Risk Factors

- Prior suicide attempt(s)
- History of mood disorder
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Family history of trauma, suicide, and/or violence
- Feeling alone
- Impulsivity
- Events or recent losses leading to humiliation, shame, and/or despair
- Irritability, agitation, aggression
- Chronic pain, major physical illness or recent life-threatening diagnosis
- Insomnia
- Brain injury
- Perceived burden on others
- Exposure to suicide in the community, social circles, or the media

Protective Factors

- Sense of connectedness and/or responsibility to family
- Feeling of control in their own life
- Life satisfaction
- School and community belongingness
- Coping skills
- Problem solving skills
- Ability to tolerate frustration
- Strong therapeutic relationship with a trusted provider
- Reality testing ability
- Spirituality
- Regular school attendance and academic performance

Warning Signs

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself or talking about it
- Seeking means to kill oneself
- Hopelessness and/or purposelessness- no reason for living
- Giving away belongings of importance
- Irritability, agitation, aggression
- Insomnia or sleep disturbance
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in high risk activities, seemingly without thinking
- Dramatic mood changes
- Feeling trapped- like there's no way out

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SAFETY PLAN

A safety plan can help keep you safe if you are feeling overwhelmed and having thoughts of ending your life. Making a plan like this can help you understand yourself better, keeping you safer. It's important to share this plan with your support people so they can help you. If your needs or warning signs change, revise your safety plan with your caregivers or professional support people.

Who are the people or animals I live for?

What are other things I have to live for?

<u>Warning Signs:</u> What are my warning signs that tell me I'm starting to get overwhelmed?

Thoughts	Emotions	Body sensations	Behaviors

If people notice any of my warning signs, they can help by:

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Stanley & Brown 2008 adapted by PCMH 2020

Internal Coping Strategies: How can I manage my triggers or things that set me off?

Healthy Distractions: Who are the safe people that I can call/hangout with or where can I go that will take my mind off of the problem?

People for Support and Help: Who are the main people that I can turn to for support if I am overwhelmed? People to whom I can say, "Hey, I'm not feeling good right now, I really need someone to talk to. I don't need advice. I just need you to listen. Can we talk?"

Making the Environment Safe: How can I make my surroundings safe? (remove things, go to a safer space)

Professionals and Agencies: If no one is available, who can I call during a suicidal crisis?

- **Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**
  - **Call or text 988**
- **Colorado Crisis Services**
  - **Call 1-844-493-TALK (8255)**
  - **Text TALK to 38255**
- **Trevor Project Hotline**
  - **Call 1-866-488-7386**
  - **Text Start to 678678**
- **911**

Follow up phone call
Name:
Phone number:

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asQ
Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

ASQ Toolkit Summary

The ASQ toolkit is organized by the medical setting in which it will be used: **emergency department**, **inpatient medical/surgical unit, and outpatient primary care and specialty clinics.** All toolkit materials are available on the NIMH website at **www.nimh.nih.gov/asq.** Questions about the materials or how to implement suicide risk screening can be directed to Lisa Horowitz, PhD, MPH at horowitzl@mail.nih.gov or Debbie Snyder, MSW at DeborahSnyder@mail.nih.gov.

Emergency Department (ED/ER):

-ASQ Information Sheet*
-ASQ Tool*
-Brief Suicide Safety Assessment Guide
-Nursing Script
-Parent/Guardian Flyer
-Patient Resource List*
-Educational Videos*

Inpatient Medical/Surgical Unit:

-ASQ Information Sheet*
-ASQ Tool*
-Brief Suicide Safety Assessment Guide
-Nursing Script
-Parent/Guardian Flyer
-Patient Resource List*
-Educational Videos*

Outpatient Primary Care/Specialty Clinics:

-ASQ Information Sheet*
-ASQ Tool*
-Brief Suicide Safety Assessment Guide
-Nursing Script
-Parent/Guardian Flyer
-Patient Resource List*
-Educational Videos*

***Note: The following materials remain the same across all medical settings. These materials can be used in other settings with youth (e.g. school nursing office, juvenile detention centers).**

-ASQ Information Sheet
-ASQ Tool
-ASQ in other languages
-Patient Resource List
-Educational Videos

asQ
Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Information Sheet

Screening Youth for Suicide Risk in Medical Settings

A rapid, psychometrically sound 4-item screening tool for all pediatric patients presenting to the emergency department, inpatient units, & primary care facilities.

BACKGROUND

- In 2010, suicide became the 2nd leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24.
- In 2015, more than 5,900 American youth killed themselves.
- In the U.S., over 2 million young people attempt suicide each year. 90% of suicide attempts among youth are unknown to parents.
- Early identification and treatment of patients at elevated risk for suicide is a key suicide prevention strategy, yet high risk patients are often not recognized by healthcare providers.
- Recent studies show that the majority of individuals who die by suicide have had contact with a healthcare provider within three months prior to their death.
- Unfortunately, these patients often present solely with physical complaints and infrequently discuss suicidal thoughts and plans unless asked directly.

Suicide in the Hospital

Suicide in the medical setting is one of the most frequent sentinel events reported to the Joint Commission (JC). In the past 20 years, over 1,300 patient deaths by suicide have been reported to the JC from hospitals nationwide.

- Notably, 25% of these suicides occurred in non- behavioral health settings such as general medical units and the emergency department.
- Root cause analyses reveal that the lack of proper "assessment" of suicide risk was the leading cause for these reported suicides.

Ask directly about suicidal thoughts –
EVERY HEALTHCARE PROVIDER CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Screening in Medical Settings

The emergency department, inpatient units, and primary care settings are promising venues for identifying young people at risk for suicide.

- Several studies have refuted myths about iatrogenic risk of asking youth questions about suicide, such as the worry about "putting ideas into their heads."
- Screening positive for suicide risk on validated instruments may not only be predictive of future suicidal behavior, but may also be a proxy for other serious mental health concerns that require attention.
- Non-psychiatric clinicians in medical settings require brief validated instruments to help detect medical patients at risk for suicide.

Emergency Department (ED)

- For over 1.5 million youth, the ED is their only point of contact with the healthcare system, creating an opportune time to screen for suicide risk.
- Screening in the ED has been found to be feasible (non-disruptive to workflow and acceptable to patients and their families).

Inpatient Units

- Research reveals that the majority of medical inpatients have never been asked about suicide before; however, opinion data indicate that most adolescents support screening in inpatient settings.

Primary Care/Inpatient Clinics

- Primary Care Physicians (PCPs) are often the de-facto principal mental healthcare providers for children and adolescents.
- Adolescents may be more comfortable discussing risk-taking activities with PCPs than with specialists.

Suicide Risk Screening Recommendations

- 2007 – The JC issued National Patient Safety Goal 15A, requiring suicide risk screening for all patients being treated for mental health concerns in all healthcare settings.
- 2010 & 2016 – The JC issued a Sentinel Event Alert, recommending that all medical patients in hospitals also be screened for suicide risk.

asQ Development

- The ASQ was developed in 3 pediatric Emergency Departments (EDs):
  - Children's National Medical Center, Washington, DC
  - Boston Children's Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts
  - Nationwide Children's Hospital, Columbus, Ohio
- For use by non-psychiatric clinicians
- Takes less than 2 minutes to screen
- Positive screen: "yes" to any of the 4 items
- **Sound psychometric properties***

asQ
Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Ask the patient:

1. In the past few weeks, have you wished you were dead?	Yes	No
2. In the past few weeks, have you felt that you or your family would be better off if you were dead?	Yes	No
3. In the past week, have you been having thoughts about killing yourself?	Yes	No
4. Have you ever tried to kill yourself?	Yes	No

If yes, how? _____ When? _____

If the patient answers yes to any of the above, ask the following question:

5. Are you having thoughts of killing yourself right now?	Yes	No

If yes, please describe: _____

NIH National Institute of Mental Health

For description of study:
*Horowitz LM, Bridge JA, Teach SJ, Ballard E, Klima J, Rosenstein DL, Wharff EA, Ginnis K, Cannon E, Joshi P, Pao M. Ask Suicide-Screening Questions (ASQ): A Brief Instrument for the Pediatric Emergency Department. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2012;166(12):1170-1176.

After administering the asQ

- If patient answers "No" to all questions 1 through 4, screening is complete (not necessary to ask question #5). No intervention is necessary *(*Note: Clinical judgment can always override a negative screen).*
- **If patient answers "Yes" to any of questions 1 through 4, or refuses to answer, they are considered a positive screen. Ask question #5 to assess acuity:**
  - ☐ "Yes" to question #5 = **acute positive screen** (imminent risk identified)
    - **Patient requires a STAT safety/full mental health evaluation. Patient cannot leave until evaluated for safety.**
    - Keep patient in sight. Remove all dangerous objects from room. Alert physician or clinician responsible for patient's care.
  - ☐ **"No"** to question #5 = **non-acute positive screen** (potential risk identified)
    - **Patient requires a brief suicide safety assessment to determine if a full mental health evaluation is needed. Patient cannot leave until evaluated for safety.**
    - Alert physician or clinician responsible for patient's care.

asQ
- Patients ages 10-24
- Positive screen: "Yes" to any question
- Public domain tool, free of charge
- Available in multiple languages

For more information contact:

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Boston Children's Hospital, Harvard Medical School

asQ Suicide Risk Screening Tool

Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Ask the patient:

1. **In the past few weeks, have you wished you were dead?** ❍ Yes ❍ No
2. **In the past few weeks, have you felt that you or your family would be better off if you were dead?** ❍ Yes ❍ No
3. **In the past week, have you been having thoughts about killing yourself?** ❍ Yes ❍ No
4. **Have you ever tried to kill yourself?** ❍ Yes ❍ No

   If yes, how? _____

   _____

   _____

   When? _____

   _____

If the patient answers **Yes** *to any of the above, ask the following acuity question:*

5. **Are you having thoughts of killing yourself right now?** ❍ Yes ❍ No

   If yes, please describe: _____

Next steps:

- If patient answers "No" to all questions 1 through 4, screening is complete (not necessary to ask question #5). No intervention is necessary (**Note: Clinical judgment can always override a negative screen*).
- **If patient answers "Yes" to any of questions 1 through 4, or refuses to answer, they are considered a positive screen. Ask question #5 to assess acuity:**
  - ☐ **"Yes"** to question #5 = **acute positive screen** (imminent risk identified)
    - **Patient requires a STAT safety/full mental health evaluation. Patient cannot leave until evaluated for safety.**
    - Keep patient in sight. Remove all dangerous objects from room. Alert physician or clinician responsible for patient's care.
  - ☐ **"No"** to question #5 = **non-acute positive screen** (potential risk identified)
    - **Patient requires a brief suicide safety assessment to determine if a full mental health evaluation is needed. Patient cannot leave until evaluated for safety.**
    - Alert physician or clinician responsible for patient's care.

Provide resources to all patients

- 24/7 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) En Español: 1-888-628-9454
- 24/7 Crisis Text Line: Text "HOME" to 741-741

asQ Brief Suicide Safety Assessment

Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

What to do when a pediatric patient screens positive for suicide risk:

- Use after a patient **(10 - 24 years)** screens positive for suicide risk on the asQ
- Assessment guide for mental health clinicians, MDs, NPs, or PAs
- Prompts help determine disposition

1 Praise patient *for discussing their thoughts*

"I'm here to follow up on your responses to the suicide risk screening questions. These are hard things to talk about. Thank you for telling us. I need to ask you a few more questions."

2 Assess the patient

(If possible, assess patient alone depending on developmental considerations and parent willingness.)

Review patient's responses from the asQ

Frequency of suicidal thoughts

Determine if and how often the patient is having suicidal thoughts.

Ask the patient: "In the past few weeks, have you been thinking about killing yourself?" **If yes, ask:** "How often?" (once or twice a day, several times a day, a couple times a week, etc.) "When was the last time you had these thoughts?"

"Are you having thoughts of killing yourself right now?" **(If "yes," patient is at imminent risk and requires an urgent/STAT mental health evaluation and cannot be left alone. Notify patient's medical team.)**

Suicide plan

Assess if the patient has a suicide plan, regardless of how they responded to any other questions (ask about method and access to means).

Ask the patient: "Do you have a plan to kill yourself?" **If yes, ask:** "What is your plan?" **If no plan, ask:** "If you were going to kill yourself, how would you do it?"

Note: If the patient has a very detailed plan, this is more concerning than if they haven't thought it through in great detail. If the plan is feasible (e.g., if they are planning to use pills and have access to pills), this is a reason for greater concern and removing or securing dangerous items (medications, guns, ropes, etc.).

Past behavior

Evaluate past self-injury and history of suicide attempts (method, estimated date, intent).

Ask the patient: "Have you ever tried to hurt yourself?" "Have you ever tried to kill yourself?"

If yes, ask: "How? When? Why?" and assess intent: "Did you think [method] would kill you?" "Did you want to die?" (for youth, intent is as important as lethality of method)
Ask: "Did you receive medical/psychiatric treatment?"

Note: Past suicidal behavior is the strongest risk factor for future attempts.

Symptoms Ask the patient about:

Depression: "In the past few weeks, have you felt so sad or depressed that it makes it hard to do the things you would like to do?"

Anxiety: "In the past few weeks, have you felt so worried that it makes it hard to do the things you would like to do or that you feel constantly agitated/on-edge?"

Impulsivity/Recklessness: "Do you often act without thinking?"

Hopelessness: "In the past few weeks, have you felt hopeless, like things would never get better?"

Anhedonia: "In the past few weeks, have you felt like you couldn't enjoy the things that usually make you happy?"

Isolation: "Have you been keeping to yourself more than usual?"

Irritability: "In the past few weeks, have you been feeling more irritable or grouchier than usual?"

Substance and alcohol use: "In the past few weeks, have you used drugs or alcohol?" **If yes, ask:** "What? How much?"

Sleep pattern: "In the past few weeks, have you had trouble falling asleep or found yourself waking up in the middle of the night or earlier than usual in the morning?"

Appetite: "In the past few weeks, have you noticed changes in your appetite? Have you been less hungry or more hungry than usual?"

Other concerns: "Recently, have there been any concerning changes in how you are thinking or feeling?"

Social Support & Stressors

(For all questions below, if patient answers yes, ask them to describe.)

Support network: "Is there a trusted adult you can talk to? Who? Have you ever seen a therapist/counselor?" **If yes, ask:** "When?"

Family situation: "Are there any conflicts at home that are hard to handle?"

School functioning: "Do you ever feel so much pressure at school (academic or social) that you can't take it anymore?"

Bullying: "Are you being bullied or picked on?"

Suicide contagion: "Do you know anyone who has killed themselves or tried to kill themselves?"

Reasons for living: "What are some of the reasons you would NOT kill yourself?"

asQ Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Brief Suicide Safety Assessment

3 Interview patient & parent/guardian together

If patient is ≥ 18 years, ask patient's permission for parent/guardian to join.

Say to the parent: "After speaking with your child, I have some concerns about his/her safety. We are glad your child spoke up as this can be a difficult topic to talk about. We would now like to get your perspective."

- "Your child said… (reference positive responses on the asQ). Is this something he/she shared with you?"
- "Does your child have a history of suicidal thoughts or behavior that you're aware of?" **If yes, say:** "Please explain."
- "Does your child seem:
  - o Sad or depressed?"
  - o Anxious?"
  - o Impulsive? Reckless?"
  - o Hopeless?"
  - o Irritable?"
  - o Unable to enjoy the things that usually bring him/her pleasure?"
  - o Withdrawn from friends or to be keeping to him/herself?
- "Have you noticed changes in your child's:
  - o Sleeping pattern?"
  - o Appetite?"
- "Does your child use drugs or alcohol?"
- "Has anyone in your family/close friend network ever tried to kill themselves?"
- "How are potentially dangerous items stored in your home?" (e.g. guns, medications, poisons, etc.)
- "Does your child have a trusted adult they can talk to?" (Normalize that youth are often more comfortable talking to adults who are not their parents)
- "Are you comfortable keeping your child safe at home?"

At the end of the interview, ask the parent/guardian: "Is there anything you would like to tell me in private?"

4 Make a safety plan with the patient

Include the parent/guardian, if possible.

Create a safety plan for managing potential future suicidal thoughts. A safety plan is different than making a "safety contract"; asking the patient to contract for safety is NOT effective and may be dangerous or give a false sense of security.

Say to patient: "Our first priority is keeping you safe. Let's work together to develop a safety plan for when you are having thoughts of suicide."

Examples: "I will tell my mom/coach/teacher." "I will call the hotline." "I will call _____."

Discuss coping strategies to manage stress (such as journal writing, distraction, exercise, self-soothing techniques).

Discuss means restriction (securing or removing lethal means): "Research has shown that limiting access to dangerous objects saves lives. How will you secure or remove these potentially dangerous items (guns, medications, ropes, etc.)?"

Ask safety question: "Do you think you need help to keep yourself safe?" (A "no" response does not indicate that the patient is safe; but a "yes" is a reason to act immediately to ensure safety.)

5 Determine disposition

After completing the assessment, choose the appropriate disposition plan.

- ❑ **Emergency psychiatric evaluation:** **Patient is at imminent risk for suicide (current suicidal thoughts).** Keep patient safe on the unit. Follow the standard of care for a suicidal patient (e.g. remove dangerous objects, 1:1 observer). Request a STAT, emergency psychiatric evaluation.
- ❑ **Further evaluation of risk is necessary:** Request a comprehensive mental health/safety evaluation prior to discharge.
- ❑ **Patient might benefit from non-urgent mental health follow-up post-discharge:** No further mental health evaluation in the hospital is needed at this time. Review safety plan for potential future suicidal thoughts and refer patient for a follow-up mental health evaluation in the community, post-discharge.
- ❑ **No further intervention is necessary at this time.**

6 Provide resources to all patients

- **24/7 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) En Español: 1-888-628-9454**
- **24/7 Crisis Text Line: Text "HOME" to 741-741**

NIMH TOOLKIT: EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

asQ Brief Suicide Safety Assessment

Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

What to do when a pediatric patient screens positive for suicide risk:

- Use after a patient **(10 - 24 years)** screens positive for suicide risk on the asQ
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- Prompts help determine disposition

1 Praise patient *for discussing their thoughts*

"I'm here to follow up on your responses to the suicide risk screening questions. These are hard things to talk about. Thank you for telling us. I need to ask you a few more questions."

2 Assess the patient

If possible, assess patient alone *(depending on developmental considerations and parent willingness)*

Review patient's responses from the asQ

Frequency of suicidal thoughts

Determine if and how often the patient is having suicidal thoughts.
Ask the patient: "In the past few weeks, have you been thinking about killing yourself?" **If yes, ask:** "How often?" (once or twice a day, several times a day, a couple times a week, etc.)

"Are you having thoughts of killing yourself right now?"
(If "yes," patient requires an urgent/STAT mental health evaluation and cannot be left alone. A positive response indicates imminent risk.)

Suicide plan

Assess if the patient has a suicide plan, regardless of how they responded to any other questions (ask about method and access to means). **Ask the patient:** "Do you have a plan to kill yourself? Please describe." **If no plan, ask:** "If you were going to kill yourself, how would you do it?"

Note: If the patient has a very detailed plan, this is more concerning than if they haven't thought it through in great detail. If the plan is feasible (e.g., if they are planning to use pills and have access to pills), this is a reason for greater concern and removing or securing dangerous items (medications, guns, ropes, etc.).

Past behavior *(Strongest predictor of future attempts)*

Evaluate past self-injury and history of suicide attempts (method, estimated date, intent). **Ask the patient:** "Have you ever tried to hurt yourself?" "Have you ever tried to kill yourself?" **If yes, ask:** "How? When? Why?" and assess intent: "Did you think [method] would kill you?" "Did you want to die?" (for youth, intent is as important as lethality of method) **Ask:** "Did you receive medical/psychiatric treatment?"

Symptoms

Depression: "In the past few weeks, have you felt so sad or depressed that it makes it hard to do the things you would like to do?"

Anxiety: "In the past few weeks, have you felt so worried that it makes it hard to do the things you would like to do or that you feel constantly agitated/on-edge?"

Impulsivity/Recklessness: "Do you often act without thinking?"

Hopelessness: "In the past few weeks, have you felt hopeless, like things would never get better?"

Irritability: "In the past few weeks, have you been feeling more irritable or grouchier than usual?"

Substance and alcohol use: "In the past few weeks, have you used drugs or alcohol?" **If yes, ask:** "What? How much?"

Other concerns: "Recently, have there been any concerning changes in how you are thinking or feeling?"

Support & Safety

Support network: "Is there a trusted adult you can talk to? Who? Have you ever seen a therapist/counselor?" **If yes, ask:** "When?"

Safety question: "Do you think you need help to keep yourself safe?" (A "no" response does not indicate that the patient is safe, but a "yes" is a reason to act immediately to ensure safety.)

Reasons for living: "What are some of the reasons you would NOT kill yourself?"

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Say to the parent: "After speaking with your child, I have some concerns about his/her safety. We are glad your child spoke up as this can be a difficult topic to talk about. We would now like to get your perspective."

- "Your child said (reference positive responses on the asQ). Is this something he/she shared with you?"
- "Does your child have a history of suicidal thoughts or behaviors that you're aware of?" **If yes, say:** "Please explain."
- "Does your child seem sad or depressed? Withdrawn? Anxious? Impulsive? Hopeless? Irritable? Reckless?"
- "Are you comfortable keeping your child safe at home?"
- "How will you secure or remove potentially dangerous items (guns, medications, ropes, etc.)?"
- "Is there anything you would like to tell me in private?"

4 Determine disposition

After completing the assessment, choose the appropriate disposition.

❑ **Emergency psychiatric evaluation:** **Patient is at imminent risk for suicide (current suicidal thoughts).** Urgent/STAT page psychiatry; keep patient safe in ED

❑ **Further evaluation of risk is necessary:** Request full mental health/safety evaluation in the ED

❑ **No further evaluation in the ED:** Create safety plan for managing potential future suicidal thoughts and discuss securing or removing potentially dangerous items (medications, guns, ropes, etc.)

❍ Send home with mental health referrals
or
❍ No further intervention is necessary at this time

5 Provide resources to all patients

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Ask: "Did you receive medical/psychiatric treatment?"

Note: Past suicidal behavior is the strongest risk factor for future attempts.

Symptoms Ask the patient about:

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Anxiety: "In the past few weeks, have you felt so worried that it makes it hard to do the things you would like to do or that you feel constantly agitated/on-edge?"

Impulsivity/Recklessness: "Do you often act without thinking?"

Hopelessness: "In the past few weeks, have you felt hopeless, like things would never get better?"

Anhedonia: "In the past few weeks, have you felt like you couldn't enjoy the things that usually make you happy?"

Isolation: "Have you been keeping to yourself more than usual?"

Irritability: "In the past few weeks, have you been feeling more irritable or grouchier than usual?"

Substance and alcohol use: "In the past few weeks, have you used drugs or alcohol?" **If yes, ask:** "What? How much?"

Sleep pattern: "In the past few weeks, have you had trouble falling asleep or found yourself waking up in the middle of the night or earlier than usual in the morning?"

Appetite: "In the past few weeks, have you noticed changes in your appetite? Have you been less hungry or more hungry than usual?"

Other concerns: "Recently, have there been any concerning changes in how you are thinking or feeling?"

Social Support & Stressors

(For all questions below, if patient answers yes, ask them to describe.)

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Family situation: "Are there any conflicts at home that are hard to handle?"

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asQ Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Brief Suicide Safety Assessment

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- "Does your child have a history of suicidal thoughts or behavior that you're aware of?" **If yes, say:** "Please explain."
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  - o Hopeless?"
  - o Irritable?"
  - o Unable to enjoy the things that usually bring him/her pleasure?"
  - o Withdrawn from friends or to be keeping to him/herself?"
- "Have you noticed changes in your child's:
  - o Sleeping pattern?"
  - o Appetite?"
- "Does your child use drugs or alcohol?"
- "Has anyone in your family/close friend network ever tried to kill themselves?"
- "How are potentially dangerous items stored in your home?" (e.g. guns, medications, poisons, etc.)
- "Does your child have a trusted adult they can talk to?" (Normalize that youth are often more comfortable talking to adults who are not their parents)
- "Are you comfortable keeping your child safe at home?"

At the end of the interview, ask the parent/guardian: "Is there anything you would like to tell me in private?"

4 Make a safety plan with the patient

Include the parent/guardian, if possible.

Create a safety plan for managing potential future suicidal thoughts. A safety plan is different than making a "safety contract"; asking the patient to contract for safety is NOT effective and may be dangerous or give a false sense of security.

Say to patient: "Our first priority is keeping you safe. Let's work together to develop a safety plan for when you are having thoughts of suicide."

Examples: "I will tell my mom/coach/teacher." "I will call the hotline." "I will call _____."

Discuss coping strategies to manage stress (such as journal writing, distraction, exercise, self-soothing techniques).

Discuss means restriction (securing or removing lethal means): "Research has shown that limiting access to dangerous objects saves lives. How will you secure or remove these potentially dangerous items (guns, medications, ropes, etc.)?"

Ask safety question: "Do you think you need help to keep yourself safe?" (A "no" response does not indicate that the patient is safe; but a "yes" is a reason to act immediately to ensure safety.)

5 Determine disposition

After completing the assessment, choose the appropriate disposition plan. *If possible, nurse should follow-up with a check-in phone call (within 48 hours) with all patients who screened positive.*

- ❑ **Emergency psychiatric evaluation:** **Patient is at imminent risk for suicide (current suicidal thoughts).** Send to emergency department for extensive mental health evaluation (unless contact with a patient's current mental health provider is possible and alternative safety plan for imminent risk is established).
- ❑ **Further evaluation of risk is necessary:** Review the safety plan and send home with a mental health referral as soon as patient can get an appointment (preferably within 72 hours).
- ❑ **Patient might benefit from non-urgent mental health follow-up:** Review the safety plan and send home with a mental health referral.
- ❑ **No further intervention is necessary at this time.**

For all positive screens, follow up with patient at next appointment.

6 Provide resources to all patients

- **24/7 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) En Español: 1-888-628-9454**
- **24/7 Crisis Text Line: Text "HOME" to 741-741**

asQ
Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Parent/guardian flyer

Your child's health and safety is our #1 priority. New national safety guidelines recommend that we screen children and adolescents for suicide risk.

During today's visit, we will ask you to step out of the room for a few minutes so a nurse can ask your child some additional questions about suicide risk and other safety issues in private.

If we have any concerns about your child's safety, we will let you know.

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for youth. Please note that **asking kids questions about suicide is safe**, and is very important for suicide prevention. Research has shown that asking kids about thoughts of suicide is not harmful and **does not put thoughts or ideas into their heads**.

Please feel free to ask your child's doctor if you have any questions about our patient safety efforts.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

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If we have any concerns about your child's safety, we will let you know.

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for youth. Please note that **asking kids questions about suicide is safe**, and is very important for suicide prevention. Research has shown that asking kids about thoughts of suicide is not harmful and **does not put thoughts or ideas into their heads**.

Please feel free to ask your child's doctor if you have any questions about our patient safety efforts.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

asQ
Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Script for nursing staff

Say to parent/guardian:
"National safety guidelines recommend that we screen all kids for suicide risk. We ask these questions in private, so I am going to ask you to step out of the room for a few minutes. If we have any concerns about your child's safety, we will let you know."

Once parent steps out, say to patient:
"Now I'm going to ask you a few more questions."
Administer the ASQ and any other questions you want to ask in private (e.g. domestic violence).

If patient screens positive, say to patient:
"These are hard things to talk about. Thank you for telling me. I'm going to share your answers with [insert name of MD, PA, NP, or mental health clinician] and he/she will come speak with you."

If patient screens positive, and parent/guardian is awaiting results, say:
"We have some concerns about your child's safety that we would like to further evaluate. It's really important that he/she spoke up about this. I'm going to talk to [insert name of MD, PA, NP, or mental health clinician], and he/she will further evaluate your child for safety."

asQ
Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Script for nursing staff

Say to parent/guardian:
"National safety guidelines recommend that we screen all kids for suicide risk. We ask these questions in private, so I am going to ask you to step out of the room for a few minutes. If we have any concerns about your child's safety, we will let you know."

Once parent steps out, say to patient:
"Now I'm going to ask you a few more questions."
Administer the ASQ and any other questions you want to ask in private (e.g. domestic violence).

If patient screens positive, say to patient:
"I'm so glad you spoke up about this. I'm going to talk to your parent and your medical team. Someone who is trained to talk with kids about suicide is going to come speak with you."

If patient screens positive, say to parent/guardian:
"We have some concerns about your child's safety that we would like to further evaluate. It's really important that he/she spoke up about this. I'm going to talk to your medical team, and someone who is trained to talk with kids about suicide is going to come speak with you and your child."

asQ Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Links to Videos

Nurses: The Importance of Screening

-Video produced by Children's Mercy Kansas City Hospital

http://bcove.video/2pWyvcN

Physicians: The Importance of Screening

-Video featuring doctors Ted Abernathy and Scott Keel

Long version: https://youtu.be/OTjxEZkp4-Y

Short version: https://youtu.be/QaPeu6s__YM

Mayo Clinic: Youth Suicide Prevention - What to Say & Not to Say

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BByqa7bhto&feature=youtu.be

asQ
Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Mental Health Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Spanish/Español: 1-888-628-9454

Crisis Text Line

Text HOME to 741-741

Suicide Prevention Resource Center

www.sprc.org

National Institutes of Health

www.nimh.nih.gov

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

www.samhsa.gov

YOUTH SUICIDE RISK SCREENING PATHWAY

OUTPATIENT PRIMARY CARE & SPECIALTY CLINICS

Presentation to Outpatient Primary Care & Specialty Clinics

Screen all patients ages 10 and above who meet any of the screening criteria.*

Medically able to answer questions?

NO → Screen at next visit

YES → Administer ASQ (ideally separate from parents)

YES on any question 1-4 or refuses to answer?

NO → **NEGATIVE SCREEN** Exit Pathway

YES → **YES to Q5?**

YES → IMMINENT RISK

NO → **Non-acute Positive Screen; Conduct Brief Suicide Safety Assessment (BSSA)**
Detailed instructions about the BSSA can be found at www.nimh.nih.gov/ASQ

BSSA outcome (three possibilities)

*SCREENING CRITERIA

1. New patient
2. Existing patient who has not been screened within the past 30 days
3. Patient had a positive suicide risk screen the last time they were screened
4. Clinical judgement dictates screening
5. Screen 8 and 9 year olds who present with behavioral health chief complaints

Q4 FACTORS TO CONSIDER (past suicidal behavior):

If patient answered "yes" to Q4, and the patient has been screened before, ask: "**Since last visit, have you tried to kill yourself?**" If they answer "no" and they also answered "no" to Q1-3, then consider "Low Risk" choice for action.

If the only "yes" answer is to Q4:

- ☐ Was the attempt more than a year ago?
- ☐ Has the patient received or is currently in mental health care?
- ☐ Is parent aware of past suicidal behavior?
- ☐ Is the suicidal behavior not a current, active concern?

If yes to all these, then consider "Low Risk" choice for action.

LOW RISK
No further evaluation needed at this time

Would benefit from a non-urgent mental health follow-up?

NO → No referral needed at this time

YES → **REFERRAL** to further mental health care as appropriate; Continue medical care; Initiate safety plan for potential future suicidal thoughts

FURTHER EVALUATION NEEDED
Mental health referral needed as soon as possible

Make a safety plan with the patient and parent/guardian to activate as needed.

If mental health evaluation is not available within practice, refer to outpatient mental health clinician.

Schedule a follow up with patient within 72 hours for safety check and to determine whether or not they were able to obtain a mental health appointment

IMMINENT RISK
Patient has acute suicidal thoughts and needs an urgent full mental health evaluation

INITIATE SAFETY PRECAUTIONS[1]
Until able to obtain full mental health evaluation

[1]**SAFETY PRECAUTIONS**
Per institution protocol; keep patient under direct observation, remove dangerous items, provide safety education, etc.

Send to emergency department for full mental health/safety evaluation

SAFETY PLANNING

- Create safety plan for potential future suicidal thoughts, including identifying personal warning signs, coping strategies, social contacts for support, and emergency contacts. Detailed instructions about safety planning can be found at https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/patient-safety-plan-template
- Discuss lethal means safe storage and/or removal with both parent/guardian and child (e.g. ropes, pills, firearms, belts, knives)
- Provide Resources: 24/7 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
- 1- 800-273-TALK (8255), En Español:1-888-628-9454, 24/7 Crisis Text Line: Text "START" to 741-741

If suicide risk becomes more acute, instruct patient/parent/guardian to contact outpatient healthcare provider to evaluate need for ED visit.

Schedule all patients who screen positive for a follow-up visit in 3 days to confirm safety and determine if a mental health care connection has been made. Future follow-up primary care appointments should include re-screening patient, reviewing use of safety plan, and assuring connection with mental health clinician.

asQ Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Parent/guardian flyer

Your child's health and safety is our #1 priority.
New national safety guidelines recommend that we screen kids for suicide risk.

During today's visit, we will ask you to step out of the room for a few minutes so a nurse can ask your child some additional questions about suicide risk and other safety issues in private. If we have any concerns about your child's safety, we will let you know.

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for youth. Please note that **asking kids questions about suicide is safe,** and is very important for suicide prevention. Research has shown that asking kids about thoughts of suicide is not harmful and **does not put thoughts or ideas into their heads.**

Please feel free to ask your child's doctor if you have any questions about our patient safety efforts.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

asQ
Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Information Sheet

Screening Patients for Suicide Risk in Medical Settings

A rapid, psychometrically sound 4-item screening tool for all pediatric and adult patients presenting to the emergency department, inpatient units, & primary care facilities.

BACKGROUND

- "In the U.S., suicide is the 10th leading cause of death across all age groups and is the 2nd leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24.
- In 2018, more than 6,800 American youth killed themselves and over 2 million young people attempt suicide each year in the U.S."
- Early identification and treatment of patients at elevated risk for suicide is a key suicide prevention strategy, yet high risk patients are often not recognized by healthcare providers.
- Recent studies show that the majority of individuals who die by suicide have had contact with a healthcare provider within three months prior to their death.
- Unfortunately, these patients often present solely with physical complaints and infrequently discuss suicidal thoughts and plans unless asked directly.

Suicide in the Hospital

Suicide in the medical setting is one of the most frequent sentinel events reported to the Joint Commission (JC). In the past 20 years, over 1,300 patient deaths by suicide have been reported to the JC from hospitals nationwide.

- Notably, 14% of these suicides occurred in non- behavioral health settings such as general medical units and the emergency department.
- Root cause analyses reveal that the lack of proper "assessment" of suicide risk was the leading cause for these reported suicides.

Ask directly about suicidal thoughts –
EVERY HEALTHCARE PROVIDER CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Screening in Medical Settings

The emergency department, inpatient units, and primary care settings are promising venues for identifying people at risk for suicide.

- Several studies have refuted myths about iatrogenic risk of asking people questions about suicide, such as the worry about "putting ideas into their heads."
- Screening positive for suicide risk on validated instruments may not only be predictive of future suicidal behavior, but may also be a proxy for other serious mental health concerns that require attention.
- Non-psychiatric clinicians in medical settings require brief validated instruments to help detect medical patients at risk for suicide.

Emergency Department (ED)

- For over 1.5 million youth, the ED is their only point of contact with the healthcare system, creating an opportune time to screen for suicide risk.
- Screening in the ED has been found to be feasible (non-disruptive to workflow and acceptable to patients and their families).

Inpatient Units

- Research reveals that the majority of medical inpatients have never been asked about suicide before; however, opinion data indicate that most individuals support screening in inpatient settings.

Primary Care/Inpatient Clinics

- Primary Care Physicians (PCPs) are often the de-facto principal mental healthcare providers.
- Patients may be more comfortable discussing risk-taking activities with PCPs than with specialists.

Suicide Risk Screening Recommendations

- 2007 & 2019 – The JC issued National Patient Safety Goal 15A, requiring suicide risk screening for all patients being treated for mental health concerns in all healthcare settings.
- 2010 & 2016 – The JC issued a Sentinel Event Alert, recommending that all medical patients in hospitals also be screened for suicide risk.

asQ Development

- The ASQ was developed in 3 pediatric Emergency Departments (EDs):
  - Children's National Medical Center, Washington, DC
  - Boston Children's Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts
  - Nationwide Children's Hospital, Columbus, Ohio
- **Sound psychometric properties for youth and adult medical patients***
- For use by non-psychiatric clinicians
- Takes less than 2 minutes to screen
- Positive screen: "yes" to any of the 4 items

asQ
Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Ask the patient:

1. **In the past few weeks, have you wished you were dead?** Yes No
2. **In the past few weeks, have you felt that you or your family would be better off if you were dead?** Yes No
3. **In the past week, have you been having thoughts about killing yourself?** Yes No
4. **Have you ever tried to kill yourself?** Yes No

   If yes, how? _____ When? _____

If the patient answers yes to any of the above, ask the following question:

5. **Are you having thoughts of killing yourself right now?** Yes No

   If yes, please describe: _____

National Institute of Mental Health

For description of study:
*Horowitz LM, Bridge JA, Teach SJ, Ballard E, Klima J, Rosenstein DL, Wharff EA, Ginnis K, Cannon E, Joshi P, Pao M. Ask Suicide-Screening Questions (ASQ): A Brief Instrument for the Pediatric Emergency Department. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2012;166(12):1170-1176. Horowitz LM, Snyder DJ, Boudreaux ED, He J-P, Harrington CJ, Cai J, Claassen CA, Salhany JE, Dao T, Chaves JF, Jobes DA, Merikangas KR, Bridge JA, Pao M, Validation of the Ask Suicide-Screening Questions (ASQ) for Adult Medical Inpatients: A Brief Tool for All Ages. Psychosomatics. 2020. doi:10.1016/j.psym.2020.04.008.

After administering the asQ

- If patient answers "No" to all questions 1 through 4, screening is complete (not necessary to ask question #5). No intervention is necessary *(*Note: Clinical judgment can always override a negative screen).*
- **If patient answers "Yes" to any of questions 1 through 4, or refuses to answer, they are considered a positive screen. Ask question #5 to assess acuity:**
  - ☐ **"Yes"** to question #5 = **acute positive screen** (imminent risk identified)
    - **Patient requires a STAT safety/full mental health evaluation. Patient cannot leave until evaluated for safety.**
    - Keep patient in sight. Remove all dangerous objects from room. Alert physician or clinician responsible for patient's care.
  - ☐ **"No"** to question #5 = **non-acute positive screen** (potential risk identified)
    - **Patient requires a brief suicide safety assessment to determine if a full mental health evaluation is needed. Patient cannot leave until evaluated for safety.**
    - Alert physician or clinician responsible for patient's care.

asQ
- For patients of all ages
- Positive screen: "Yes" to any question
- Public domain tool, free of charge
- Available in multiple languages

For more information contact:

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Boston Children's Hospital, Harvard Medical School

asQ Suicide Risk Screening Tool

Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Ask the patient:

1. **In the past few weeks, have you wished you were dead?** ❍ Yes ❍ No
2. **In the past few weeks, have you felt that you or your family would be better off if you were dead?** ❍ Yes ❍ No
3. **In the past week, have you been having thoughts about killing yourself?** ❍ Yes ❍ No
4. **Have you ever tried to kill yourself?** ❍ Yes ❍ No

   If yes, how? _____

   _____

   _____

   When? _____

   _____

If the patient answers **Yes** *to any of the above, ask the following acuity question:*

5. **Are you having thoughts of killing yourself right now?** ❍ Yes ❍ No

   If yes, please describe: _____

Next steps:

- If patient answers "No" to all questions 1 through 4, screening is complete (not necessary to ask question #5). No intervention is necessary *(*Note: Clinical judgment can always override a negative screen).*
- **If patient answers "Yes" to any of questions 1 through 4, or refuses to answer, they are considered a positive screen. Ask question #5 to assess acuity:**
  - ☐ **"Yes"** to question #5 = **acute positive screen** (imminent risk identified)
    - **Patient requires a STAT safety/full mental health evaluation. Patient cannot leave until evaluated for safety.**
    - Keep patient in sight. Remove all dangerous objects from room. Alert physician or clinician responsible for patient's care.
  - ☐ **"No"** to question #5 = **non-acute positive screen** (potential risk identified)
    - **Patient requires a brief suicide safety assessment to determine if a full mental health evaluation is needed. If a patient (or parent/guardian) refuses the brief assessment, this should be treated as an "against medical advice" (AMA) discharge.**
    - Alert physician or clinician responsible for patient's care.

Provide resources to all patients

- 24/7 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 988
- 24/7 Crisis Text Line: Text "HOME" to 741741

NIMH TOOLKIT: YOUTH OUTPATIENT

asQ Brief Suicide Safety Assessment

Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

What to do when a pediatric patient screens positive for suicide risk:

- Use after a patient **(8 - 24 years)** screens positive for suicide risk on the asQ
- Assessment guide for mental health clinicians, MDs, NPs, or PAs
- Prompts help determine disposition

1 Praise patient *for discussing their thoughts*

"I'm here to follow up on your responses to the suicide risk screening questions. These are hard things to talk about. Thank you for telling us. I need to ask you a few more questions."

2 Assess the patient

(If possible, assess patient alone depending on developmental considerations and parent willingness.)

Review patient's responses from the asQ

Frequency of suicidal thoughts

Determine if and how often the patient is having suicidal thoughts.

Ask the patient: "In the past few weeks, have you been thinking about killing yourself?" **If yes, ask:** "How often?" (once or twice a day, several times a day, a couple times a week, etc.) "When was the last time you had these thoughts?"

"Are you having thoughts of killing yourself right now?" **(If "yes," patient requires an urgent/ STAT mental health evaluation and cannot be left alone. A positive response indicates imminent risk.)**

Suicide plan

Assess if the patient has a suicide plan, regardless of how they responded to any other questions (ask about method and access to means).

Ask the patient: "Do you have a plan to kill yourself?" **If yes, ask:** "What is your plan?" **If no plan, ask:** "If you were going to kill yourself, how would you do it?"

Note: If the patient has a very detailed plan, this is more concerning than if they haven't thought it through in great detail. If the plan is feasible (e.g., if they are planning to use pills and have access to pills), this is a reason for greater concern and removing or securing dangerous items (medications, guns, ropes, etc.).

Past behavior

Evaluate past self-injury and history of suicide attempts (method, estimated date, intent).

Ask the patient: "Have you ever tried to hurt yourself?" "Have you ever tried to kill yourself?"

If yes, ask: "How? When? Why?" and assess intent: "Did you think [method] would kill you?" "Did you want to die?" (for youth, intent is as important as lethality of method)
Ask: "Did you receive medical/psychiatric treatment?"

Note: Past suicidal behavior is the strongest risk factor for future attempts.

Symptoms Ask the patient about:

Depression: "In the past few weeks, have you felt so sad or depressed that it makes it hard to do the things you would like to do?"

Anxiety: "In the past few weeks, have you felt so worried that it makes it hard to do the things you would like to do or that you feel constantly agitated/on-edge?"

Impulsivity/Recklessness: "Do you often act without thinking?"

Hopelessness: "In the past few weeks, have you felt hopeless, like things would never get better?"

Anhedonia: "In the past few weeks, have you felt like you couldn't enjoy the things that usually make you happy?"

Isolation: "Have you been keeping to yourself more than usual?"

Irritability: "In the past few weeks, have you been feeling more irritable or grouchier than usual?"

Substance and alcohol use: "In the past few weeks, have you used drugs or alcohol?" **If yes, ask:** "What? How much?"

Sleep pattern: "In the past few weeks, have you had trouble falling asleep or found yourself waking up in the middle of the night or earlier than usual in the morning?"

Appetite: "In the past few weeks, have you noticed changes in your appetite? Have you been less hungry or more hungry than usual?"

Other concerns: "Recently, have there been any concerning changes in how you are thinking or feeling?"

Social Support & Stressors

(For all questions below, if patient answers yes, ask them to describe.)

Support network: "Is there a trusted adult you can talk to? Who? Have you ever seen a therapist/counselor?" **If yes, ask:** "When?"

Family situation: "Are there any conflicts at home that are hard to handle?"

School functioning: "Do you ever feel so much pressure at school (academic or social) that you can't take it anymore?"

Bullying: "Are you being bullied or picked on?"

Suicide contagion: "Do you know anyone who has killed themselves or tried to kill themselves?"

Reasons for living: "What are some of the reasons you would NOT kill yourself?"

asQ Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Brief Suicide Safety Assessment

3 Interview patient & parent/guardian together

If patient is ≥ 18 years, ask patient's permission for parent/guardian to join.

Say to the parent: "After speaking with your child, I have some concerns about his/her safety. We are glad your child spoke up as this can be a difficult topic to talk about. We would now like to get your perspective."

- "Your child said… (reference positive responses on the asQ). Is this something he/she shared with you?"
- "Does your child have a history of suicidal thoughts or behavior that you're aware of?" **If yes, say:** "Please explain."
- "Does your child seem:
  - o Sad or depressed?"
  - o Anxious?"
  - o Impulsive? Reckless?"
  - o Hopeless?"
  - o Irritable?"
  - o Unable to enjoy the things that usually bring him/her pleasure?"
  - o Withdrawn from friends or to be keeping to him/herself?"
- "Have you noticed changes in your child's:
  - o Sleeping pattern?"
  - o Appetite?"
- "Does your child use drugs or alcohol?"
- "Has anyone in your family/close friend network ever tried to kill themselves?"
- "How are potentially dangerous items stored in your home?" (e.g. guns, medications, poisons, etc.)
- "Does your child have a trusted adult they can talk to?" (Normalize that youth are often more comfortable talking to adults who are not their parents)
- "Are you comfortable keeping your child safe at home?"

At the end of the interview, ask the parent/guardian: "Is there anything you would like to tell me in private?"

4 Make a safety plan with the patient

Include the parent/guardian, if possible.

Create a safety plan for managing potential future suicidal thoughts. A safety plan is different than making a "safety contract"; asking the patient to contract for safety is NOT effective and may be dangerous or give a false sense of security.

Say to patient: "Our first priority is keeping you safe. Let's work together to develop a safety plan for when you are having thoughts of suicide."

Examples: "I will tell my mom/coach/teacher." "I will call the hotline." "I will call _____."

Discuss coping strategies to manage stress (such as journal writing, distraction, exercise, self-soothing techniques).

Discuss means restriction (securing or removing lethal means): "Research has shown that limiting access to dangerous objects saves lives. How will you secure or remove these potentially dangerous items (guns, medications, ropes, etc.)?"

Ask safety question: "Do you think you need help to keep yourself safe?" (A "no" response does not indicate that the patient is safe; but a "yes" is a reason to act immediately to ensure safety.)

5 Determine disposition

After completing the assessment, choose the appropriate disposition plan. *If possible, nurse should follow-up with a check-in phone call (within 48 hours) with all patients who screened positive.*

- ❑ **Emergency psychiatric evaluation:** **Patient is at imminent risk for suicide (current suicidal thoughts).** Send to emergency department for extensive mental health evaluation (unless contact with a patient's current mental health provider is possible and alternative safety plan for imminent risk is established).
- ❑ **Further evaluation of risk is necessary:** Review the safety plan and send home with a mental health referral as soon as patient can get an appointment (preferably within 72 hours).
- ❑ **Patient might benefit from non-urgent mental health follow-up:** Review the safety plan and send home with a mental health referral.
- ❑ **No further intervention is necessary at this time.**

For all positive screens, follow up with patient at next appointment.

6 Provide resources to all patients

- **24/7 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) En Español: 1-888-628-9454**
- **24/7 Crisis Text Line: Text "HOME" to 741-741**

asQ Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Brief Suicide Safety Assessment

- Use after a patient **(8 - 24 years)** screens positive for suicide risk on the asQ
- Assessment guide for mental health clinicians, MDs, NPs, or PAs
- Prompts help determine disposition

What to do when a pediatric patient screens positive for suicide risk:

WORKSHEET

Patient name:_____ **DOB:** _____

Interviewer name: _____ **Assessment date:**_____

1 Praise patient *for discussing their thoughts*

"I'm here to follow up on your responses to the suicide risk screening questions. These are hard things to talk about. Thank you for telling us. I need to ask you a few more questions."

2 Assess the patient Review patient's responses from the asQ

❑ Frequency of suicidal thoughts

(If possible, assess patient alone depending on developmental considerations and parent willingness.)
Determine if and how often the patient is having suicidal thoughts.
Ask the patient: "In the past few weeks, have you been thinking about killing yourself?"
If yes, ask: "How often?"_____(once or twice a day, several times a day, a couple times a week, etc.)
"When was the last time you had these thoughts?" _____

❑ "Are you having thoughts of killing yourself right now?" **(If "yes," patient requires an urgent/ STAT mental health evaluation and cannot be left alone. A positive response indicates imminent risk.)**

❑ Suicide plan

Assess if the patient has a suicide plan, regardless of how they responded to any other questions (ask about method and access to means). **Ask the patient:** "Do you have a plan to kill yourself?" **If yes, ask:** "What is your plan?" **If no plan, ask:** "If you were going to kill yourself, how would you do it?"

Note: If the patient has a very detailed plan, this is more concerning than if they haven't thought it through in great detail. If the plan is feasible (e.g., if they are planning to use pills and have access to pills), this is a reason for greater concern and removing or securing dangerous items (medications, guns, ropes, etc.).

❑ Past behavior

Evaluate past self-injury and history of suicide attempts (method, estimated date, intent).
Ask the patient: "Have you ever tried to hurt yourself?" "Have you ever tried to kill yourself?"
If yes, ask: "How? When? Why?" and assess intent: "Did you think [method] would kill you?"
"Did you want to die?" (for youth, intent is as important as lethality of method)
Ask: "Did you receive medical/psychiatric treatment?"

Note: Past suicidal behavior is the strongest risk factor for future attempts.

asQ Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Brief Suicide Safety Assessment

WORKSHEET

2 Assess the patient Review patient's responses from the asQ

❑ Symptoms Ask the patient about:

- ❑ **Depression:** "In the past few weeks, have you felt so sad or depressed that it makes it hard to do the things you would like to do?"
- ❑ **Anxiety:** "In the past few weeks, have you felt so worried that it makes it hard to do the things you would like to do or that you feel constantly agitated/on-edge?"
- ❑ **Impulsivity/Recklessness:** "Do you often act without thinking?"
- ❑ **Hopelessness:** "In the past few weeks, have you felt hopeless, like things would never get better?"
- ❑ **Anhedonia:** "In the past few weeks, have you felt like you couldn't enjoy the things that usually make you happy?"
- ❑ **Isolation:** "Have you been keeping to yourself more than usual?"
- ❑ **Irritability:** "In the past few weeks, have you been feeling more irritable or grouchier than usual?"
- ❑ **Substance and alcohol use:** "In the past few weeks, have you used drugs or alcohol?" **If yes, ask:** "What? How much?"
- ❑ **Sleep pattern:** "In the past few weeks, have you had trouble falling asleep or found yourself waking up in the middle of the night or earlier than usual in the morning?"
- ❑ **Appetite:** "In the past few weeks, have you noticed changes in your appetite? Have you been less hungry or more hungry than usual?"
- ❑ **Other concerns:** "Recently, have there been any concerning changes in how you are thinking or feeling?"

❑ Social Support & Stressors *(For all questions below, if patient answers yes, ask them to describe.)*

- ❑ **Support network:** "Is there a trusted adult you can talk to? Who? Have you ever seen a therapist/counselor?" **If yes, ask:** "When?"
- ❑ **Family situation:** "Are there any conflicts at home that are hard to handle?"
- ❑ **School functioning:** "Do you ever feel so much pressure at school (academic or social) that you can't take it anymore?"
- ❑ **Bullying:** "Are you being bullied or picked on?"
- ❑ **Suicide contagion:** "Do you know anyone who has killed themselves or tried to kill themselves?"
- ❑ **Reasons for living:** "What are some of the reasons you would NOT kill yourself?"

asQ Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Brief Suicide Safety Assessment

WORKSHEET

3 Interview patient & parent/guardian together

If patient is ≥ 18 years, ask patient's permission for parent/guardian to join. Say to the parent: "After speaking with your child, I have some concerns about his/her safety. We are glad your child spoke up as this can be a difficult topic to talk about. We would now like to get your perspective."

"Your child said… (reference positive responses on the asQ). Is this something he/she shared with you?"

"Does your child have a history of suicidal thoughts or behavior that you're aware of?" **If yes, say:** "Please explain."

"Does your child seem:

- ❑ Sad or depressed?" ❑ Anxious?" ❑ Impulsive? ❑ Reckless?" ❑ Hopeless?" ❑ Irritable?"
- ❑ Unable to enjoy the things that usually bring him/her pleasure?"
- ❑ Withdrawn from friends or to be keeping to him/herself?"

"Have you noticed changes in your child's: ❑ Sleeping pattern?" ❑ Appetite?"

"Does your child use drugs or alcohol?" ❑ Yes ❑ No

"Has anyone in your family/close friend network ever tried to kill themselves?" ❑ Yes ❑ No

"How are potentially dangerous items stored in your home?" (e.g. guns, medications, poisons, etc.)

_____

"Does your child have a trusted adult they can talk to?" (Normalize that youth are often more comfortable talking to adults who are not their parents) ❑ Yes ❑ No

"Are you comfortable keeping your child safe at home?" ❑ Yes ❑ No

_____

_____

At the end of the interview, ask the parent/guardian: "Is there anything you would like to tell me in private?"

_____

_____

4 Make a safety plan with the patient

Include the parent/guardian, if possible.

Create a safety plan for managing potential future suicidal thoughts. A safety plan is different than making a "safety contract"; asking the patient to contract for safety is NOT effective and may be dangerous or give a false sense of security. **Say to patient:** "Our first priority is keeping you safe. Let's work together to develop a safety plan for when you are having thoughts of suicide." Examples: "I will tell my mom/coach/teacher." "I will call the hotline." "I will call_____."

- ❑ **Discuss coping strategies** to manage stress (such as journal writing, distraction, exercise, self-soothing techniques).
- ❑ **Discuss means restriction** (securing or removing lethal means): "Research has shown that limiting access to dangerous objects saves lives. How will you secure or remove these potentially dangerous items (guns, medications, ropes, etc.)?"
- ❑ **Ask safety question:** "Do you think you need help to keep yourself safe?" (A "no" response does not indicate that the patient is safe; but a "yes" is a reason to act immediately to ensure safety.)

Comments _____

asQ Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

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5 Determine disposition

For all positive screens, follow up with patient at next appointment.

After completing the assessment, choose the appropriate disposition plan. *If possible, nurse should follow-up with a check-in phone call (within 48 hours) with all patients who screened positive.*

- ❑ **Emergency psychiatric evaluation:** **Patient is at imminent risk for suicide (current suicidal thoughts).** Send to emergency department for extensive mental health evaluation (unless contact with a patient's current mental health provider is possible and alternative safety plan for imminent risk is established).
- ❑ **Further evaluation of risk is necessary:** Review the safety plan and send home with a mental health referral as soon as patient can get an appointment (preferably within 72 hours).
- ❑ **Patient might benefit from non-urgent mental health follow-up:** Review the safety plan and send home with a mental health referral.
- ❑ **No further intervention is necessary at this time.**

Comments _____

6 Provide resources to all patients

- **24/7 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) En Español: 1-888-628-9454**
- **24/7 Crisis Text Line: Text "HOME" to 741-741**

PHQ-9 modified for Adolescents (PHQ-A)

Name: _____ **Clinician:** _____ **Date:** _____

Instructions: How often have you been bothered by each of the following symptoms during the past **two weeks**? For each symptom put an **"X"** in the box beneath the answer that best describes how you have been feeling.

	(0) Not at all	(1) Several days	(2) More than half the days	(3) Nearly every day
1. Feeling down, depressed, irritable, or hopeless?				
2. Little interest or pleasure in doing things?				
3. Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much?				
4. Poor appetite, weight loss, or overeating?				
5. Feeling tired, or having little energy?				
6. Feeling bad about yourself – or feeling that you are a failure, or that you have let yourself or your family down?				
7. Trouble concentrating on things like school work, reading, or watching TV?				
8. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed? Or the opposite – being so fidgety or restless that you were moving around a lot more than usual?				
9. Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of hurting yourself in some way?				

In the **past year** have you felt depressed or sad most days, even if you felt okay sometimes?

☐Yes ☐No

If you are experiencing any of the problems on this form, how **difficult** have these problems made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home or get along with other people?

☐Not difficult at all ☐Somewhat difficult ☐Very difficult ☐Extremely difficult

Office use only: **Severity score:** _____

Johnson JG, Harris ES, Spitzer RL, Williams JB. The patient health questionnaire for adolescents: validation of an instrument for the assessment of mental disorders among adolescent primary care patients. J Adolesc Health. 2002;30(3):196-204. doi:10.1016/s1054-139x(01)00333-0

asQ
Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Ask the patient:

(1) In the past few weeks, have you wished you were dead? YES NO

(2) In the past few weeks, have you felt that you or your family would be better off if you were dead? YES NO

(3) In the past week, have you been having thoughts about killing yourself? YES NO

(4) Have you ever tried to kill yourself? YES NO

If yes, how? _____ When? _____

If the patient answers yes to any of the above, ask the following question:

(5) Are you having thoughts of killing yourself right now? YES NO

If yes, please describe: _____

Horowitz LM, Bridge JA, Teach SJ, et al. Ask Suicide-Screening Questions (ASQ): a brief instrument for the pediatric emergency department. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2012;166(12):1170-1176. doi:10.1001/archpediatrics.2012.1276

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asQ Ask Suicide-Screening Questions

Links to Videos

Nurses: The Importance of Screening

-Video produced by Children's Mercy Kansas City Hospital

http://bcove.video/2pWyvcN

Physicians: The Importance of Screening

-Video featuring doctors Ted Abernathy and Scott Keel Long

version: https://youtu.be/OTjxEZkp4-Y

Short version: https://youtu.be/QaPeu6s__YM

Mayo Clinic: Youth Suicide Prevention - What to Say & Not to Say

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BByqa7bhto&feature=youtu.be

Caring Messages

We asked over 1000 people. Here are the top results.
Please use and adapt these any way you like for those you care about.

Dear you. Yes you! Remember that one time you felt connected to the universe. No one can take that away from you. It's yours.

— Ursula Whiteside

When things have been rough, I think of things or touch items that give me a sense of pride, joy, encouragement, or hope. Sometimes memories that remind me I'm okay and things often change quickly. I don't know if that would help for you.

— Daniel DeBrule

You may feel you don't matter and see no future. But you do. Yet it is there - please let it evolve because the world needs you and your contribution.

— Kristine Laaninen

Please don't stop fighting. You are being prepared for something far greater than this moment.

— Breanna Laughlin

Just like winter, the long dark days slowly get shorter until there is more light than dark. Please believe this while you wait to see the light.

— Debbie Reisert

I was trapped in the Dark Place. Drowning in it. Lost in the fog. Sinking in the quicksand. Unable to get out. Slowly, slowly, slowly: I am. You might be able to too. Just get through today.

— Amy Dietz

I've found this Franklin D. Roosevelt quote helpful, "A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor." We'll be prepared for something bigger.

— Ursula Whiteside

You're a human being, not a human doing. Your worth is intrinsic, and your strength is likely greater than you think it is.

— John Brown

If I could fill the world with more people who feel the world, I would. Understanding suffering is a heavy burden to carry at times for sure - but you are never a burden for feeling it.

— Nina Smith

This is part of a poem from Jane Hirschfield, "The world asks of us only the strength we have and we give it. Then it asks more, and we give it."

— Sara Smucker Barnwell

Things can be completely dark for some of us somteimes. I don't know where you are at today, or if this message can shine through, but I'm here sending you a tiny bit of light - a light beam.

— Ursula Whiteside

Live. If only, at times, because it is an act of radical defiance.

— Ursula Whiteside

Your story doesn't have to end in this storm. Please stay for the calm after the storm. The possibility of a rainbow. Maybe not tomorrow or next week, but you can weather this.

— Breanna Laughlin

I've been there - that place where you'd do anything to stop the pain. It's a dark, suffocating birth canal to a better place...Life changes can suck; but nothing ever changing sucks more.

— Kathleen Bartholomew

This is a favorite line of mine from Desiderata, "You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here."

— Andy Bogart

Wanting to be rid of pain is the most human of impulses. You are brave to hold that. You are worth so much. Because you exist. And breathe air. Contingent on nothing else.

— Sara Smucker Barnwell

now matters now

NowMattersNow.org