



Specialising in Personality Disorder  
and Complex Trauma



## Project ECHO:

# Crisis/safety planning: essentials for treatment planning

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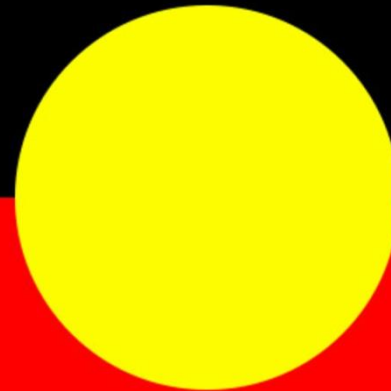
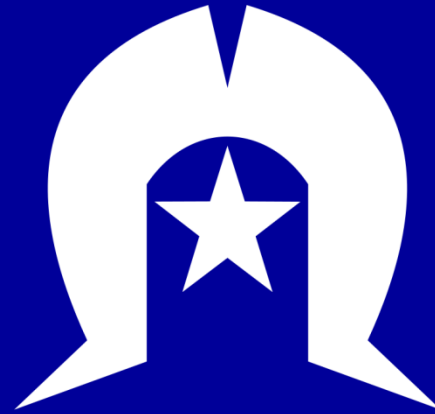
6<sup>th</sup> December 2023





## Acknowledgement of country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge any First Australians who may be present



## Acknowledgement of lived experience

We acknowledge people with lived experience of mental ill-health and recovery and the experiences of those who support them, including carers, families and supporters. The voices of people with lived experience inform our work.

We recognise the vital contribution of lived experience at all levels and value the courage of those who share these unique perspectives for the purpose of learning and growing together to achieve better outcomes for all.



# Content warning

- This presentation contains content about suicide and suicidality that some may find triggering and/or distressing

# Objectives

- What is a crisis/safety plan?
- Why have a crisis/safety plan?
- General principles of crisis/safety planning
- Strategies to effectively engage in crisis/safety planning
- Overcoming obstacles
- Resources

# What is a crisis/safety plan and what should be included?

- A plan that is generated with people who have experienced suicidality that has a specific set of coping strategies and resources to use in order to decrease the risk of suicidal behaviour
  - Serves to contain risk and empower individual to cope with suicidal thoughts
1. Identify warning signs and triggers
  2. Things I can do by myself – internal coping strategies
  3. Socialisation strategies for distraction and support – external strategies
  4. Trusted others I can contact to assist with crisis
  5. Professional to contact for assistance
  6. Create a safe environment
  7. Identify reasons to live
  8. Identify barriers to implementation of plan
- NB. Safety plans are ‘live’ documents and should be referred to and modified over time to ensure their effectiveness

# Why safety plan?

- A systematic approach which empowers an individual to describe steps they will take if distress leads to suicidal thinking (Stanley & Brown, 2012)
- The intent of a safety plan is to help individuals lower their imminent risk for suicidal behaviour by utilising coping strategies and identifying a list of individuals or agencies they may contact
  - ▶ Any safety plan is dynamic, evolving, living document with multi-modal focus.
  - ▶ Development of internal and external resources/coping strategies initial focus (the aim is to develop a ‘thicker psychological skin’)
  - ▶ Pro-therapeutic activities that engage, redirect and behaviourally activate
  - ▶ Identify and develop informal and formal social support networks
  - ▶ Future focus element- develop sense of connection, meaning, hope i.e. reasons for living, values based intervention, hope kit
- Have a place to refer to during a deterioration in mental state or crisis
- Could be a hard copy or online app

# General principles of safety planning

- Invite collaboration, not power struggle. Aim is to increase engagement, motivation
- Work with ambivalence as key construct (think of it as part of themselves that want to live/die)
- Validate and empathise with the suicidal wish, without condoning the behaviour
- Understand client's inner suicide narrative
- Invite exploration into past suicidality (whereby clients have taken steps to end their life)
- Demonstrate curiosity and a non judgmental attitude



# How to crisis/safety plan effectively

- Ensure that crisis/safety plans are a ‘live’ document and referred to and modified over time to ensure their effectiveness
- Encourage buy-in by getting clients to write their own and clearly articulate rationale for safety plan
- Highlight the bind of keeping suicide on the agenda which in turn leads into not investing in life
- Connect to reasons for living and understand reasons for dying
- Be clear what you are comfortable to work with (level of risk) and why
- Develop rapport/therapeutic alliance in the first instance
- Be realistic: It may take time to develop a robust and detailed plan
- Manage your own reactions to working with suicidal clients (in the moment, check for burnout)
- Refer onto MH triage/ED if indicated

# Overcoming obstacles/challenges

## Challenges:

- Refusing to engage in safety plan
- Refuse to contact 'services'
- Saying they don't work "they have tried them before"
- Saying there are no 'warning signs'
- Not referring to them/forgetting about them
- Not wanting to involve family/friends
- Limited social networks

## Solutions:

- Ask them what they are prepared to do
- Ask them for an alternative contact e.g. a friend and have a back up in case they aren't available
- Explore why they may be refusing from a curious and non judgmental standpoint
- Invite willingness to try again – highlighting that there is nothing more important than keeping people alive
- Explain rationale to using an aide memoire
- Explore barriers to using the plan (volunteer these up front and validate them)
- Validate their decision to exclude family/friends and still invite them to involve friends/family (perhaps through input for a HOPE box)
- Encourage connection with others without disclosing their distress
- Stress that suicide is a permanent solution to what is perhaps a temporary problem

# Resources

Lifeline 13 11 14

<https://lifeline.org.au/>

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467

<https://suicidecallbackservice.org.au/>

Beyond Blue 1300 24 636

<https://beyondblue.org.au/>

Australian Indigenous Health Info

<https://healthinfolnet.ecu.edu.au/>

Qlife 1800 184 527

<https://qlife.org.au/>

Multicultural Mental Health Australia

<https://mhima.org.au/>

Beyond Now Safety Plan:

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/beyondnow-suicide-safety-planning/create-beyondnow-safety-plan/>

Virtual HOPE box (from the app store)



# References, further reading and useful links

National suicide prevention implementation strategy 2020-2025: Working together to save lives. Developed by the National Suicide prevention project reference group, Department of health 2019. Available at <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/suicide-prevention-strategy>

Jobs, D. (2016). Managing suicidal risk: a collaborative approach, second edition. New York: The Guilford Press.

Stanley-Brown Safety Planning intervention: <https://suicidesafetyplan.com/>