

Recognizing and Responding to Suicide Risk: Essential Skills for Clinicians (RRSR)

CURRICULUM DESCRIPTION

The American Association of Suicidology (AAS), in partnership with the New Hampshire-based Suicide Prevention Partnership (SPP), has created a clinical skills training program called **Recognizing and Responding to Suicide Risk: Essential Skills for Clinicians (RRSR)**. Sections of the RRSR curriculum are adapted or borrowed from the Assessing and Managing Suicide Risk (AMSR) curriculum developed by the AAS for the Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) and are used through agreement with EDC. The AMSR is the intellectual property of the EDC.

The overall purpose of this training is to reduce suicidal behaviors and completed suicides in the at-risk population of individuals who interact with mental health professionals.

OVERVIEW

The **RRSR** is an interrelated series of learning events based on a set of 24 core competencies that comprehensively define the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for effective clinical risk assessment and treatment of individuals at risk for suicide. The specific goal of this competency-based learning program is to provide mental health clinicians with essential clinical skills for working effectively with clients at risk for suicide. The expected outcome of this effort is an increase in the number of mental health clinicians who, after completing the training program, should be able to

- Competently conduct a suicide risk assessment
- Reasonably formulate client risk for suicide
- Develop a treatment and services plan to address risk for suicidal behavior

The instructional design of the program incorporates a blend or combination of learning methodologies, including technology-enhanced e-learning offered before and after a face-to-face classroom workshop. While each of these instructional components involves a distinct learning event, taken together, they constitute the complete **RRSR**. A participant's course through the Training Program follows a linear process, as follows:

1. Program Enrollment → On-line Modules → Assessment Quiz →
2. Workshop Enrollment → Supplementary materials → Classroom Activities
3. Follow-up collaborative learning

Each component of the training program is more fully described below.

PROGRAM ENROLLMENT

1. The on-line registration process is the entry point for all participants the **RRSR**. There are no initial fees associated with program enrollment or to participate in the on-line learning program.
2. After logging into the course management system, participants have access to the web-based training titled *Attitudes and approaches for clinicians working with clients at-risk for suicide*.

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This part of the training program is an individualized, self-paced learning experience that provides learners with prerequisite *knowledge*-based content. The training covers a subset of core competencies within two modules on the following topics:

Module 1: Managing your reactions to suicide

Module 2: Working with clients at-risk for suicide

*See Appendix A for an outline of the specific content of the on-line course.

3. An on-line Assessment Quiz tests application of knowledge based on key concepts from the modules, allowing learners to demonstrate comprehension of the competency-based material. A passing score of at least 80% on the Assessment Quiz is required as a prerequisite to enroll in the classroom workshop. The Quiz can be re-taken as many times as is necessary to achieve a passing score.
4. After successfully passing the Assessment Quiz, participants can register for the face-to-face component of the training program, which is conducted by a master trainer/facilitator over two consecutive days. A registration fee is required. (see *Registration*)
5. Upon enrollment in the classroom workshop, a packet of pre-workshop reading materials is mailed to each registrant. These supplementary materials include the following:
 - Welcome letter
 - Description of the training program and on-site information, as necessary
 - Handouts on risk and protective factors
 - Pre-workshop readings
6. The instructor-facilitated workshop is divided into two day-long training sessions in a traditional classroom setting.
 - Session One – Recognizing and responding to suicide risk
 - Session Two – Techniques, strategies and approaches for working with suicidal clients

A Participant Manual is distributed at the start of the workshop for use as a workbook in class and a resource to take home. Each chapter is associated with a classroom lesson. Associated learning objectives provide opportunities to practice competency-based skills through discussions, activities, case studies, and role plays that involve demonstration, observation, rehearsal, peer interactions and feedback. Learners are encouraged to share case examples from their practice.

*See Appendix B for an outline of the specific content of the classroom workshops.

7. After building cohesion in the classroom workshop, each group of participants will be encouraged to meet on-line with other trained clinicians as a community of learners. The web-based course management system serves as a platform to implement an on-going learning environment with both synchronous and asynchronous structured learning events (such as webcasts by experienced clinician mentors) and informal learning opportunities (such as on-going discussion forums).

Appendix A

WebBased-Training Outline Attitudes and Approaches for clinicians working with clients at risk for suicide

Overview – By completing 2 on-line modules, clinician should be able to gain knowledge associated with the following core competencies:

1. Manage your reactions to suicide;
2. Reconcile the difference (and potential conflict) between your 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 your ability to assess and care for a suicidal client.

Module I: Managing your reactions to suicide

Lesson One: Become self-aware of emotional reactions related to suicide

Learning Objectives:

1. Recognize your personal emotional reactions to a client at-risk for suicide
2. Identify emotional reactions to client suicidal behaviors.

Lesson Two: Understand the impact of your reactions, attitudes, and beliefs

Learning Objectives:

1. Describe five ways that counter-transference reactions can impact a client.
2. Determine an appropriate therapeutic approach for working with individuals at-risk for suicide.

Lesson Three: Tolerate and regulate your emotional reactions to suicide

Learning Objectives:

1. Recognize how emotional responses provide clues to the meaning of a client's suicidal actions.
2. List three ways to obtain assistance when working with a client at-risk for suicide.

Module II: Working with clients at-risk for suicide

Lesson One: Develop an effective clinical alliance

Learning Objectives:

1. Recognize how common fears and emotional reactions can threaten the therapeutic alliance
2. Demonstrate desirable attitudes in a clinical interview

Lesson Two: Maintain a collaborative, non-adversarial stance

Learning Objectives

1. Identify the most common emotional reactions to suicidality.
2. Attend to the meaning behind a client's words to attain an understanding of suicidal goals.

Lesson Three: Encourage honest reporting of suicidality

Learning Objectives:

1. Encourage honest reporting of suicidality
2. Acknowledge the rules of confidentiality

Appendix B

Classroom Workshop Outline

Session One – Recognizing and Responding to Suicide Risk

I. Collecting Risk Assessment Data - Competencies #8, 9, 10, 12, 13

- Review risk and protective factors from pre-workshop reading
- Discuss assessment strategies for collecting risk assessment data
- Break into small groups to work with a case study of a client at risk

Learning Objectives:

1. Conduct a systematic review to gather information on suicide-related risk and protective factors
2. Identify and document warning signs of suicide risk

II. Formulating Client Risk for Suicide - Competencies #5, 7, 14

- Begin with a discussion regarding ‘when a client dies by suicide’
- Describe an assessment model for understanding acute and chronic risk
- Discuss case examples to illustrate phenomenological concepts of motivation, intention, and lethality
- Guide learners in making decisions about potential suicide risk

Learning Objective

1. Make clinical judgments of suicide risk by considering acute and chronic levels of risk

III. Understanding and Managing Risk - Competencies # 15, 21, 23

- Define standards of care and describe 3 elements of suicide risk management
- Review Competency # 21 – the importance of documentation
- Discuss ethical and legal challenges and how to manage them
- Work in small groups to consider a case and its legal challenges

Learning Objectives

1. Write a suicide risk assessment rationale
2. Minimize risk of liability consistent with the standards of care

IV. Managing Care

Competencies #2, 16, 19, 20

- Review competencies related to managing care
- Discuss safety planning in the context of collaborative treatment planning
- Break into small groups to develop a risk management plan for a client case study

Learning objectives

1. Select management options based on clinician core competencies for managing care
2. Work collaboratively to construct a suicide risk management plan that addresses near-term risk

Appendix B

Classroom Workshop Outline

Session Two – Techniques, Strategies & Approaches for Working with Suicidal Clients

I: Strategies for a Clinical Interview - Competencies #1, 3, 9, 11

- Begin with a warm-up discussion about working with suicidal clients
- Discuss challenges in building a therapeutic alliance
- Work in pairs to practice interview techniques to raise the topic of suicide

Learning Objectives:

1. Initiate a conversation about suicide using two interviewing techniques to facilitate open communication about the topic
2. Apply strategies to maintain a collaborative, non-adversarial stance

II. Research Based Approaches - Competencies # 2, 11, 14

- Describe three empirically-guided assessment strategies
- Use vignettes to prioritize various assessment factors

Learning Objectives

1. Gain knowledge about three research-based approaches for clinical work with suicidal outpatients
2. Prioritize assessment information to formulate client risk for suicide

III. Exploring Suicidal Ideation, Behavior and Plans - Competency #3, 9, 11

- Chronological Assessment of Suicide Events - CASE Approach with demonstration video
- Groups of 4 conduct structured role plays interviews with a suicidal client role-player

Learning objectives:

1. Describe a method for eliciting suicidal ideation called the Chronological Assessment of Suicide Events (CASE Approach)
2. Apply four Validity techniques to elicit suicidal ideation in the four time frames of the CASE Approach

IV. Treatment and Service Planning - Competencies #17, 18

- Discuss treatment alternatives
- Use a Case Study to write a complete treatment and service plan

Learning Objectives

1. Develop a written treatment and services plan that addresses the client's suicide ideation and immediate, short-term and continuing risk for suicidal behaviors.

Appendix: Resources include:

1. Core Competencies for the Assessment and Management of Individuals at-risk for Suicide
2. Chapter on bio-psycho-social and cultural risk and protective factors
3. Resources on Triggers to Suicidality; Lethality; The NSOL Risk Assessment Protocol, and Treatment Planning and Medication.
4. Sources for the latest research
5. Selected Fact Sheets a) Survivors of Suicide Fact Sheet and b) Therapists as Survivors of Suicide