

Instructions for Using the Life Promotion Plan

The Reasons for Living Inventory should be completed by the youth as a self-report. If they request, a trusted staff person can sit with them as they respond to the questions, especially if some of the questions are difficult to read or answer. Following the completion of the Reasons for Living Inventory, the Life Promotion Plan should be completed. The Life Promotion Plan should always be created collaboratively with the youth and a trusted staff person. While there are specific steps involved in the Life Promotion Plan, it should be created through a conversational approach. It is okay to complete the steps out of order and to flow with the conversation.

The Life Promotion Plan is an intervention—not a form to complete. It is the conversation and exploration through creation of the plan that supports insight and awareness.

Suicidal thoughts come and go – the intention of the Life Promotion Plan is to increase coping skills and resources to not act on the thoughts when they come. When completing the Life Promotion Plan, we should return to this question: Will this be helpful to not act on the thoughts when they come?

Throughout the development of the plan, we should focus on getting as specific as possible. The more specific the information, the better understanding we have of the person's experience and what might be most helpful for them in those moments.

Steps involved in the plan:

1. Things that may lead to suicidal thoughts or behaviours

The first step in the plan is to identify precipitating factors and situations that are likely to trigger suicidal thinking. Knowing the types of situations and feelings that might trigger suicidal thinking or behaviours for each youth can be helpful. We often assume that suicide is a mental health issue – sometimes it is, but often it is far more complex. We need to remain curious and open to other possibilities. The first step of the plan is to explore the situations, thoughts, feelings that might trigger suicidal thinking. This could be receiving a disappointment of some kind, lack of basic needs or resources, rejection from family, no one responding to their bids for connection, etc. When we review the plan with youth, we need to support them in identifying the situations or factors that are likely to contribute to suicidal thinking.

2. Warning signs that I might notice or others might notice when I have these thoughts or feelings (thinking, imagining, feeling, doing, saying)

This step of the plan encourages exploration of the signs that indicate distress and a possible crisis point. There are a number of tools that can be used to support this process, and it is important to review all possible signs, including physical, behavioural, emotional, and cognitive signs of distress. Sometimes people have difficulty tapping into their experience, so they may require others to point out what they notice from an outsider's perspective. We need to offer these observations tentatively and ask if it fits for the person's experience. For example: "I have noticed in the past that sometimes your face gets red when you are upset. Does this fit for you?"

This should include early and late warning signs of a crisis that are unique to the person. If we know some of the early warning signs unique to the person, we may be able to provide a preventative intervention to address the underlying need and reduce the likelihood that it progresses to a crisis situation.

3. What I most want and need when I feel this way or start thinking these thoughts

This step in the process explores the underlying need and motivations for suicidal thoughts and behaviours. What is the core need? What is the function or purpose the behaviour is seeking to address? Suicidal thinking could serve a variety of functions, including: providing a sense of control, providing an escape from unbearable pain, providing a way to communicate feelings, getting people to do what they want, etc. In this step, we can support youth to explore the function of the suicidal thinking and behaviours and what they most want and need when they feel this way.

A few things to remember:

Behaviour always makes sense when we take time to understand it. Understanding behaviour means recognizing the function/purpose that it serves and the need the behaviour helps the person meet.

Another important consideration is that it is likely that if we address the core need regularly and proactively, suicidal thoughts may diminish. This is certainly not a magic solution—but understanding the core need helps us think about options for responding beyond referring for mental health services. There are many ways to meet core needs that may drive suicidal thinking and behaviours, and we can build plans and approach the relationship to proactively meet the core needs that play a pivotal role in suicidal thinking and behaviours.

4. What works for me when I feel this way or think these thoughts (see the Safety Plan Wheel too)

This step encourages exploration of what works for the youth when they feel this way. This section should include specific actions to take. The more specific and robust the list, the better!

This may include:

- Distraction activities
- Grounding techniques
- Staff support preferences
- Peer support preferences

Include coping strategies we might consider “healthy” as well as those we might consider “unhealthy”. The strategies don’t have to be pretty—remember that the goal is harm reduction. Remember the goal is to think about safety planning from a harm reduction approach. The goal in this section is to identify all possible options that may be helpful when staff are responding to a crisis situation. Include as many strategies and ideas as possible to support greater access to choice and options in the moments of a crisis.

- Contact the crisis line for further support and unlimited availability, especially if staff need to step away (staff could support youth in connecting initially)
- Drinking water
- Drumming
- Playlist of music (curate beforehand songs that are helpful)
- Scream
- Cry
- Smudge
- Sweatlodge
- Prayer
- Going through values
- Distractions like jokes, games, activities
- Walking
- Tapping
- Fresh air
- Going outside (with or without another person)
- Doing something in nature
- Going through reasons for living (Mental Wellness Plan)
- Language
- This may also include accompanying the youth to the hospital when needed or requested by the youth

As we add strategies, we should also ask:

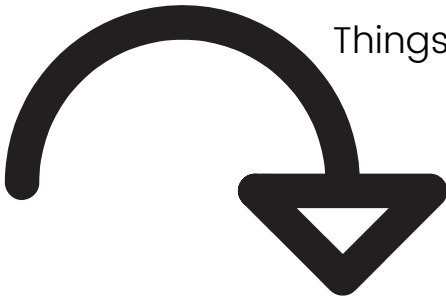
How likely do you think you would be to use this during a crisis?

What might get in the way of using this?

5. Ways to make my environment safe when I feel this way or have these thoughts

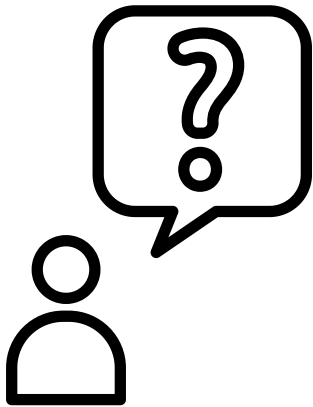
The goal of this step is making the environment safe. This section should include non-negotiables for safety in the immediate (removing access to means, not being left alone, etc.).

Throughout the plan, the language should reflect the language the youth feels most comfortable using. Include any information about language for communicating needs and talking about feelings/experiences.



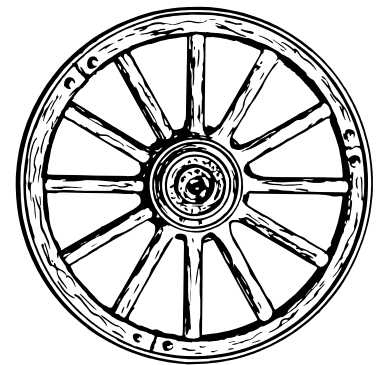
Things that may lead to suicidal thoughts or behaviours:

Warning signs that I might notice or others might notice when I have these thoughts or feelings (thinking, imagining, feeling, doing, saying):



What I most want and need when I feel this way or start thinking these thoughts:

What works for me when I feel this way or think these thoughts (see the Safety Plan Wheel too):



Ways to make my environment safe when I feel this way or have these thoughts: