

Suicide Risk Assessment

“Suicide risk assessment” may sound like a daunting clinical task, but it’s actually simple and intuitive. The assessment is a short process of determining if someone has a logistical plan of how to attempt suicide. Most people who have suicidal thoughts do not attempt suicide, and most people who attempt suicide do not die by suicide. By asking practical questions about suicide plans, you can help determine if the crisis is primarily emotional, or if there is also a physical component.

After someone tells you they are feeling suicidal, you need to ask about their plan:

1. **Plan:** Does someone have a specific plan in place?
2. **Lethal:** Is this plan lethal?
3. **Access:** Do they have access to this plan?
4. **Now:** Do they plan on using it in the immediate future?

For Example:

- If someone says they have a plan to use a firearm on themselves but don’t have a firearm or a way to access it, they aren’t at immediate risk.
- If someone says they have a firearm in their home but don’t plan on using it in the next 24 hours, they’re at a higher risk and will require some intervention to keep them safe in case they become impulsive.
- If someone says they have access to a firearm they plan on using later in the day, they require immediate intervention to keep them safe.

If you feel uncomfortable asking directly, try calling San Francisco Suicide Prevention operators at (415) 781-0500 to ask any questions.



Important Disclaimer: This information is meant for educational purposes only and should not be considered medical advice. It is meant to support, not replace, the advice of a licensed health care or mental health care professional. It should not be used to make a diagnosis or replace or overrule a qualified health care provider’s judgment.



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