



Suicide prevention assessment training and resources for specific groups (e.g., children, people with intellectual disabilities, etc.) are available. This information sheet presents elements to consider when assessing individuals who are considering suicide, with a particular emphasis on cultural diversity and the migration experience.

## 1. Assess individuals vulnerable to suicide

Certain groups of people have higher rates of suicide (e.g., men, people with mental health conditions, people with addiction disorders, people with a family member who died by suicide, people who have attempted suicide, and victims of trauma or abuse).

### Adaptations for cultural diversity and migration

- **Belonging to one or more of these groups does not mean that the individual is experiencing suicidal thoughts or will attempt suicide.** The greater the social and cultural gap, the greater the service provider's tendency to stereotype.
- **A person's vulnerabilities and experiences of discrimination can accumulate.** For example, "minority stress" among LGBTQIA+ refugees arises from multiple intersecting dimensions.
- **Certain factors of vulnerability are particularly associated with migration, belonging to a minority group, and integration,** such as racism, discrimination, and barriers to accessing care and services.
- **Certain mental health conditions are underdiagnosed** among immigrants and members of ethnocultural minority and/or racialized communities.  
  
Reasons for this include difficulty accessing services, cultural distance from service providers, culturally inappropriate tools, stigma, and different ways of expressing distress (see the [\*\*\*Suicide, Diversity, and Migration\*\*\*](#) page [only available in French]).  
  
The absence of a diagnosis is therefore a less reliable indicator of suicide risk among these groups than among the general population.

## 2. Identify critical moments

Each life course involves situations and events that can cause significant stress or even distress. If an individual has suicide-related vulnerabilities or few protective factors, critical moments may increase the likelihood of a suicide attempt.

Among the examples below, the situations and events highlighted **in bold** are particularly associated with suicide in the context of cultural diversity and migration:

- Significant losses (e.g., loss of employment, money, status, end of a romantic relationship, death of a loved one)
- Loss of a structured environment (e.g., discharge from hospital or release from prison)
- Intimate partner violence
- Holidays or events that evoke losses or reactivate trauma
- Trouble with the law
- Problems at school or with peers
- Traumatic experiences (e.g., sexual violence, **armed conflict**)
- **Denial of an asylum claim**
- **Events that cause shame or humiliation (“losing face”)**
- **Academic difficulties, especially when expectations are high**
- **Conflicts with family members, support network, or community**
- **Discrimination or unjust treatment**
- **Significant difficulties adapting to a new cultural environment**
- **Feeling misunderstood by others**

### Adaptations for cultural diversity and migration

It is important to take into account the person’s lived experiences, their needs, what they can act on, their sense of control, their worldview, their values, as well as their perception of past and future events.

Specifically:

- Unexpected events and turning points that shape the **migration experience** may precipitate suicidal behaviours (e.g., denial of an asylum claim).
- The person’s **culture** influences how events affect them and their coping strategies. Certain events may seem insignificant for some but be of great importance for others. The experience of failure, for example, is often a contributing factor to suicide. But what constitutes “failure,” codes of honour, and the importance of “saving face” vary from one culture to another.

### 3. Identify signs of distress related to suicide

- Signs that an individual is considering suicide may take various forms (e.g., comments, feelings, behaviours).
- Certain signs, on their own, do not mean that an individual is suicidal.
- An individual who is considering suicide may present a few or several signs.

Among the examples below, the signs of distress highlighted in **bold** are particularly associated with suicide in the context of cultural diversity and migration.

#### Expressing:

- A wish or hope to die (e.g., “I want to die,” “I want it to end,” or “I want to disappear”)
- **A wish to go to sleep and never wake up**
- **The feeling that their life is useless or without value**
- **The feeling that their life is a failure, that things would have been better in their country of origin**
- **The feeling of being a burden (“they would be better off without me”)**
- A feeling of being alone, even when surrounded by loved ones
- **The feeling of being abandoned or betrayed**
- **A strong feeling of shame or guilt**
- **The feeling that death would be an honourable option in the situation**
- **Fear of being deported to their country of origin, especially if there is a risk of violence or death**
- **Distress related to memories of traumatic events**

#### Behaviours:

- Preparations (e.g., writing a suicide note, giving away personal belongings, writing a will)
- Distancing themselves from their family, friends, and community
- Auditory hallucinations telling them to hurt themselves
- Neglecting their body
- Stopping medication or vital treatments
- Self-harm
- An aggravation of substance use
- **Pain or malaise without physical cause (somatization)**
- **Praying for God or a higher power to end their life**
- **Engaging in life-threatening behaviours**



If you are concerned about the person, it is important to express it to them, check whether they are experiencing suicidal ideation, and refer them to a trained professional within your organization or to specialized external resources.

### Adaptations for cultural diversity and migration

The person’s **social status** and **cultural identities** may exacerbate vulnerabilities and intensify certain signs of distress.

For example:

- Losing a job when language barriers or lack of recognition of their education complicates access to employment
- Experiencing emotional distress when the person has had negative experiences with public services or faces barriers accessing care
- Feeling rejected due to their cultural practices or country of origin
- Experiencing despair related to migration status over which the person has little or no control

## 4. Check for suicidal thoughts

To check for suicidal ideation among members of the general population, best practices recommend you:

- Mention signs of distress you've noticed:  
"Being separated from your family can be difficult..."
- Tell them you are concerned:  
"I'm concerned that you haven't been doing well lately..."
- Use direct language: suicide, take your own life, end your life, etc.
- Ask the question clearly, without ambiguity, and in the present tense

### Adaptations for cultural diversity and migration

- A person's culture influences the way they communicate, express, or conceal distress. Often indirect or metaphorical, these expressions may be communicated in words, body language, or behaviours. See the [\*\*\*Language and Communication Styles\*\*\*](#) section (only available in French).
- People with a migration background or from ethnocultural minority and/or racialized communities are generally less likely to share their suicidal thoughts for various reasons (e.g., stigma, mistrust, fears related to their migration status, fear of actions that may take away their autonomy). See the [\*\*\*Suicide and Culture\*\*\*](#) section (only available in French).
- Avoid stereotypes: an individual does not necessarily have a particular concept of suicide or life just because they belong to a certain group.

### What to do?

#### Examples of lead-ins

"Sometimes, people go through difficult periods; they feel sad and worried. Some people consider ending their lives, but it is important to know that help is available."

"Being separated from one's family or unsure about the future can be hard. People in such situations sometimes think of ending their lives."

- 1 Follow up with a clear question:  
"Are you thinking of ending your life?"  
"Are you considering suicide?"
- 2 If the answer is "yes," follow your organization's procedures to assess suicide danger or refer the individual to a specialized resource. Call 1-866-APPELLE if necessary.  
  
If the individual says they do not have suicidal thoughts, confirm your availability and willingness to talk with them. Acknowledge and validate their distress, and ask them what can be done to help them feel better. Do not take reluctance as refusal when it comes to discussing their suicidal thoughts.



Talking about suicide does not suggest the idea of suicide. Although the word "suicide" may cause discomfort, asking questions about suicide opens up space to talk about their suffering, encourages them to seek help, and contributes to fighting stigma.

## 5. Protect the person

During the assessment, certain actions may be taken to support the distressed person and protect them.

For example:

- Refer them to internal or external resources specialized in suicide prevention.
- Accompany the individual to these resources, depending on the level of urgency.
- Keep track of signs of distress and all relevant information, to be able to share them with these resources if needed.



Only a full intervention can accurately assess suicide danger.

### Adaptations for cultural diversity and migration

- Seeking help means something different for each person based on their beliefs, experiences, interpretation of the situation, and openness to change. These elements are influenced by the individual's culture and migration trajectory. See the ***Stigma*** and ***Help-Seeking*** sections (only available in French).
- Ensure that the individual understands the resources offered, why and how they can provide support, and what they involve (e.g., costs, access to services, confidentiality). The person must trust the resources to use them. See the ***Safe, needs-based referral and support*** information sheet.
- Uncertainty about how to proceed is normal. Seek advice and support from your colleagues or local resources. See the ***Taking a Step Back*** page (only available in French).



For precise information on signs of distress, checking for suicidal ideation, what is involved in the assessment of suicide danger, the level of urgency, and protection measures, **consult an accredited training program** on suicide prevention, your organization's procedures, or a qualified professional in your organization who can intervene with individuals considering suicide. See the [Resources](#) page for further information.