## Suicide Risk and Protective Factors

**Risk factors:** associated (by empirical study) with an increased occurrence of suicidal behavior (The list is neither prioritized nor exhaustive)

### Individual
- Mental disorders
  - Depression
  - Schizophrenia
  - Anxiety disorders
  - Borderline personality disorder
- "States of mind"
  - Hopelessness
  - Impulsivity
  - Low self-esteem
  - Psychic pain
- Behaviors
  - Social withdrawal
  - Alcohol or drug abuse
  - Aggressive tendencies and/or history of violent behavior
  - Previous suicide attempt
- Older age
- Race
  - White
  - Native American
- History
  - Previous psychiatric treatment
  - History of trauma or abuse
  - Some major physical illnesses; severe impairment of physical health
- Suicidal ideation
- A&D
- Access to means (firearms, poisons, etc.)

### Peer/Family
- History of interpersonal violence, conflict, abuse, bullying
- Family history of substance abuse
- Social isolation: low or lack of social support
- Exposure to suicide
- Stigma associated with help-seeking behavior
- Barriers to accessing health care, especially mental health and substance abuse treatment
- No longer married
- Loss of close attachment/relationship (divorce, death of spouse, etc.)
- Access to means (firearms, poisons, etc.)

### Community
- Access to lethal means (firearms, poisons, etc.)
- Unemployment or financial loss
- Relational or social loss/humiliation
- Local clusters of suicide that have a contagious influence
- Barriers to health care and mental health care
- Stigma
- Exposure to suicide (media, memorials, etc.)

### Society
- Certain cultural and/or religious beliefs (e.g., suicide is a noble resolution of a personal dilemma)
- Societal breakdown
- Residence in the western U.S.
- Rural/remote area
- Cultural values and attitudes
- Media influence
- Alcohol and drug misuse and/or abuse
- Economic instability
- Peer values
### Protective factors: associated (by empirical study) with a decreased occurrence of suicidal behavior (The list is neither prioritized nor exhaustive)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Peer/Family</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and/or support self-preservation</td>
<td>• Family cohesion, especially important for youth</td>
<td>• Access to health care and mental health care</td>
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<td>• Support through ongoing health and mental health care relationships</td>
<td>• Sense of social support</td>
<td>• Access to substance abuse treatment</td>
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<td>• Coping/problem-solving skills</td>
<td>• Interconnectedness</td>
<td>• Social support, close relationships, caring family members, participation and bond with school or business</td>
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<td>• Resiliency, self-esteem, direction, mission, determination, perseverance, optimism, empathy</td>
<td>• Married and/or a parent</td>
<td>• Respect for help-seeking behavior</td>
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<td>• Intellectual competence, especially in youth</td>
<td>• Access to comprehensive health care</td>
<td>• Skills to recognize and respond to signs of risk</td>
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<td>• Reasons for living</td>
<td>• Membership in a Twelve Step program if in recovery from a substance abuse problem or addiction</td>
<td>• Access to Twelve Step programs and other support groups, such as Al-Anon</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sense of connectedness</td>
<td>• Membership in Al-Anon or other support groups</td>
<td>Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sobriety</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Urban/suburban area</td>
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<td>• Membership in a Twelve Step program if in recovery from a substance abuse problem or addiction</td>
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<td>• Access to health care and mental health care</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Cultural values affirming life</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Media influence</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Resource Sheet 1-1, Strategic Planning For Suicide Prevention: Core Community Competencies Workshop, Suicide Prevention Resource Center

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