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Suicidality in Teens

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Disclosures

- Dr. Dunne is a Partnership Access Line consultant at Seattle Children's and the consulting child and adolescent psychiatry at the PeaceHealth Pediatric Clinic, Bellingham
- He has no financial conflicts of interest to report

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Scope of the Problem in Adolescents

- Non-suicidal self injury (NSSI) in US
- Approximately 15% of teens have had NSSI at least once; girls (17%)>boys
- To punish myself (50%), obtain relief, express desperation, test other's love
- Suicide attempts in past 12 months
- Seriously considered suicide (13.3%)
- Made a plan (10.1 %)
- Attempted suicide (8.0%)
- Needed medical attention (3.7%)
- Suicide deaths
- Approximately 1/1000 attempts (0.005 % for 10-19 y/o)
- 50% had no prior attempts
- Strangulation (hanging) and firearms caused ~90%
- Overdoses caused ~7%
- Other means caused ~3%
- Per Youth Risk Behavioral Survey by CDC 2013

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Developmental Perspective

- Drive for social acceptance; vulnerability to rejection and harassment (e.g. cyber-bullying)
- Poorly developed self-identity
- Weak concept of future goals
- Immature cognitive defenses, including a weak realization of the finality of death
- Vulnerability to suggestion/contagion effects, e.g., "13 Reasons"



Psychological Perspective

- Avoidance; escape from distress
- Sense of hopelessness, helplessness
- Plea for help, external reassurance
- Grandiose attempt at revenge
- Self-loathing
- Psychological defenses become overwhelmed



Routine Screening

- Interview questions during routine check ups
- Patient Health Questionnaire, Adolescent version (PHQ-A) (attached to handout)
- Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire (SMFQ) (attached to handout)



Assessment of Adolescents Expressing Suicidal Ideation

- Assess onset and precipitating factors
- Duration and intensity
- Degree of planning
- Urge to act on plan
- Accessibility of lethal means
- History of previous attempts or NSSI
- Presence of protective factors



Assessment Continued: Risk Factors

- Depressive disorders
- Anxiety disorders, especially panic disorder
- ADHD/Hx of impulsive behavior
- Substance abuse
- Psychosis
- Agitation
- LGBTQ sexual minorities
- Personality disorders, particularly histrionic and borderline PD
- Male gender
- Access to guns or lethal medications
- Rejection or harassment by peers
- Family discord or lacking family support
- Hx of suicide in family, acquaintances or on-line friends
- Hx of NSSI



Protective Factors

- A supportive adult and/or family
- Willingness to be open with thoughts and feelings with supportive adults
- Stable group of prosocial friends
- Future goals
- Regular exercise