Youth Engagement Tips for Remote* Suicide Risk Assessment with Youth

*Remote environments include online communication platforms (e.g., Zoom, Teams) and/or the phone.

Accessibility, building rapport, establishing appropriate space and helping youth prepare for virtual/remote sessions.

Consider Audio

- Stay on screen the entire time and maintain eye contact.
- Make sure the youth can clearly see your face throughout the session and that your screen is big enough to see the youth's face.
- Pay extra attention to youth's tone of voice and language (e.g., usage of negative language and atypical speech patterns).
- Convey warmth through your tone.
- Give youth space to speak.
- Let youth know they can interrupt you at any time.

Consider Video

- Use video in addition to audio if possible (both are ideal for optimal virtual care)
- Pay attention to facial cues
- Convey warmth through facial expressions

Consider Transcripts

- Consider providing youth with session transcripts. This can help them remember information and strategies to use in daily life. If you decide to do this, verify it aligns with institutional privacy requirements.

Consider Accessibility

- Ensure sessions are accessible for youth with restricted internet access.
- Choose a mode of technology for sessions that meets youth needs/preferences.
- Include other methods of delivery such as phone (calling or texting) when internet is not an option (if you decide to do this, verify the youth has phone minutes or text messages available).

Consider Youth Engagement

- Keep youth engaged. Consider using screen sharing, playing a game together, having youth share a photo, or showing them things in your environment like art.

Consider Privacy

- Discuss how to increase youth privacy (e.g., pick a time of day for the session that is quieter in the house, have a code word if someone is nearby, use chat if they can't speak privately, wear headphones, have password-protected sessions).
- Help youth find a quiet, private place for your sessions where they will have minimal distractions.
- Involve caregivers to make sure the space is private for the duration of your session.
- Check that a caregiver is in the house at the time of the session in case the student requires support/supervision.

Consider a Heads-up

- Remind youth to make sure their device is fully charged before the session.
- Encourage youth to test out technology before using.
- Encourage youth to write down what they want to talk about before the session.
- Encourage youth to bring a paper and pen to the session to take notes.

Consider Youth Comfort

- Set-up your room to promote youth comfort (e.g., remove personal items, minimize distractions, use a headset so your voice is clear, ensure you are well-lit).
- Let youth know they can be informal and use a background or emojis if that makes them more comfortable.
- Ask youth what they need from your virtual relationship, and how you can make them feel safe and secure.
- Discuss what virtual/remote sessions will look like (e.g., security concerns, session recording).
- Reassure youth at the start of the session that you are in a private space. Let the youth see your whole office.

Indigenous youth

To build rapport, be sure to create a safe process for youth.
- Assess at a relaxed pace and emphasize the role of community and personal relationships in safety planning.
- Focus the conversation by understanding cultural needs, if this fits the youth: Some individuals prefer talking about protective factors and not suicide directly
- Consider including a family member or Indigenous health worker, if this fits the youth.
- Refer the youth to Indigenous mental health professionals/agencies if further intervention is necessary, available, and this is wanted by youth and their family.

Connect and partner with local communities to explore their understanding of suicide and the impact of traditional knowledge.

Male youth

Male youth may require targeted approaches to better understand needs and prevent suicide attempts.
- Aim to strengthen social relationships and improve recognition of mental health issues.
- Ask opinions on current services offered, rather than what services they want, in order to assess gaps in services (1,2).

Consider barriers that might influence willingness to engage with remote supports among this population.

Create opportunities for male youth to practice/observe help-seeking conversations with strangers (1)

LGBTQ2SIA+ youth

Create a safe space
- Ask youth the pronouns they use – avoid assumptions of youth's sexual orientation or gender. If you don't know, use gender-inclusive pronouns.
- Display inclusive approach (e.g., having pride flags in your background), if this safe for the youth.
- Provide specialized training and raise awareness about specialized supports in the local community for LGBTQ2SIA+ youth.
- Train all school-based service providers to reduce experiences of discrimination and prejudice for LGBTQ2SIA+ youth.