

## Suicide Risk Assessment with the SAFE-T Card

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline has developed an assessment card based on the American Psychiatric Association's Practice Guidelines for the Assessment and Treatment of Patients with Suicidal Behaviors. This The SAFE-T (Suicide Assessment Five-Step Evaluation and Triage) card is available from the organization's web site, <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>. Its content is reprinted below, with permission:

### Risk factors:

- Current or past diagnoses: Mood disorders, psychotic disorders, alcohol or drug problems, personality disorders
- Key symptoms: Anhedonia, impulsivity, hopelessness, anxiety/panic, insomnia, command hallucinations
- suicidal behavior: History of prior suicide attempts, aborted suicide attempts, injury to self
- Family history: Suicide, attempts, Axis I diagnoses requiring hospitalization
- Precipitating factors: Triggering events leading to humiliation, shame, despair; ongoing medical illness
- Access to firearms

### Protective factors:

- Internal: Ability to cope with stress, religious beliefs, frustration tolerance, absence of psychosis
- External: Responsibility to children or beloved pets, positive therapeutic relationships, social supports

### Likelihood of suicide:

- Ideation: Frequency, intensity, duration (in past 48 hours, past month, and worst ever)
- Plan: Timing, location, lethality, availability, acts in preparation
- Behaviors: Past attempts, aborted attempts, rehearsals (e.g., tying noose, loading gun) as opposed to non-suicidal self injury

The same criteria can be used to assess the possibility of homicide, when this possibility is indicated. This assessment is particularly important with postpartum mothers, and in men with Axis II disorders or paranoia who are dealing with loss or humiliation.

**PLEASE NOTE: The Veterans Suicide Prevention Hotline is 1-800-273-8255 (TALK). It is sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.**