



Standards for the Assessment of Suicide Risk Among Callers to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Setting
Crisis Centers

Type of Program
Protocols & Guidelines

NSSP Goals Addressed
7.2, 7.3, 7.9

Program Description

Developed by the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, the *Standards for the Assessment of Suicide Risk among Callers to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline* provides crisis telephone workers with evidence-informed standards for assessing a person’s risk for suicide. The *Standards* include four core domains or principles: (1) suicidal desire, (2) suicidal capability, (3) suicidal intent, and (4) buffers (protective factors¹). Research indicates that suicidal desire, capability and intent are separate but interrelated constructs. To help the telephone worker elicit risk, subcomponents of these domains are also described. The *Standards* set national guidelines for assessing suicide risk among callers to crisis lines, and may be applicable in some clinical settings as well.

Program Objectives

Those who use the *Standards* will:

1. Increase their knowledge of factors pertinent to assessing the suicide risk of Lifeline callers.
2. Increase appropriate and direct inquiries of suicide risk among Lifeline callers.

Program Development

The *Standards* were developed by the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline’s Standards, Training and Practices Division Subcommittee, comprised of experts and stakeholders in suicide prevention. The Subcommittee reviewed the most recent literature and best practice models to determine the most salient risk factors for a person at immediate risk of suicide. For additional information see:

Joiner, T., Kalafat, J., Draper, J., Stokes, H., Knudson, M., Berman, A. L., et al. (2007). Establishing standards for the assessment of suicide risk among callers to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 37(3), 353-365. (Available for free at www.atypon-link.com/GPI/toc/suli/37/3)

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Costs

The *Standards* are available for free. The study that identified the standards can be downloaded from the Guilford Publications website at the link above.

¹ Although buffers or protective factors play a role in suicide risk assessment, it is important to remember that the presence of protective factors do not diminish clear suicide risk.

*The content of programs listed in Section II (Expert and Consensus Statements) of the SPRC/AFSP Best Practices Registry address specific goals of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention and have been reviewed by a panel of three suicide prevention experts and found to meet standards of importance, likelihood of meeting objectives, accuracy, safety, congruence with prevailing knowledge, and appropriateness of development process. Programs were not reviewed for evidence of effectiveness. Additional information about the Best Practices Registry can be found at www.sprc.org.

The Best Practices Registry is supported by a grant (1 U79 SM57392-03) from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). No official endorsement by SAMHSA or DHHS for the information in this document is intended or should be inferred.