

Youth Suicide Risk and Protective Factors: Implications for Prevention



BEYOND THE BASICS CONFERENCE - MAINE

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Introduction

The screenshot displays the website for the American Association of Suicidology (AAS). At the top left is the AAS logo, a stylized purple 'A' and 'S'. To its right is the text 'AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SUICIDOLOGY'. A search bar with a 'Go >' button and a 'Donate' link are located in the top right. A horizontal navigation menu below the header contains the following items: ABOUT AAS, STATS & TOOLS, EDUCATION & TRAINING, CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS, CURRENT RESEARCH, HOW YOU CAN HELP, THINKING ABOUT SUICIDE?, SUICIDE LOSS SURVIVORS, SUICIDE ATTEMPT SURVIVORS, and MEMBERS ONLY. The main content area features a yellow sidebar on the left with links: 'About National Center for the Prevention of Youth Suicide', 'Help Prevent Youth Suicide', 'Warning Signs of Suicide and What To Do', 'Lead a Fundraising Project', 'Resources', and 'Contact'. The central content area has a green logo for the 'NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE PREVENTION OF YOUTH SUICIDE' and a purple button that says 'JOIN AAS TODAY! Learn more >'. Below the logo is the heading 'About the National Center for the Prevention of Youth Suicide' followed by a paragraph: 'The AAS National Center for the Prevention of Youth Suicide believes that suicide can often be prevented. For example, many youth give warning signs if they are considering taking their lives, and intervening can save their lives. Other youth may be kept from reaching the point of even thinking about suicide by individuals reaching out and showing them they care. Strong communities, safe schools, and supportive families all help the development of healthy youth. For youth struggling with mental illness and or substance abuse, effective services make a difference.' Below this is another paragraph: 'The National Center has the goal of reducing the rate of youth suicide attempts and deaths by:' followed by a numbered list: '1. Disseminating the warning signs of suicide through web outreach to dramatically increase the proportion of youth at risk who are identified and referred to appropriate mental health care and support.' and '2. Partnering with other organizations to increase the development and use of'. At the bottom left of the sidebar, there is a section titled 'IF YOU ARE IN CRISIS AND NEED IMMEDIATE HELP, please call 1-800-273-TALK (8255). The American Association of Suicidology is an education and resource organization.' The bottom of the screenshot shows a Windows taskbar with icons for Internet Explorer, Firefox, and other applications.

On the Spot Assessment

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CHOOSE A QUESTION:

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS?

WHAT DO YOU HATE ABOUT RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS?

HOW HAVE YOU USED RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS?

Purpose

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- **Increase knowledge about risk and protective factors**
- **Increase understanding how they can be used**

Outline

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- **Define, describe, and list risk and protective factors**
- **Distinguish from warning signs**
- **Describe their uses and give examples of how they can be used**

Risk Factors - Definition



- Risk factors indicate someone is at heightened risk for suicide
- Risk factors are based on an association for a particular group
- Could be only an association, or a cause, or a contributing factor

Rodgers, P., 2010

Risk Factors for Youth Suicide



- Mental illness including substance-related disorder
- Prior suicide attempt
- Self injury
- Parental/familial problems
- Family history of suicidal behavior
- Poor coping skills
- Social/interpersonal isolation/alienation
- Contagion
- Means availability

Features of Risk Factors



- Major or minor
- Modifiable or not
- Synergistic
- Idiosyncratic
- Dynamic
- Cross-cutting or culturally unique

Risk Factors – Common themes



- Negative life events and stressors
- MI and certain personality attributes
- Isolation and alienation
- Hopelessness, pessimism, etc.
- Method

Berman et al., 2006, *Adolescent Suicide*

What's Wrong with Risk Factors



- May not be the cause
- Not predictive
- Sloppy
- Not feasible to apply?
- Fit the group they were found for

Protective Factors for Youth Suicide



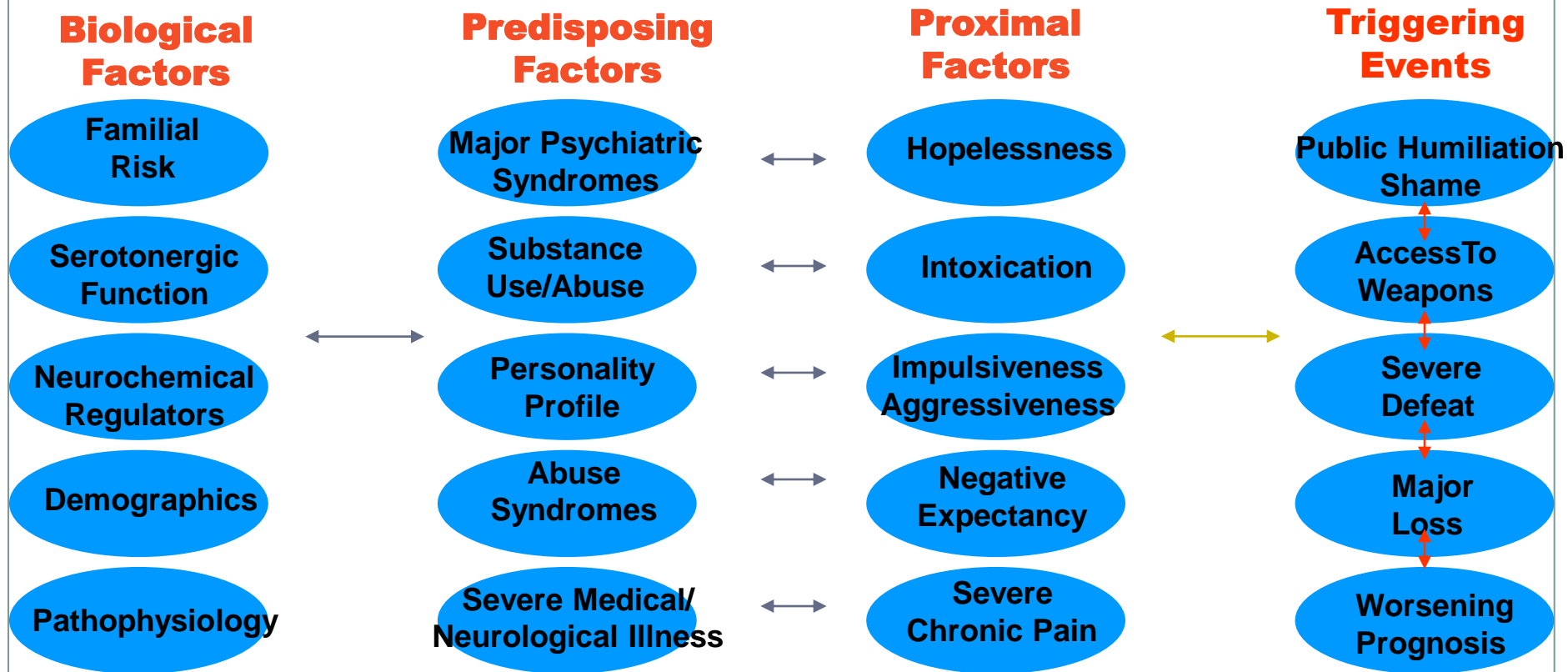
- Psychological or emotional well-being
- Self esteem
- Academic achievement
- Connectedness, support, communication with parents
- Family connectedness
- Social support
- Coping skills
- Frequent, vigorous physical activity, sports
- Safe school, connectedness
- Caring adult
- Reduced access to alcohol, firearms, medications

Protective Factors for Youth Suicide

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- Personal control – confidence in cope-ability; life satisfaction
- Internal constraints – hope, religiosity, spirituality
- External constraints – family, environment
- Connections to support – help receptivity, positive communication
- Frustration and distress tolerance

Suicide Risk Factors and Triggering Events



BP Warning Signs for Suicide Prevention (1)



Someone at *critical* risk of suicide if he or she:

- Threatens to hurt or kill him or herself, or talks of wanting to hurt or kill him or herself; and/or,
- Looks for ways to kill him or herself by seeking access to firearms, pills, or other means; and/or,
- Talks or writes about death, dying or suicide, when these actions are out of the ordinary.

Get help ***immediately*** from a mental health professional or a hospital emergency department, or call 9 1 1.

BP Warning Signs for Suicide Prevention (2)



- Feelings of hopelessness
- Anxiety, agitation, trouble sleeping or sleeping all the time
- Expressions of no reason for living; no purpose in life
- Feelings of being trapped - like there's no way out
- Increased alcohol and/or drug use
- Withdrawal from friends, family, and community
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, expressions of revenge
- Reckless behavior or more risky activities,
- Dramatic mood changes

Get help by contacting a mental health professional or calling the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](https://www.nationalsuicideline.org) at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Risk and Protective Factors - Uses



Treatment

- **Clinical risk assessment of patients**
- **Training – youth caretakers know what to track and report**

Intervention

- **Program planning – groups and factors to target**

Targeting Risk Groups for Youth Suicide



- LGB for attempts
- Youth in foster care
- Youth w mental illness or substance use disorder
- Demographics: White male young adults, Native American males, poverty, rural
- Youth in juvenile justice system
- Runaway and homeless youth
- Bullied youth and bullies
- Youth who have attempted suicide

Targeting Risk Factors for LGBT youth



- Gender nonconformity
- Internal conflict about sexual orientation
- Time of coming out
- Early coming out
- Low family connectedness
- Lack of adult caring
- Unsafe school
- Family rejection
- Victimization
- Stigma and discrimination



Protective Factor – LGBT youth



- Family acceptance – parents and caregivers can help:
 - Talk with your child about his/her LGBT identity
 - Express affection when you learn that your child is LGBT
 - Advocate for your child when he/she is mistreated because of his/her LGBT identity
 - Bring your child to LGBT events
 - Connect your child with an LGBT adult role model
 - Welcome your child's LGBT friends and partners into your home
 - Believe that your LGBT child can have a happy future

Adapted from Caitlin Ryan, 2009.

Source: SPRC's Workshop Suicide Prevention among LGBT Youth

Suicidal behavior among youth in foster care



- Youth in foster care are 3 to 5 times more likely to die by suicide (Farand, 2004; Thompson, 1995).
- Adolescents who had been in FC are four times more likely to have attempted suicide last year (Pilowsky & Wu, 2006).
- Adolescents who had been in FC were nearly two and half times more likely to have seriously considered attempting suicide (Pilowsky & Wu, 2006).



Risk factors for suicidal behavior



- *Mental illness including substance abuse*
- *Prior suicide attempt*
- *Abuse and neglect*
- *Trauma*
- *Parental mental illness and substance abuse*
- *Familial discord and dysfunction*
- *Family history of suicidal behavior*
- *Social/interpersonal isolation/alienation*
- *Exposure to suicides and attempts*
- *Violence and victimization*
- *Poor coping skills*
- *Bullying*
- *Suicide means availability/firearm in household*
- *Self injury*



Targeting depression early



- 40% of 13- to 17-year-olds had any mental disorder in the last year
- Over half had any mental disorder in their lifetime

Source: Kessler et al. (2011). Arch Gen Psychiatry

- Most adult mental illnesses begin in childhood or adolescence
- New approaches work with youth when they first have symptoms of depression.



Summary



You can now

- Define, describe, and list risk and protective factors
- Distinguish from warning signs
- Describe their uses and start to plan to use them



References and Resources



Best Practice Warning Signs of Suicide at

<http://www.suicidology.org/stats-and-tools/suicide-warning-signs>

Rodgers, P., November 5, 2010, unpublished presentation

SPRC & Rodgers, P., 2011, Understanding Risk and Protective Factors

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