

The Reasons for Living Inventory

Background Information

Mainstream suicide risk assessment focuses on:

- Risk factors
- Protective factors
- Specificity of the plan and risk of imminent harm

The primary goal of mainstream suicide risk assessment is to predict level of risk and determine if immediate intervention is warranted. Rarely are suicide risk assessment tools used proactively to identify needs or gaps. They are used for immediate detection of risk so that the risk can be managed; they are not designed to promote life. We decided to address this and shift our focus.

The Reasons for Living Inventory is a resource that we adapted to support life promotion. A bit of background about the Reasons for Living Inventory:

- The Reasons for Living Inventory (RFL) was originally created by Dr. Marsha Linehan, a psychologist with lived experience who also created Dialectical Behavioural Therapy.
- The RFL emphasizes protective factors and provides a foundation for intervention focused on enhancing protective factors believed to buffer against suicidal thoughts (Allen et al., 2019).
- It also aligns well with a relational worldview, a focus on strengths (Crofoot Graham, 2002), and cultural norms of respect for people (not asking inappropriate or intrusive questions), respect for the power of words, and promotion of protective factors instead of addressing risk factors (Allen et al., 2019).
- The RFL and the version created for youth both have strong clinical utility and validity in assessing for suicide risk (Osman, 1996). It is effectively able to identify people who may be at risk for suicide.
- However, cultural adaptations of the RFL have been limited to validation of language translations, not adaptations of constructs or more in-depth cultural modifications (Chu et al., 2017).
- We set out to modify the Reasons for Living Inventory—we drew on feedback from youth and the literature on the RFL and adaptations.
- Emerging research suggests that imagery is important in the experience of suicidal thinking for youth (Lawrence et al., 2021). Suicidal thinking might include not just explicit thoughts but also mental imagery. We included future oriented and optimistic imagery in the RFL.
- We took the modified Reasons for Living Inventory to youth and Elders for additional feedback, and we made revisions based on the input.

Using the Reasons for Living Inventory

We have developed a plan for incorporating the Reasons for Living Inventory into practice to support preventative life promotion conversations and to better plan for support in crisis

situations. The RFL should never be used in immediate crisis situations—remember that the part of the brain required to complete the RFL is not accessible during a crisis. Rather, it should be used as a preventive intervention for life promotion, to support safety planning, and to connect and support stabilization and reorientation to life promotion after a crisis intervention.

The RFL can help focus attention on elements that keep people connected to life and support identification of areas that may need attention and building up through longer term intervention.

A few notes on utilization from the literature:

- Balance among all areas is key (Crofoot Graham, 2002)
- Some reasons for living are stronger for keeping people connected to life and preventing suicide
- Positive expectations for the future (optimism) and beliefs in one's self-efficacy to cope strongly differentiate suicidal and non-suicidal adolescents (survival and coping beliefs) (Pinto et al., 1998)
- Low scores in significant areas (family support) signify important areas to build up through the wellness plan, while high scores in others (fear of death or fear of social disapproval) point to reasons for living that may not offer the intrinsic connection to life needed for long-term safety
- Crofoot Graham also includes a visual of how the questions in the RFL-A map onto a medicine wheel with the four identified dimensions

We recognize that for some people, responding to questions like this may remind them of things that they don't have currently. While these may not be reasons for living in the present, we can support people in their hope for a better future. Sometimes it can be hard to hold onto hope—hope can feel heavy to carry, especially if change feels impossible. It's important to validate the experience—being witnessed in our pain and understood through our experiences can be incredibly powerful. We want to emphasize and support connection to life and engage in conversations that are life affirming—yet first we often have to acknowledge the ways in which people may not feel connected to life. When people aren't ready to carry hope themselves, staff can provide assistance to hold onto the hope.

“Hope of those things kept me going” Elder Patrick

In order to use the tool effectively, it is important that staff understand the RFL as a resource to support generative, life affirming conversations. The RFL is intended to be used to start the conversation about life promotion to explore areas that are strong reasons for living and areas that may benefit from attention to enhance connections to life and reasons for living. Because the questions may prompt big feelings, it is important that staff work closely with the person as they complete the RFL to ask good appreciative inquiry questions that support understanding, connection, and validation.

Asking good questions—helps us to understand the person’s experience and where we might need to focus our attention in their future planning.

- **How does the Reasons for Living Inventory (RFL) help counselors?**
- RFL follows a strength-based approach to suicide intervention. By starting at crisis assessment, we collaboratively discover goals for the counseling relationship in the spirit of connection. It assesses a youth’s ability to stay hopeful and optimistic. It helps us gauge their sense of purpose and how they view self and discover what brings meaning to their life. Most imperatively, it assesses through scaling prompts how they are connected to their culture, and what their risk is to suicide. The tool further engages dialogue about past suicide ideation. The responses help identify triggers and stressors that lead to maladaptive coping, trauma responses, and other behavior such as past and present self-harm, substance use, isolation, and interpersonal conflicts. The tool helps Michif Wellness staff build a strength based middle column that is rooted in insight and action-based healing in connection with Parantii.
- **In Youth Services how does the completed RFL help case managers complete the Connection and Belonging Kwaayesh Ni Kaanawaymikawin Assessment form going through the 8 domains:**
- 1. **La Parantii** (Kinship): Belonging prompts
- 2. **Niikinaahk** (the place you living and people who care for you): Belonging, meaning in culture, and purpose and self acceptance prompts
- 3. **Aen Michif Niiya** (Strong in identity and culture): Purpose and self-acceptance, hope and future optimism, meaning in culture
- 4. **Miyooayaan** (feeling safe in mind, body, spirit): all the suicide questions matter, purpose and acceptance, belonging, hope and future optimism, meaning in culture
- 5. **Otipemisiwak** (your best self, dreams, self governance): belonging, purpose and self acceptance, hope and future optimism, meaning and culture
- 6. **Lii Bonn Zaafayr Di Vii** (things you enjoy activities/ friends/culture and programs): Belonging, Purpose and Self Acceptance, Hope and Future Optimism, Meaning in Culture
- 7. **Kaa- Wiichihitoyaahk** (care for each other, spirit of generosity) Belonging, Purpose and Self Acceptance, Meaning in Culture.
- 8. **Nistwaryr** (your understanding of your current location through time): Suicide, Culture in Meaning.
- **How does the RFL help Michif Wellness Counsellors identify what they are most worried about?**
- Low scores = higher suicide risk. For most questions, if they are scoring below a 3, we monitor them very closely and focus on helping them have a routine, get outside in nature, reconnect with family and friends, and reflect on the root cause of what is

causing them to isolate and not engage with people around them. We also have care team meetings and life promotion review meetings with the youth to provide them with wrap around support.

- Each category identified in the RFL separates belief (B) from importance (I). If there is a large discrepancy in a question between if they believe it is happening in their life and if it is important to them, Michif Wellness counsellors will engage in therapeutic modalities to understand how to close that gap. This allows for a lot of insight-based dialogue within the counselling relationship.
- If scores are low in importance generally, this is a worry. If a Metis parent, child, or youth does not think it is important to have hope, self-acceptance and purpose, meaning in life or in culture, a desire for connection or belonging then we have lots of meaningful work to do in both the Wellness Counselling team and extended LMO teams. Knowing the relevance of importance can act as a bridge to the connection and belonging assessment. When the case manager and Michif Wellness Counsellor come together with their completed assessments, we are able to what is important for the youth and how that can help us prioritize the greatest unmet need and where we need to start with the youth.
- **How does RFL help with next steps for planning:**
- We try to capture their words as much as we can when we do the assessment and during the questions around meaning, purpose, future hope and optimism, when they talk about future goals/plans, we reflect on stuck points, exceptions when those stuck points didn't stop them from pursuing their goals, and we discuss how they can do more of that moving forward, and how counseling can support them with that.

Examples of Questions for Exploring the RFL

3) I accept myself for who I am.

- Even if you don't feel this way 100% of the time, think about a time when you felt like you fully accepted yourself. What was this like for you? What did it feel like? What helped you feel like you fully accepted yourself?
- What are the qualities or characteristics about you that you really value and appreciate?
- Can you tell me about a time that you felt accepted in yourself? What were the thoughts you were telling yourself? What did that feel like in your body?

6) I feel loved and accepted by my close friends.

- Tell me of a time that your friend has shown you that they care about you? What did they do or say to allow you to feel accepted just as you are?

- If you were to show love and acceptance to a friend or someone you care about, what would that look like? What would you say or do? How important is this for you to have in your life?

7) I feel emotionally close to my natural supports.

- Understanding the vulnerability it takes for you to be emotionally close to your natural supports, name some ways your natural supports can provide a safe space for you to be emotionally close to them?
- Has there ever been a time you were emotionally close to your natural supports? What was different about that time?
- Can you tell me about a time that you felt emotionally close to your natural supports? What do you think that person would say about sharing that moment with you? How did you feel connected to them in that moment?

8) *I have hope that I will be loved, accepted, and supported by my natural supports and friends in the future.

- If you woke up tomorrow and you felt loved, accepted, and supported by your natural supports, what would that look like? How would you feel? Who would be in that circle with you? How can we help support you to reconnect with those supports?
- What could you do or think that would allow yourself to be accepting of this love and support from your natural supports and friends?

22) The thought of killing myself scares me.

- How did your fear based thoughts help keep you alive or help you resolve your thoughts about killing yourself?

31) I have many plans I am looking forward to carrying out in the future.

- Although planning for the future can seem overwhelming and pointless sometimes, because of how difficult your life has been, what are some things you would want to do in your future if you had no barriers?
- Tell me of a time you made a plan, even if it was a simple plan like cleaning your room, and it actually happened. How did you feel after you completed a task you wanted to do?

44) *I believe that my life has a purpose.

- This statement can feel heavy for many people. It is hard to think that our life has purpose when we are stuck in perpetual hurt and sadness, however I believe every life has purpose and every person carries gifts from the creator. Think back to a time when you have helped someone who was hurting. How did you make a difference in that

person's day or in that moment for them? What would they say you did that helped them?

- Knowing that every human is unique, tell me something about you that is different – it can be how you dress, your sense of humor, your ability to text really fast, your outlook on life, how you help people who are hurting – something special about you that sets you apart from others.

39) *No matter how hard things get, I believe that the Creator wants me to live.

- It is said that the Creator doesn't make mistakes, and that you were born into this world simply because you are meant to exist. Name at least one thing that keeps you thinking that the Creator wants you to live.
- Although times are tough for you right now, you are alive. Through everything you have gone through, you are still alive, because the Creator wants you to be. What does it mean to you knowing that the Creator wants you to live? If you struggle with feeling this connection, what would you need to feel in order to believe that the Creator wants you to live?

42) *I feel a connection to land, nature, and the natural world around me.

- Where do you feel most at peace? Is it the mountains? The river? The ocean? The prairies? What makes your spirit come to rest?
- When was the last time you allowed yourself to sit and just be in nature, with no other purpose than connection to the natural world around you? How do you feel after you spend some time connecting to nature? What would it mean to you to have more time in nature? What is stopping you from getting more time with nature?

46) *I am worried about what would happen to my soul if I killed myself.

- What do you think happens to your soul if you kill yourself? Do you worry about what would happen to your soul?
- When you think about what might happen to your soul if you killed yourself, is this part of the reason of what keeps you fighting to stay alive?

47) *I am worried about what would happen to my natural supports and friends if I killed myself.

- Thinking about the people who mean the most to you in the world, how would you feel and what would you think if one of them chose to end their life? How would you cope? What would you have told them to try and keep them alive?
- Who is the person or people in your life you would worry about the most if you ended your life? Why would you worry about them?

- Analyzing information and Making a Decision re: Life Promotion Plan or other planning

- At the end of the RFL there is a scoring page where the counsellor will sort through the 5 dimensions and make meaning out of the content and actuary numbers they have gathered from the youth.
- Michif Wellness Counsellors will be looking for gaps in the dimensions, and how to increase connection and belonging through peers and Elders and how it will inform the work in the Life Promotion plan or Connection and Belonging Independence Plan moving forward.
- The Michif Wellness counsellor will then determine if this youth/child/adult requires a Life promotion plan, or they are ready for other planning (Independence or Safety Planning) using the scaling question on the form and their rationale. They will provide the case manager with a signed copy of the RFL to review.
- In youth services the Michif Wellness counsellor and the youth services social worker, will meet to review the outcome and the Connection and Belonging Assessment to prioritize the needs for the youth. The Michif Wellness Counsellor will review the RFL when the youth is in crisis or when there has been a significant change in behaviour.