Risk Factors for Suicide

Risk factors are stressful events, situations, or conditions that exist in a person’s life that may increase the likelihood of attempting or dying by suicide. There is no predictive list of a particular set of risk factors that spells imminent danger of suicide. It is important to understand that risk factors DO NOT cause suicide.

Risk factors most strongly associated with suicidal behavior include:

Individual
- Prior suicide attempt(s)
- Suicidal threats; homicidal ideation
- A suicide plan
- Fantasy concept/preoccupation with death
- Mental disorders, particularly depression, mood disorder, personality disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety or psychosis lasting over two weeks
- Alcohol or other substance use disorders
- Major physical illness
- Hopeless, helpless, very unhappy
- Impulsive and/or aggressive tendencies
- Low self-esteem
- Learning Disabilities
- Changes and worsening in self-injuring behavior
- Access to lethal means (firearms, poisons, prescription medications, alcohol or other substances)
- Stressors related to sexual orientation

Peer/Family
- History of interpersonal violence, conflict, trauma, or abuse
- Social isolation, alienation from family members, friends
- Moving/being new to a school
- Family dysfunction or changes (illnesses, parental/marital conflict, absentee parent)
- Stigma or barriers associated with help-seeking behavior
- Exposure to suicidal behavior of a family member or close friend

Community
- Multiple losses (job, financial, relationship, social)
- “Loss of face” or disrespect from peers
- Recent disappointment/rejection
- Lack of social support
- Barriers to health care and mental health care
- Portrayal of suicide in the media (movies, news, or music)
- Perceived pressure to succeed by self or others

Society
- Certain cultural/religious beliefs that accept suicide as a solution
- Loss of connection to spiritual/religious beliefs
- Cultural values and attitudes