

## **Assessing and Managing Suicide Risk: Core Competencies for Mental Health Professionals**

SPRC's *Assessing and Managing Suicide Risk (AMSR)* workshop covers 24 core competencies that mental health professionals should have to effectively assess and manage suicide risk. Competencies are clusters of knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes required for people to be successful in their work. While this set of competencies is based on empirical evidence and expert opinion, please note that it not intended to be construed or to serve as a standard of care and does not include core competencies related to specific treatment interventions such as CBT or DBT.

### **The 24 Core Competencies**

#### **Working with Individuals at Risk for Suicide: Attitudes and Approach**

1. Manage one's own reactions to suicide.
2. Reconcile the difference and potential conflict between the clinician's goal to prevent suicide and the client's goal to eliminate psychological pain via suicidal behavior.
3. Maintain a collaborative, non-adversarial stance.
4. Make a realistic assessment of one's ability and time to assess and care for a suicidal client.

#### **Understanding Suicide**

5. Define basic terms related to suicidality.
6. Be familiar with suicide-related statistics.
7. Describe the phenomenology of suicide.
8. Demonstrate understanding of risk and protective factors.

#### **Collecting Accurate Assessment Information**

9. Integrate a risk assessment for suicidality early in a clinical interview and continue to collect assessment information on an ongoing basis.
10. Elicit risk and protective factors.
11. Elicit suicide ideation, behavior, and plans.
12. Elicit warning signs of imminent risk of suicide.
13. Obtain records and information from collateral sources as appropriate.

#### **Formulating Risk**

14. Make a clinical judgment of the risk that a client will attempt or complete suicide in the short and long term.
15. Write the judgment and the rationale in the client's record.

#### **Developing a Treatment and Services Plan**

16. Collaboratively develop an emergency plan that assures safety and conveys the message that the client's safety is not negotiable.
17. Develop a written treatment and services plan that addresses the client's immediate acute and continuing suicide ideation and risk for suicide behavior.
18. Coordinate and work collaboratively with other treatment and service providers.

#### **Managing Care**

19. Develop policies and procedures for following clients closely.
20. Follow principles of crisis management

#### **Documenting**

21. Document items related to suicidality.

#### **Understanding Legal and Regulatory Issues Related to Suicidality**

22. Understand state laws pertaining to suicide.
23. Understand that poor or incomplete documentation makes it difficult to defend against legal challenges.
24. Protect client records and rights to privacy and confidentiality following the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 that went into effect April 15, 2003.