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Safety Plan Treatment Manual to Reduce Suicide Risk:

Veteran Version

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Introduction

This manual describes a brief clinical intervention, safety planning, that can serve as a valuable adjunct to risk assessment and may be used with veterans who have made a suicide attempt, have suicide ideation, have psychiatric disorders that increase suicide risk, or who are otherwise determined to be at high risk for suicide (cf. Stanley & Brown, 2008). This manual is intended to be used by VA mental health clinicians, including suicide prevention coordinators, as well as other VA clinicians who evaluate, treat, or have contact with patients at risk for suicide in any VA setting.

A safety plan is a prioritized written list of coping strategies and sources of support that patients can use during or preceding suicidal crises. The intent of safety planning is to provide a pre-determined list of potential coping strategies as well as a list of individuals or agencies that veterans can contact in order to help them lower their imminent risk of suicidal behavior. It is a therapeutic technique that provides patients with something more than just a referral at the completion of suicide risk assessment. By following a pre-determined set of coping strategies, social support activities, and help-seeking behaviors, veterans can determine and employ those strategies that are most effective.

The purpose of this manual is to provide a detailed description of how VA clinicians and patients may collaboratively develop and use safety plans as an intervention strategy to lower the risk of suicidal behavior. This approach is consistent with the Recovery Model, which views veterans as collaborators in their treatment and fosters empowerment, hope, and individual potential.