

Revisiting Best Practices in High-Risk Behavior Assessments

Elena M. Doskey de Lobón, Ph.D., Licensed Psychologist
Director of Clinical Training
Dallas Children's Advocacy Center
September 25, 2025

© 2025 Elena M. Doskey de Lobón, Ph.D. • Dallas Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC) • This form may not be reproduced without permission of the author.



The Current State of Affairs

AS OF LATE



- Suicide was the second-leading cause of death for teens and young adults, 10-34, in 2023. (CDC, n.d.)
- Suicide rates increased 30% between 2002 and 2018, declined through 2020, then increased in 2022 to the peak levels seen in 2018. (Garnett & Curtin, 2024)
- Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in 2023 found that 20.4% of students in grades 9-12 had seriously considered attempting suicide and 9.5% had attempted suicide. (Verlenden et al., 2024)

© 2025 Elena M. Doskey de Lobón, Ph.D. • Dallas Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC) • This form may not be reproduced without permission of the author

AS OF LATE CONT.



- Females are more likely than males to seriously consider attempting suicide (27.1% to 14.1%) and attempt suicide (12.6% to 6.4%) though boys are four times more likely to die by suicide. (Verlenden et al., 2024; Teen suicide, (n.d.).)
- LGBQ+ youth are more likely than non-LGBQ+ youth to seriously consider attempting suicide (41.0% to 13.0%) and attempt suicide (19.&% to 6.0%). (Verlenden et al., 2024)
- From estimates in 2017, the suicide rate among youth age 15-19 was 73.6% higher than their urban counterparts. (Suicide in rural areas, 2025).

AS OF LATE CONT.



Race and ethnicity	Seriously considered attempting suicide	Attempted suicide
American Indian or Alaska Native	24.5%	11.5%
Asian	14.4%	8.0%
Black or African American	19.6%	10.3%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	16.1%	15.3%
White	22.1%	8.3%
Hispanic or Latino	18.2%	10.8%
Multiracial	21.6%	11.4%

Verlenden et al., 2024

© 2025 Elena M. Doskey de Lobón, Ph.D. • Dallas Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC) • This form may not be reproduced without permission of the author.

SOLID RESOURCES



- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

 https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics/
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
 https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/data.html
 https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db509.htm
- The Jed Foundation

https://iedfoundation.org/mental-health-and-suicide-statistics/

- Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC)

 https://sprc.org/
- Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YBRSS)

https://www.cdc.gov/vrbs/index.html



What About the Intersection of Sexual Abuse and High-Risk Behaviors?

© 2025 Elena M. Doskey de Lobón, Ph.D. • Dallas Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC) • This form may not be reproduced without permission of the author.

CSA AND HIGH-RISK BEHAVIORS



- Child maltreatment is a significant risk factor for non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) and suicide attempts. (Angelakis et al., 2020; Bahk et al., 2016; Cero & Sifers, 2013; Miller et al., 2013; Serafini et al., 2017; Wherry et al., 2013).
- Major depressive disorder and substance use disorder are more frequently comorbid with PTSD in the context of sexual abuse than those with PTSD without a history of sexual abuse. (Jain et al., 2023)
- Of note
 - Risk of suicide for those perpetrators who view CSAM is higher that the risk of suicide for perpetrators who engage in hands-on abuse (Kothari et al., 2021)



My Client Wants to Kill Themself. What Other Factors Are at Play?

© 2025 Elena M. Doskey de Lobón, Ph.D. • Dallas Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC) • This form may not be reproduced without permission of the author.

OTHER FACTORS FOR ADULTS



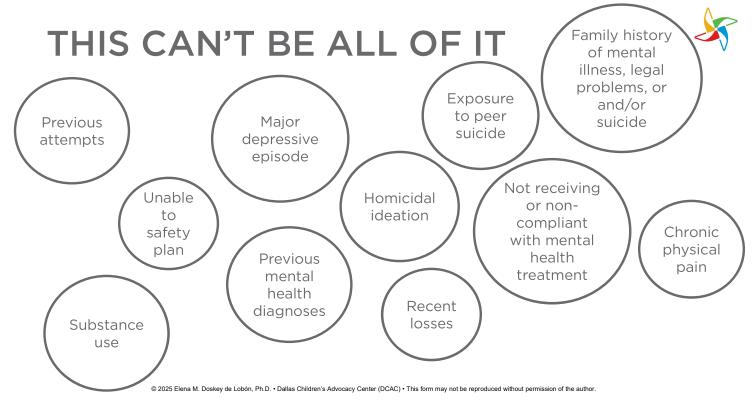
Based on three well-researched theories of suicidality, Sommers-Flanagan and Shaw (2017) establish 7 factors that should guide our evaluation of suicidality

- 1. Substantial psychological or emotional pain
- 2. Social disconnectedness, thwarted belongingness, and/or a sense of being burdensome
- 3. Hopelessness about the psychological, emotional, or interpersonal angst ever resolving
- 4. Problem-solving deficits
- 5. Agitation or arousal
- 6. Diminished fear of suicide or increased pain tolerance that push individuals toward...
- 7. ...an accessible lethal means

WHAT ABOUT WITH YOUTH?

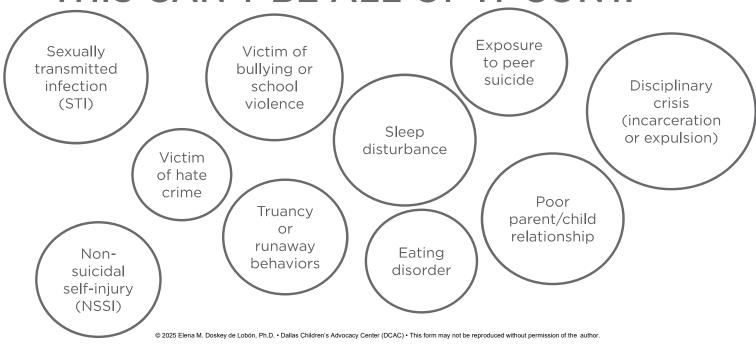


- 1. Substantial psychological or emotional pain (Swee et al. 2020; Wolff et al., 2017)
- 2. Social disconnectedness, thwarted belongingness, and/or a sense of being burdensome (Cero & Sifers, 2013; Sweet et al., 2020; Verlenden et al., 2024)
- 3. Hopelessness about the psychological, emotional, or interpersonal angst ever resolving (CZYZ & King, 2015)
- 4. Problem-solving deficits
- 5. Agitation or arousal (C-SSRS, 2008)
- 6. Diminished fear of suicide or increased pain tolerance that push individuals toward...
- 7. ...an accessible lethal means (C-SSRS, 2008)



THIS CAN'T BE ALL OF IT CONT.





(Bommersbach et al., 2025; C-SSRS, 2008)



Develop a Protocol for your Setting Using Existing Resources

AVAILABLE PROTOCOLS TO ASSESS FOR SUICIDE



- Ask Suicide-Screening Questions (ASQ) Toolkit
 - https://www.nimh.nih.gov/research/research-conducted-at-nimh/asq-toolkit-materials
 - Geared more toward an emergency department setting or primary care clinics
- Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality (CAMS)
 https://cams-care.com/
- The Columbia Protocol: Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS)

https://cssrs.columbia.edu/

SAFE-T Suicide Assessment Five Step Evaluation and Triage

https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/safet-flyer-pep24-01-036.pdf

© 2025 Elena M. Doskey de Lobón, Ph.D. • Dallas Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC) • This form may not be reproduced without permission of the author

ASSESSMENT RESOURCES FOR NSSI



- SOARS Model: Risk Assessment of Non-Suicidal Self-Injury
 https://www.contemporarypediatrics.com/view/soars-model-risk-assessment-nonsuicidal-self-injury
- Cornell University Self-Injury and Recovery Research and Resources (SIRRR)

https://www.selfinjury.bctr.cornell.edu/resources.html#tab7

• Mainly validated with adults

ASSESSMENTS OF RISK OF VIOLENCE



- Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth[™] (SAVRY[™])

 https://www.parinc.com/products/SAVRY
- The Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI™) https://www.orbispartners.com/juvenile-risk-assessment

© 2025 Elena M. Doskey de Lobón, Ph.D. • Dallas Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC) • This form may not be reproduced without permission of the author.



Tarasoff

TARASOFF V. REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



- 1976 ruling by the California Supreme Court which called for a "duty to protect" an identified victim, even if it breaks confidentiality
- Triggered the creation of "duty to warn/protect" laws across states
- https://www.ncsl.org/health/mental-health-professionals-duty-to-warn

© 2025 Elena M. Doskey de Lobón, Ph.D. • Dallas Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC) • This form may not be reproduced without permission of the author



Safety Planning is More Than a CYA...It is an Intervention

STANLEY-BROWN SAFETY PLANNING INTERVENTION



- https://suicidesafetyplan.com/
- Stanley, B., & Brown, G. K. (2012). Safety planning intervention: A brief intervention to mitigate suicide risk. Cognitive and Behavioral Practice, 19 (SPECIAL SERIES: Working with Suicidal Clients: Not Business as Usual), 256-264. doi:10.1016/j.cbpra.2011.01.001

© 2025 Elena M. Doskey de Lobón, Ph.D. • Dallas Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC) • This form may not be reproduced without permission of the author

SAFETY PLANNING IS AN INTERVENTION



Factors to evaluate suicidality	Safety plan components (Stanley & Brown, 2012; Stanley-Brown Safety Planning Intervention)
Substantial psychological or emotional pain (Swee et al. 2020, Wolff et al., 2017)	Warning signs
Social disconnectedness, thwarted belongingness, and/or a sense of being burdensome (Cero & Sifers, 2013; Sweet et al., 2020; Verlenden et al., 2024)	People and social settings that provide distraction; people whom I can ask for help during a crisis; professionals or professional services I can contact during a crisis
Hopelessness about the psychological, emotional, or interpersonal angst ever resolving (CZYZ & KING, 2015)	Successful use of the safety plan; using safety planning as an intervention in the context of mental health treatment
Problem-solving deficits	The intervention of safety planning
Agitation or arousal (C-SSRS, 2008)	Internal coping strategies; People and social settings that provide distraction; people whom I can ask for help during a crisis; professionals or professional services I can contact during a crisis
Diminished fear of suicide or increased pain tolerance that push individuals toward	
an accessible lethal means (C-SSRS, 2008)	Making the environment safer



But I'm Not a Therapist. This is Beyond My Paygrade.

© 2025 Elena M. Doskey de Lobón, Ph.D. • Dallas Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC) • This form may not be reproduced without permission of the author.

YOUR STRESS NARRATIVE



- · What is being demanded of me here?
- Am I able to hand this? (And if I can't, how can I get help?)
 - It may not be your job to do a full risk assessment and safety plan AND it *is* your job to do your part.
 - C-SSRS: The Protocol in Different Settings
- · You may be the social connection and hope a child needs.



Not Only Does It Take the MDT; It Also Takes the Greater Village

© 2025 Elena M. Doskey de Lobón, Ph.D. • Dallas Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC) • This form may not be reproduced without permission of the author.

RESOURCES IN THE GREATER VILLAGE

- Gun locks provided by the police or the VA
- Partnership with big-box stores for gift cards to buy lock boxes
- Contact at legal aid to help with familial legal questions
- Domestic violence shelter and services for parental needs
- Stocking your agency with activities to use as coping skills purchased by the community
- · Co-programming with local school districts
- · Sponsoring events that promote connectedness and belonging
- Community-based psychiatry providers
- Acute inpatient facilities

These are just a few!



Know Your Level of Risk Tolerance and Adjust As Needed

© 2025 Elena M. Doskey de Lobón, Ph.D. • Dallas Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC) • This form may not be reproduced without permission of the author

TOLERATING UNCERTAINTY



- Risk tolerance
 - The degree to which we can live with situations and decisions with uncertain outcomes that carry potentially undesirable consequences (Doskey, 2019).
- Working with individuals at-risk for suicide: Attitudes and approach (Rudd et al., 2008, p. 221)
 - Manage one's own reactions to suicide.
 - Reconcile the difference (and potential conflict) between the clinician's goal to prevent suicide and the client's goal to eliminate psychological pain via suicidal behavior.
 - Maintain a collaborative, non-adversarial stance.
 - Make a realistic assessment of one's ability and time to assess and care for a suicidal client as well as for what role the clinician is best suited.



References



- Angelakis, I., Austin, J. L., & Gooding, P. (2020). Association of child maltreatment with suicide behaviors among young people: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA Network Open, 3*(8). doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.12563
- Bahk, Y. C., Jang, S. K., Choi, K. H., & Lee, S. H. (2016). The relationship between childhood trauma and suicidal ideation: Role of maltreatment and potential mediators. *Psychiatry Investigation*, *14*(1), 37-43. doi:10.4306/pi.2017.14.1.37
- Bommersbach, T. J., Olfson, M., & Rhee, T. G. (2025). National trends in suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts among high school students in the united states. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 182(7), 639–659. doi:10.1176/appi.ajp.20240706
- Borum, R., Lodewijks, H. P. B., Bartel, P. A., & Forth, A. E. (2021). The Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY). In K. S. Douglas & R. K. Otto (Eds.), *Handbook of violence risk assessment* (2nd ed., pp. 438–461). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group. doi:10.4324/9781315518374-22
- Boyle, G. (2010). Tattoos on the heart: The power of boundless compassion. Free Press.



- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1974). Developmental research, public policy, and the ecology of childhood. *Child Development*, 45(1), 1-5.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (n.d.). *Injury counts and rates*. Web-Based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) Fata and Notnfatal Injury Reports. Retrieved September 6, 2025 from <a href="https://wisqars.cdc.gov/reports/?o=MORT&y1=2023&y2=2023&t=0&i=0&m=20810&g=00&m==0&s=0&ry=2&e=0&yp=65&a=custom&g1=0&g2=199&a1=10&a2=34&r1=INTENT&r2=NONE&r3=NONE&r4=NONE
- Cero, I., & Sifers, S. (2013). Moderating factors in the path from physical abuse to attempted suicide in adolescents: Application of the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, 43*(3), 296–304. doi:10.1111=sltb.12016
- Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS): Risk Assessment with C-SSRS High Risk Triage Indicators Youth. (2008). The Research Foundation for Mental Hygiene, Inc. Retrieved September 6, 2025 from https://cssrs.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/C-SSRS-Risk-Assessment-Page-Youth-2024.docx

© 2025 Elena M. Doskey de Lobón, Ph.D. • Dallas Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC) • This form may not be reproduced without permission of the author.



- Cornell Research Program for Self-Injury Recovery (CRPSIR). 2025. Self-injury and recovery resources (SIRR): CRPSIR tools and assessments. Retrieved September 6, 2025 from https://www.selfinjury.bctr.cornell.edu/resources.html#tab7
- Czyz, E. K., & King, C. A. (2015). Longitudinal trajectories of suicidal ideation and subsequent suicide attempts among adolescent inpatients. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology, 44*(1), 181-193. doi:10.1080/15374416.2013.836454
- Doskey, E. M. (2019, November 22). *Risk tolerance, risk assessments, and safety planning: Beyond just a CYA*. [Professional development]. Dallas Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC), Dallas, TX.
- Garnett, M. F., & Curtin, S. C. (2024). *Suicide mortality in the United States, 2002–2022*. National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Data Brief, No. 509, September 2024. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db509.pdf
- Guy-Evans, O. (2025, May 6). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. SimplyPsychology. https://www.simplypsychology.org/bronfenbrenner.html
 Rhodes, S. (2013). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory [PDF]. Retrieved from http://uoit.blackboard.com



- Horowitz, L. M., Bridge, J. A., Teach, S. J., Ballard, E., Klima, J., Rosenstein, D. L., Wharff, E. A., Ginnis, K., Cannon, E., Joshi, P., & Pao, M. (2012). Ask Suicide-Screening Questions (ASQ): a brief instrument for the pediatric emergency department. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 166*(12), 1170-1176. doi:10.1001/archpediatrics.2012.1276
- Jain, S., Mansuri, Z., Trivedi, C., Vadukapuram, R., Motiwala, F., & Mainali, P. (2023). Sexual abuse and its impact on suicidal ideation and attempts and psychiatric illness in children and adolescents with posttraumatic stress disorder. *Prim Care Companion CNS Disord, 25*(1). doi:10.4088/PCC.22m03239
- Jones, N. J., Brown, S. L., Robinson, D., & Frey, D. (2016). Validity of the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument: A juvenile justice tool incorporating risks, needs, and strengths. *Law and Human Behavior, 40*(2), 182-194.
- Kothari, R., Key, R., Lawrenson, J., & Squire, T. (2021). Understanding risk of suicide among perpetrators who view child sexual abuse material (CSAM). *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine, 81*(2). doi:10.1016/j.jflm.2021.102188
- Miller, B. C. (2025). Reducing secondary traumatic stress: Skills for sustaining a career in the helping professions (2nd ed.). Routledge.



- National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). *Mental health professionals' duty to warn*. (2022, March 16). https://www.ncsl.org/health/mental-health-professionals-duty-to-warn
- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). (n.d.). *Ask Suicide-Screening Questions (ASQ) toolkit*. Retrieved September 6, 2025 from https://www.nimh.nih.gov/research/research-conducted-at-nimh/asg-toolkit-materials
- Rudd, M. D., Cukrowicz, K. C., & Bryan, C. J. (2008). Core competencies in suicide risk assessment and management: Implications for supervision. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 2(4), 219-228. doi:10.1037/1931-3918.2.4.219
- Serafini, G., Canepa, G., Adavastro, G., Nebbia, J., Murri, M. B., Erbuto, D., Pocai, B., Fiorillo, A., Pompili, M., Flouri, E., & Amore, M. (2017). The relationship between childhood maltreatment and non-suicidal self-injury: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, 8.* doi:10.3389/fpsyt.2017.00149
- Sommers-Flanagan, J., & Shaw, S. L. (2017). Suicide risk assessment: What psychologists should know. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 48*(2), 98-106. doi:10.1037/pro0000106



- Stanley, B., & Brown, G. K. (2012). Safety planning intervention: A brief intervention to mitigate suicide risk. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice, 19* (SPECIAL SERIES: Working with Suicidal Clients: Not Business as Usual), 256-264. doi:10.1016/j.cbpra.2011.01.001
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2024). SAFE-T Suicide Assessment: Five-Step evaluation and triage. Retrieved September 6, 2025 from https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/safet-flyer-pep24-01-036.pdf
- Suicide in rural areas. (2025). Rural Health Information Hub (RHIhub). Retrieved September 6, 2025 from https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/suicide/1/rural
- Swee, G., Shochet, I., Cockshaw, W., & Hides, Ly. (2020). Emotion regulation as a risk factor for suicide ideation among adolescents and young adults: The mediating role of belongingness. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 49*(5), 2265-2274. doi:10.1007/s10964-020-01301-2
- Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California. (2025, July 20). In *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California& oldid=1301532105



- *Teen suicide*. (n.d.). Johns Hopkins Medicine. Retrieved September 6, 2025 from https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/teen-suicide
- Verlenden, J. V., Fodeman, A., Wilkins, N., Everett Jones, S., Moore, S., Cornett, K., Sims, V., Saelee, R., & Brener, N. D. (2024). Mental health and suicide risk among high school students and protective factors Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2023. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR) Supplements, 73(4), 79–86. doi:10.15585/mmwr.su7304a9
- Westers, N. J., Muehlenkamp, J. J., & Lau, M. (2016). SOARS model: Risk assessment of nonsuicidal self-injury. *Contemporary Pediatrics*. Retrieved September 6, 2025 from https://www.contemporarypediatrics.com/view/soars-model-risk-assessment-nonsuicidal-self-injury
- Wherry, J. N., Baldwin, S., Junco, K., & Floyd, B. (2013). Suicidal thoughts/behaviors in sexually abused children. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, *22*(5), 534-551. doi:10.1080/10538712.2013.800938
- Wolff, J. C., Davis, S., Liu, R. T., Cha, C. B., Cheek, S. M., Nestor, B. A., Frazier, E. A., Schaffer, M. M., & Spirito, A. (2018). Trajectories of suicidal ideation among adolescents following psychiatric hospitalization. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 46(2), 355–363. doi:10.1007/s10802-017-0293-6

CONTACT



Elena M. Doskey de Lobón, Ph.D.

Licensed Psychologist
Director of Clinical Training
Dallas Children's Advocacy Center

edoskey@dcac.org