An Evidence-Based Suicide Risk Assessment

Suicide screening: Do things ever get so bad you think about ending your life or suicide? Tell me a little bit about what, specifically, you have been thinking. What is it exactly that goes through your mind? [Differentiate suicidal ideation from nonsuicidal morbid ideation] If negative suicide screening: Discontinue risk assessment If positive suicide screening: Screen for multiple attempt status Multiple attempter screening Have you ever had thoughts like this before? Have you ever tried to kill yourself before? So you've never cut yourself, burned yourself, held a gun to your head, taken more pills than you should, or tried to kill yourself in any other way? If no evidence of prior attempt(s): Assess current suicidal episode If positive evidence of prior attempt(s): Assess multiple attempt status Assess multiple attempt status How many times have you tried to kill yourself? Let's talk about the first time... a. When did this occur? b. What did you do? c. Where were you when you did this? d. Did you hope you would die, or did you hope something else would happen? e. Afterwards, were you glad to be alive or disappointed you weren't dead? I'd like to talk a bit about the worst time... [Repeat a through e] Assess current suicidal episode Let's talk about what's going on right now. You said you've been thinking about Have you thought about how you might kill yourself? When you think about suicide, do the thoughts come and go, or are they so intense you can't think about anything else? Have you practiced [method] in any way, or have you done anything to prepare for your death? Do you have access to [method]? Screen for protective factors What is keeping you alive right now?

Excerpt from Bryan CJ, Corso KA, Neal-Walden TA, Rudd MD. Managing suicide risk in primary care: Recommendations for behavioral health consultants. Professional Psychology: Research and Practice. 2009; 40(2): 148-155.