**Assessment of Suicide**

**The RED ZONE**

**The Most Dangerous**

**Firewall:**

*Fear of death*

There usually is a progression of thinking that gets more and more dangerous. 5 general categories on a continuum:

* Those who think a lot about death, loss, despair, sadness, grief.
* Those who think *generally* about taking their life. “I want to die.”
* Those who think *specifically* about how to take their life. “I want to shoot myself.”
* Those who pursue the means for a plan. “I bought a gun.”
* Those who have the resolve to kill themselves. “I’m pulling the trigger.” They have the bold *resolve* to face the fear of death and pull the trigger.

5 Assessment Questions:

1. Does her or she wrestle with general thoughts & feelings about death, loss, sadness, despair, grief? **[Loss and grief]**

2. What are her *thoughts* & *feelings* about suicide? **[suicidal ideation; generally thinking about suicide]** – Is he or she thinking about suicide? How much ‘air time’ in her brain to she give to it? Is she thinking about it *a lot* or *a little*?

“…the more prolonged, the more recurrent, and the more acute the thoughts of dying has been, the more concerned you should be.” – Sironi & Emlet (p. 36, *Evaluating a Person with Suicidal Desires*, from the JBC)

3. Is there *a plan*? **[thinking specifically how]** – How much time is spent scheming about the plan? How specific and concrete is the plan?

4. Has she thought about *the means* to a plan? **[acquiring the means to the plan]** - do they have rope, pills, knife, gun, etc.?

5. Have they *practiced* or made *dry runs*? **[they’ve tested out the plan and the means]**

“Remember, practice is deadly…[it] can be lethal.” – Sironi & Emlet (p. 38, *Evaluating a Person’s Suicidal Desires*, from the JBC)

6. Do they have the ability to follow through with *their intention* to carry out the plan? Do they have *the resolve* (boldness) to end their life? **[the psychological leap to death] –**

* As image-bearers, our natural, created instinct is to preserve our life. There is a mental, emotional, spiritual leap that a person has to take in order to do what is unnatural—to kill oneself.
* Some folks who are suicidal don’t have the guts to take that leap because they are still scared to die. It’s a firewall that serves as an ally to help us keep the person alive.
* A suicidal person gets to that last part of the continuum that requires the resolve to pull the trigger and realizes, “I can’t do it.”
* Previous suicide attempts increase the risk significantly because there is a decreased fear of trying to kill oneself.

**Factors that increase risk**

* Previous suicide attempts
* Isolation (no or little community)
* No employment (little or nothing to do; too much time to contemplate their troubles)
* Spends a lot of time thinking about suicide
* A specific plan
* The means are currently in their possession
* Dry runs

**Mitigating factors**

* They have *conscious* reasons to live
* People know and are carrying these burdens alongside the troubled person. He or she is *not* isolated.

“Think of this using a diving board metaphor. For a child to go from learning to swim to jumping off the high dive is a process that takes time and repeated practice. Children learn to swim, jump into a pool from the edge, and then give the low diving board a try. After they have safely and successfully conquered the low dive, they start to consider the high dive. Even then, it may take several harrowing trips up and down the ladder before a child is ready to walk the plank. Eventually, a child is able to walk the length of the high diving board and leap into the pool. **In the same way, killing oneself is usually a process that takes repeated practice and exposure for a person to actually complete it.**

Keeping with this metaphor, learning to swim and jumping in from the side of the pool might be a person longing for a ‘way out’ or an escape from a particularly painful struggle. Here you might sense a transient desire for death or a disquiet yearning for heaven. Proceeding to the low dive might be fantasizing about ending life or playing a mental video of how to die. Climbing the ladder to the high dive would be researching, obtaining the means, and then rehearsing a suicide plan. Walking out onto the high diving board might be a dry run at suicide. Jumping from the high dive would be an actual suicide attempt. In assessing suicidal intensity and the degree of suicidal planning, we are trying to locate a person on the spectrum from desiring to die to being ready and able to commit suicide.” – Sironi & Emlet (p. 37, *Evaluating a Person’s Suicidal Desires*, from the JBC)