions: See high risk

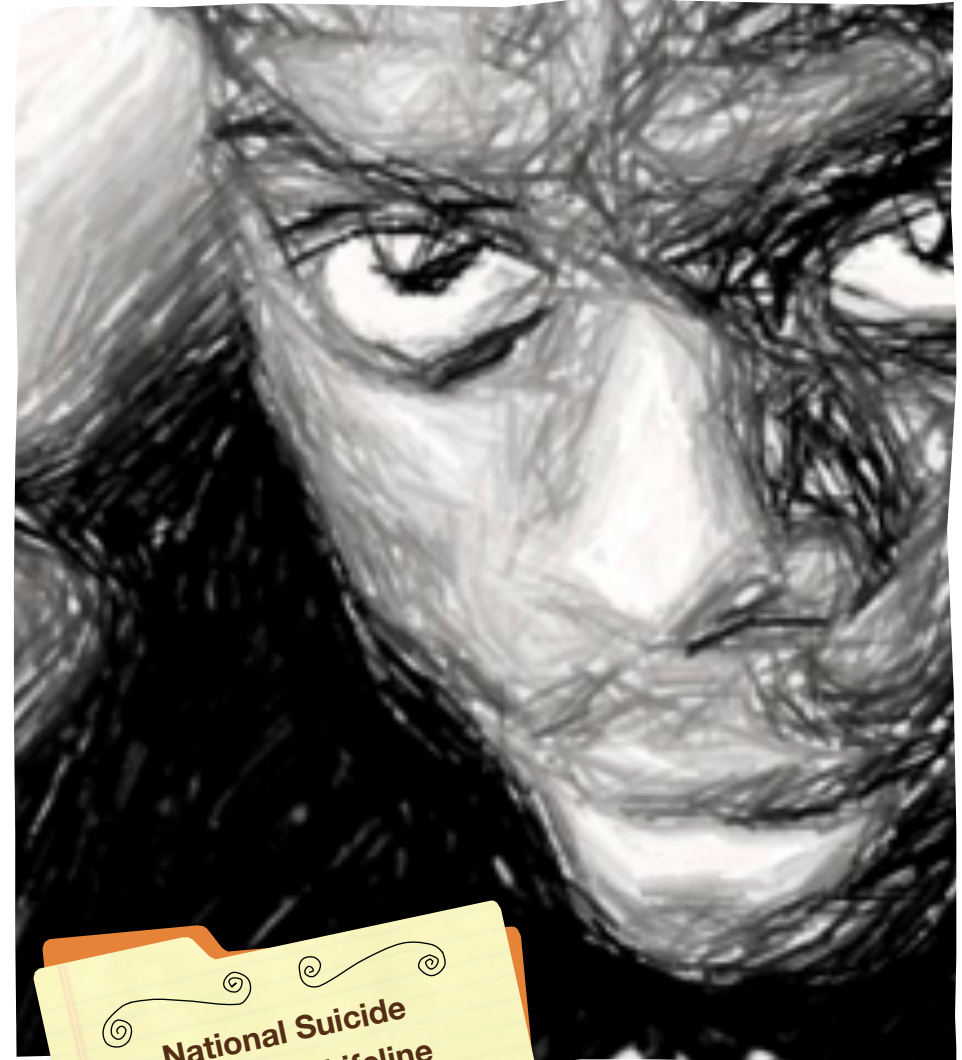
High Risk (current plan and access to method)

Sample student question: Do you have a plan to kill yourself today?

Other indicators: Current plan with method/access, finalizing arrangements, giving away prized possessions or written/e-mailed goodbye notes, refusal to agree to a safety plan.

Actions: (a) Supervise the student at all times (including rest rooms). (b) Notify and hand off student only to a parent or guardian who commits to seek an immediate mental health assessment, law enforcement, or a psychiatric mobile responder. (c) Prepare a reentry plan when the student returns to school that establishes a circle of care between home, school, and community mental health agents (p. 1466).

Suicide Threat Assessment



National Suicide
Prevention Lifeline
1.800.273.TALK (8255)

Suicide Threat Assessment

All School Personnel

1

Remain Calm (Don't make things worse)
PROTECT THE STUDENT (*Never* leave alone)
Get Help (Administrator, First Responder)
Refer to Suicide Threat Assessment Procedures

First Responder: School Psychologist/Social Worker/Nurse/Counselor

2

Assess Risk Factors
Review Student's Screening Data
Interview Informant
Contact & Interview Parent/Guardian

First Responder: School Psychologist/Social Worker/Nurse/Counselor

3

Conduct Student Interview

First Responder: School Psychologist/Social Worker/Nurse/Counselor

4

Document
Transfer Responsibility

It is essential that you, in a calm, matter of fact, and **direct** manner ask the student about past and current emotional states, thoughts, and intentions relative to suicide. This can be difficult, but is essential to making an appropriate assessment decision.

Begin the interview by building rapport with the student. A simple question like, "How are you today?" is often a good starting place. When the student appears comfortable, ask the student why you have asked to speak with him/her. If the student initiates a discussion about their emotional state or suicide, listen carefully. Respond non-judgmentally. Help the student to disclose what is happening in their life. If the student does not self-disclose, tell the student that someone was concerned about them because (describe the concern) _____.

Once you have established a relationship, and established the purpose of the interview, ask these questions:

Circle Responses

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Have you ever thought about suicide? | Yes | No |
| 2. Have you ever tried to kill yourself before? | Yes | No |
| 3. Do you have a plan to kill yourself today? | Yes | No |

Notify student that under the circumstances, his/her safety is your utmost concern and confidentiality is suspended.

Express your concern and share that you cannot allow anyone to hurt themselves. That, normally, you would keep anything they shared with you confidential, just between you and them. However, when they might be a danger to themselves, the law requires you to share that information with people who can ensure their safety. Ask the student about any concerns sharing this with others. Ask if the student would prefer that you contact a specific caregiver.

Louisiana Bulletin 741 §1123 (3). The screenings shall be done directly by elementary school counselors, pupil appraisal personnel, teachers, or any other professional employees of the LEA who have been appropriately trained, all of whom shall operate as advocates for the students identified as needing services or assistance. No screenings shall be done by persons who have not been trained to do such screenings.