



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



The Self-Directed Violence Classification System (SDVCS)

**The Utility of a Common Language for Suicidal Ideation and
Behavior**

Rocky Mountain Mental Illness, Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC)



Disclosure Statement

This presentation is based on work supported, in part, by the Department of Veterans Affairs, but does not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States Government.



Training Overview

Objective: to learn and begin using a new nomenclature for self-directed violence

1. Why is it important to have a common language?
2. A Solution to the Problem
3. What does SDVCS look like?
4. How do I use it?



1. The Language of Self-Directed Violence

Why is it important to have a common language?



Common Language and Suicide

Having a common language around suicide promotes recovery oriented and person centered care

- Contributes to a shared understanding that can facilitate support
- Reduces bias and discrimination
- Increases respect
- Enhances communication among clinicians, gatekeepers, patients, and families
- Promotes accurate and neutral descriptions of self directed violence
- Facilitates recovery





Why do we need this for self-directed violence?

A healthy 24-year-old female is brought by her boyfriend to the Emergency Department after she ingested all remaining pills in a bottle of regular strength Tylenol. She estimates there were 4 to 6 pills total in the bottle and she reports no ill effects. Lab tests done at the time of admission to the ED reported her acetaminophen level within the therapeutic range. During triage, she states that before she took the pills she was upset from arguing with her boyfriend and just wanted to die. She feels better now and requests to go home.

What would you call this behavior?

- Gesture?
- Threat?
- Acting Out/Manipulation?
- Attempt?
- Cry for help?
- Other?

What criteria did you use to decide?

- Lethality of method?
- Expressed intent?
- Number of pills ingested?
- Lab results?
- Other?



The Problem

Aborted Suicide Attempt
Attempted Suicide
Committed Suicide
Cry for Help
Death Rehearsals
Deliberate Self-Harm
Failed Attempts
Failed Completion
Failed Suicide
Intentional Self-Murder
Intentional Suicide
Non-Suicidal Self-injury

Parasuicide
Rational Suicide
Self-Harm Behavior
Self-Inflicted Behavior
Self-Injurious Behavior
Suicidal Episode
Suicidal Gesture
Suicidal Manipulation
Suicidal Rehearsal
Suicide Victim
Successful Attempt
Successful Suicide
Unintentional Suicide



Implications of the Problem

Clinical

- Impedes communication between and among clinicians, patients and patients' families

Research

- Introduces challenges for conducting longitudinal research with those who have attempted suicide

Public Health

- Difficult to accurately count the number of suicides and suicide attempts that occur annually

Public Policy

- Difficult to establish suicide as a major public health problem that warrants investment of resources



2. A Solution to the Problem

Nomenclature
Classification System



What is a nomenclature?

What is a nomenclature?

Nomenclature (def.) - a set of terms that are:

- Commonly understood
- Widely acceptable
- Comprehensive

What is the purpose of a nomenclature?

- Enhance clarity of communication
- Have applicability across clinical settings
- Be theory and culturally neutral
- Use mutually exclusive terms that encompass the spectrum of thoughts and actions



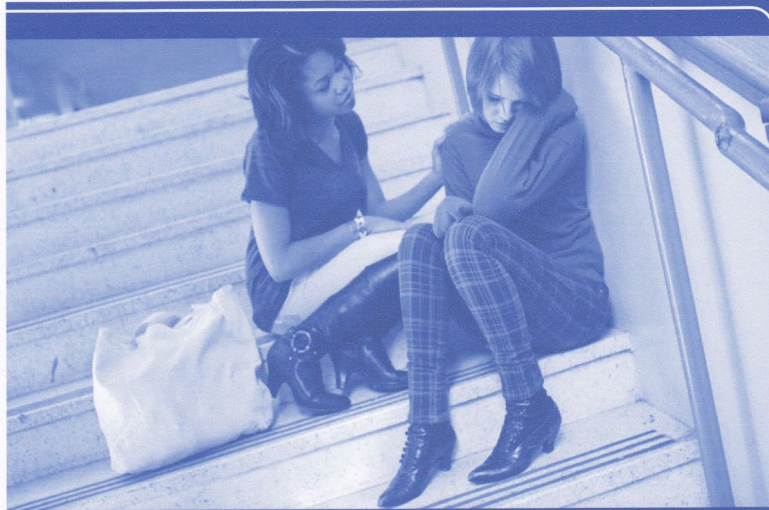
What is a Classification System?

- Classification Builds upon a nomenclature(e.g., terminology)
- “Exhaustive” categorization and breakdown of subtypes of related behaviors (e.g., covers all possibilities)
- Further differentiates amongst phenomena that appear to be similar by use of modifiers



CDC developed uniform definitions and recommended data elements for surveillance efforts

Rocky Mountain MIRECC developed the SDVCS which is compatible with and an expansion of the CDC's terms



SELF-DIRECTED VIOLENCE SURVEILLANCE

UNIFORM DEFINITIONS AND
RECOMMENDED DATA ELEMENTS

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
Division of Violence Prevention

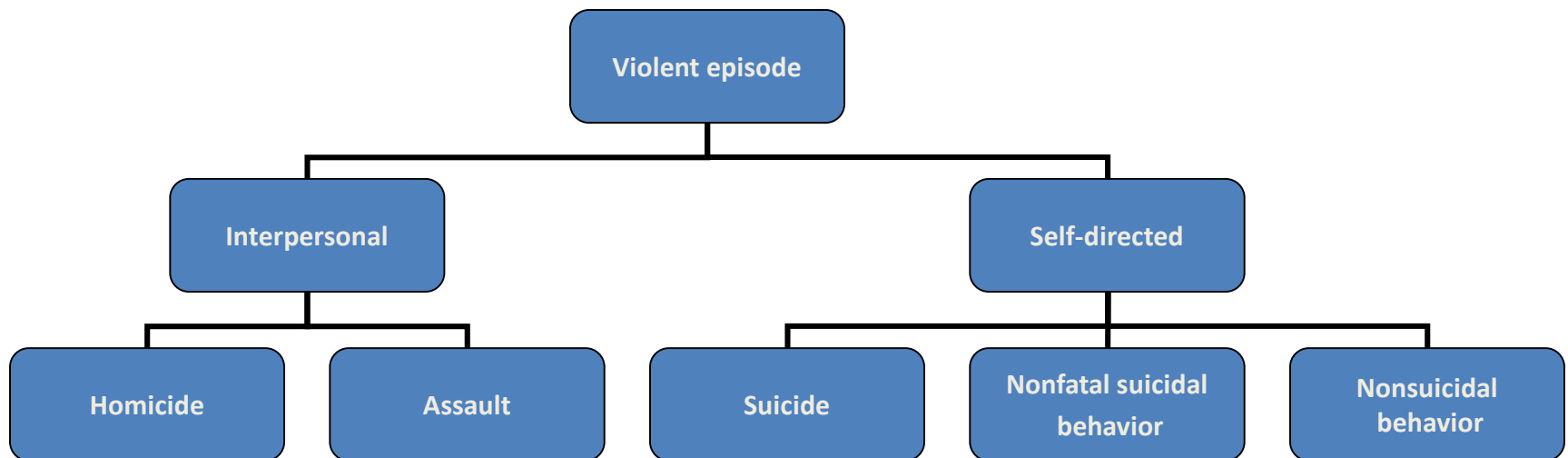


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Why “Self-Directed” Violence?

Self-directed violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.

(Source: World Health Organization)





3. What does SDVCS look like?



SDVCS Structure

- Suicidal and non-suicidal SDV
- 22 terms
 - Mutually exclusive
 - Culture and theory neutral
 - Encompasses the spectrum of SDV-related thoughts and behaviors
- SDVCS Table and Clinical Tool

Self-Directed Violence (SDV) Classification System Clinical Tool

Key Terms (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Self-Directed Violence: Behavior that is self-directed and deliberately results in injury or the potential for injury to oneself.

Suicidal Intent: There is past or present evidence (implicit or explicit) that an individual wishes to die, means to kill him/herself, and understands the probable consequences of his/her actions or potential actions. Suicidal intent can be determined retrospectively and in the absence of suicidal behavior.

Preparatory Behavior: Acts or preparation towards engaging in Self-Directed Violence, but before potential for injury has begun. This can include anything beyond a verbalization or thought, such as assembling a method (e.g., buying a gun, collecting pills) or preparing for one's death by suicide (e.g., writing a suicide note, giving things away).

Physical Injury (paraphrased): A bodily lesion resulting from acute overexposure to energy (this can be mechanical, thermal, electrical, chemical, or radiant) interacting with the body in amounts or rates that exceed the threshold of physiological tolerance (e.g., bodily harm due to suffocation, poisoning or overdoses, lacerations, gunshot wounds, etc.). Refer to the Classification System for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention definition.

Interrupted By Self or Other: A person takes steps to injure self but is stopped by self/another person prior to fatal injury. The interruption may occur at any point.

Suicide Attempt: A non-fatal self-inflicted potentially injurious behavior with any intent to die as a result of the behavior.

Suicide: Death caused by self-inflicted injurious behavior with any intent to die as a result of the behavior.

Behaviors

Thoughts

Reminder: Behaviors Trump Thoughts



Key Concept- Suicidal Intent

There is past or present evidence (implicit or explicit) that an individual:

1. Wishes to die
2. Means to kill him/herself, and
3. Understands the probable consequences of his/her actions or potential actions

4. How do I use it?





Example - John

John tells you that he was thinking about suicide last night. He says he can't take the pain anymore, and to stop it he thought about killing himself with the gun he keeps in his nightstand. However, instead of getting his gun out, he decided to go to sleep.



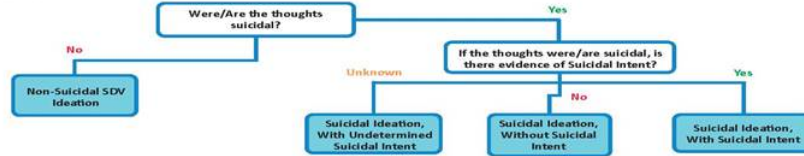
Self-Directed Violence (SDV) Classification System Clinical Tool

BEGIN WITH THESE 3 QUESTIONS:

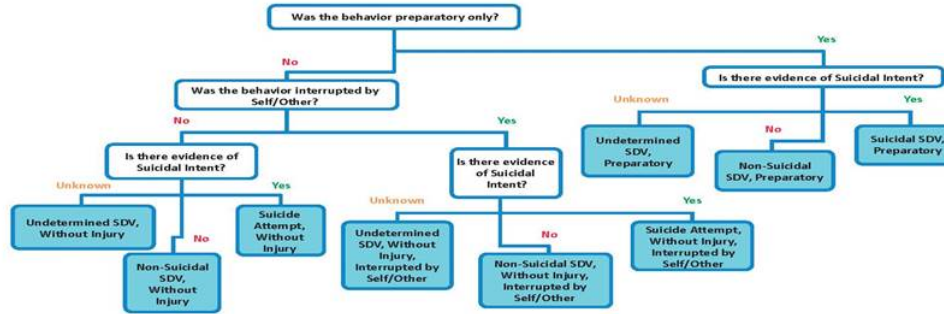
1. Is there any indication that the person engaged in self-directed violent behavior that was lethal, preparatory, or potentially harmful?
(Refer to Key Terms on reverse side)
If NO, proceed to Question 2
If YES, proceed to Question 3
2. Is there any indication that the person had self-directed violence related thoughts?
If NO to Questions 1 and 2, there is insufficient evidence to suggest self-directed violence → NO SDV TERM
If YES, proceed to Decision Tree A
3. Did the behavior involve any injury or did it result in death?
If NO, proceed to Decision Tree B
If YES, proceed to Decision Tree C



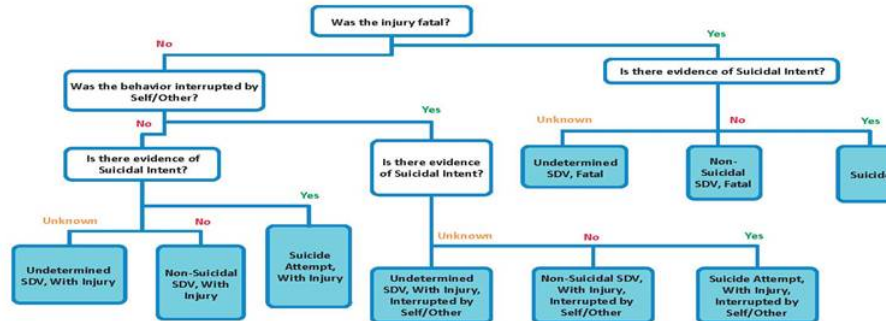
DECISION TREE A: THOUGHTS



DECISION TREE B: BEHAVIORS, WITHOUT INJURY



DECISION TREE C: BEHAVIORS, WITH INJURY





BEGIN WITH THESE 3 QUESTIONS:

1. Is there any indication that the person engaged in self-directed violent behavior that was lethal, preparatory, or potentially harmful?

(Refer to Key Terms on reverse side)

If NO, proceed to Question 2

If YES, proceed to Question 3

2. Is there any indication that the person had self-directed violence related thoughts?

If NO to Questions 1 and 2, there is insufficient evidence to suggest self-directed violence (NO SDV TERM)

If YES, proceed to Decision Tree A

3. Did the behavior involve any injury or did it result in death?

If NO, proceed to Decision Tree B

If YES, proceed to Decision Tree C



Example 1

1. Is there any indication that the person engaged in self-directed violent behavior that was lethal, preparatory, or potentially harmful?

(Refer to Key Terms on reverse side)

No.

If NO, proceed to Question 2



If YES, proceed to Question 3



Example 1

2. Is there any indication that the person had self-directed violence related thoughts?

Yes.

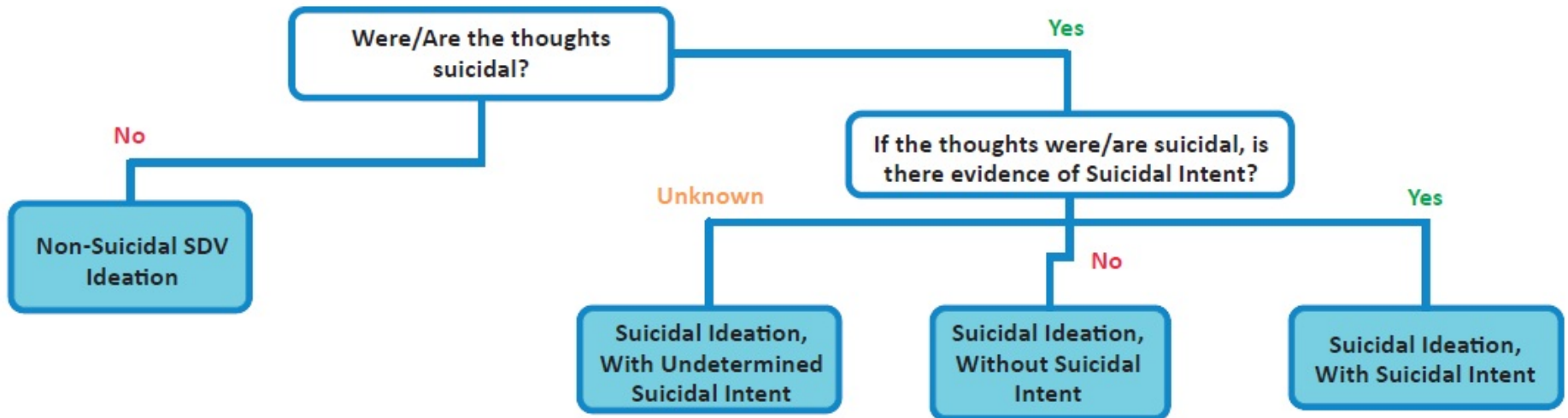
If NO to Questions 1 and 2, there is insufficient evidence to suggest self-directed violence (NO SDV TERM)

If YES, proceed to Decision Tree A



Example 1

DECISION TREE A: THOUGHTS



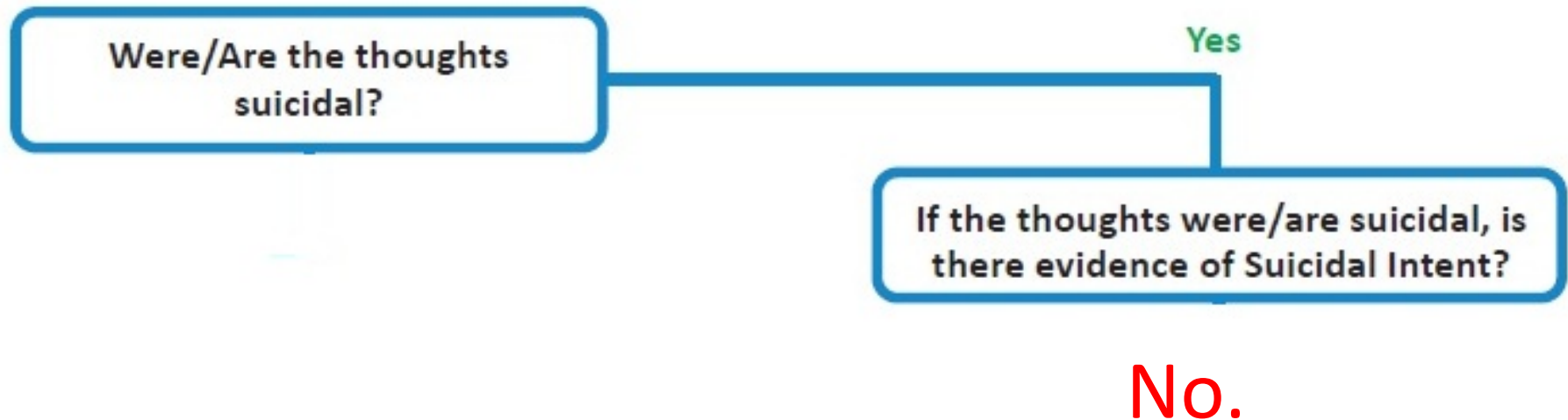
John tells you that he was thinking about suicide last night. He says he can't take the pain anymore, and to stop it he thought about killing himself with the gun he keeps in his nightstand. However, instead of getting his gun out, he decided to go to sleep.

DECISION TREE A: THOUGHTS



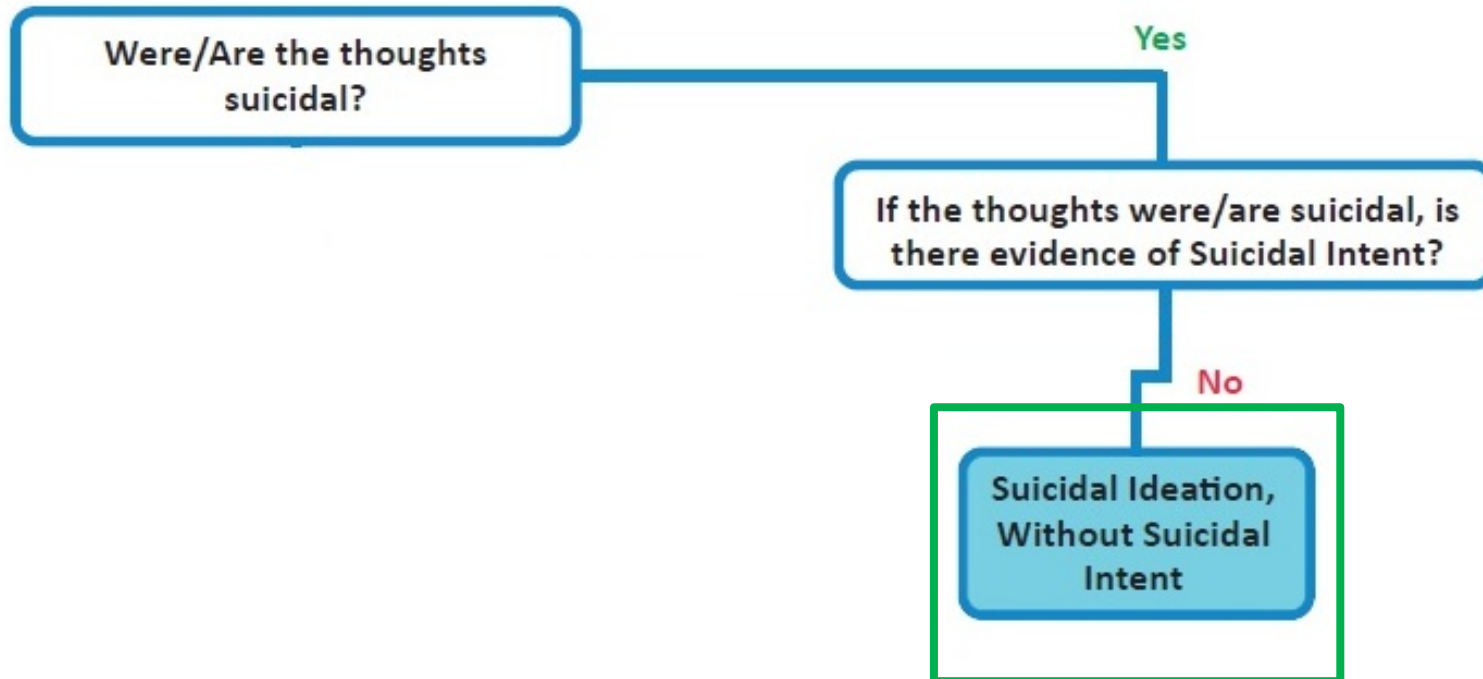
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DECISION TREE A: THOUGHTS



John tells you that he was thinking about suicide last night. He says he can't take the pain anymore, and to stop it he thought about killing himself with the gun he keeps in his nightstand. However, instead of getting his gun out, he decided to go to sleep.

DECISION TREE A: THOUGHTS





Self-Directed Violence Classification System*

Type	Sub-Type	Definition	Modifiers	Terms
Thoughts	Non-Suicidal Self-Directed Violence Ideation	Self-reported thoughts regarding a person's desire to engage in self-inflicted potentially injurious behavior. There is no evidence of suicidal intent. For example, persons engage in Non-Suicidal Self-Directed Violence Ideation in order to attain some other end (e.g., to seek help, regulate negative mood, punish others, to receive attention).	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Non-Suicidal Self-Directed Violence Ideation
	Suicidal Ideation	Thoughts of engaging in suicide-related behavior. For example, intrusive thoughts of suicide without the wish to die would be classified as Suicidal Ideation, Without Intent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Suicidal Intent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Without -Undetermined -With 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Suicidal Ideation, Without Suicidal Intent •Suicidal Ideation, With Undetermined Suicidal Intent •Suicidal Ideation, With Suicidal Intent
Behaviors	Preparatory	Acts or preparation towards engaging in Self-Directed Violence, but before potential for injury has begun. This can include anything beyond a verbalization or thought, such as assembling a method (e.g., buying a gun, collecting pills) or preparing for one's death by suicide (e.g., writing a suicide note, giving things away). For example, hoarding medication for the purpose of overdosing would be classified as Suicidal Self-Directed Violence, Preparatory.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Suicidal Intent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Without -Undetermined -With 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Non-Suicidal Self-Directed Violence, Preparatory •Undetermined Self-Directed Violence, Preparatory •Suicidal Self-Directed Violence, Preparatory
	Non-Suicidal Self-Directed Violence	Behavior that is self-directed and deliberately results in injury or the potential for injury to oneself. There is no evidence, whether implicit or explicit, of suicidal intent. For example, persons engage in Non-Suicidal Self-Directed Violence in order to attain some other end (e.g., to seek help, regulate negative mood, punish others, to receive attention).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Injury: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Without -With -Fatal •Interrupted by Self or Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Non-Suicidal Self-Directed Violence, Without Injury •Non-Suicidal Self-Directed Violence, Without Injury, Interrupted by Self or Other •Non-Suicidal Self-Directed Violence, With Injury •Non-Suicidal Self-Directed Violence, With Injury, Interrupted by Self or Other •Non-Suicidal Self-Directed Violence, Fatal
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	Suicidal Self-Directed Violence	Behavior that is self-directed and deliberately results in injury or the potential for injury to oneself. There is evidence, whether implicit or explicit, of suicidal intent. For example, a person with the wish to die cutting her wrists with a knife would be classified as Suicide Attempt, With Injury.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Injury: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Without -With -Fatal •Interrupted by Self or Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Suicide Attempt, Without Injury •Suicide Attempt, Without Injury, Interrupted by Self or Other •Suicide Attempt, With Injury •Suicide Attempt, With Injury, Interrupted by Self or Other •Suicide

* Developed in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Example 2

A Veteran is despondent over his pending divorce and failing health. He writes a suicide note, smokes marijuana, and gets into his car with the plan to drive into a concrete wall. On the way, he is stopped by police for speeding and reckless driving, and is arrested due to an outstanding warrant.

**BEGIN WITH THESE 3 QUESTIONS:**

1. Is there any indication that the person engaged in self-directed violent behavior that was lethal, preparatory, or potentially harmful?
(Refer to Key Terms on reverse side)

If NO, proceed to Question 2

If YES, proceed to Question 3

Yes.

3. Did the behavior involve any injury or did it result in death?

If NO, proceed to Decision Tree B

If YES, proceed to Decision Tree C



No.

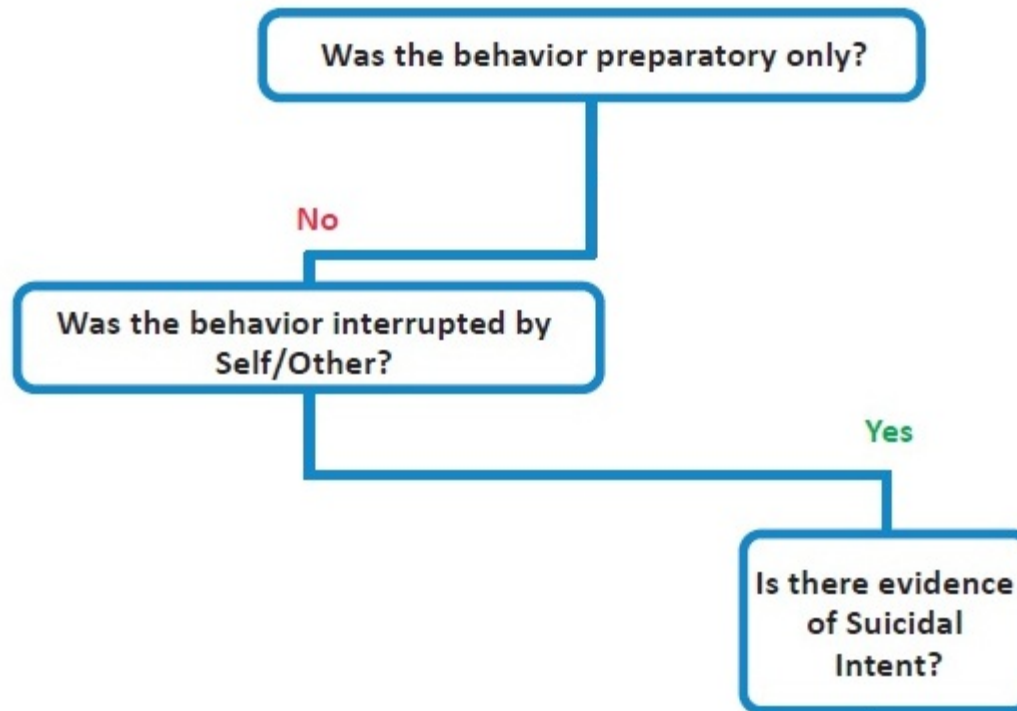
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DECISION TREE B: BEHAVIORS, WITHOUT INJURY



A Veteran is despondent over his pending divorce and failing health. He writes a suicide note, smokes marijuana, and gets into his car with the plan to drive into a concrete wall. On the way, he is stopped by police for speeding and reckless driving, and is arrested due to an outstanding warrant.

DECISION TREE B: BEHAVIORS, WITHOUT INJURY



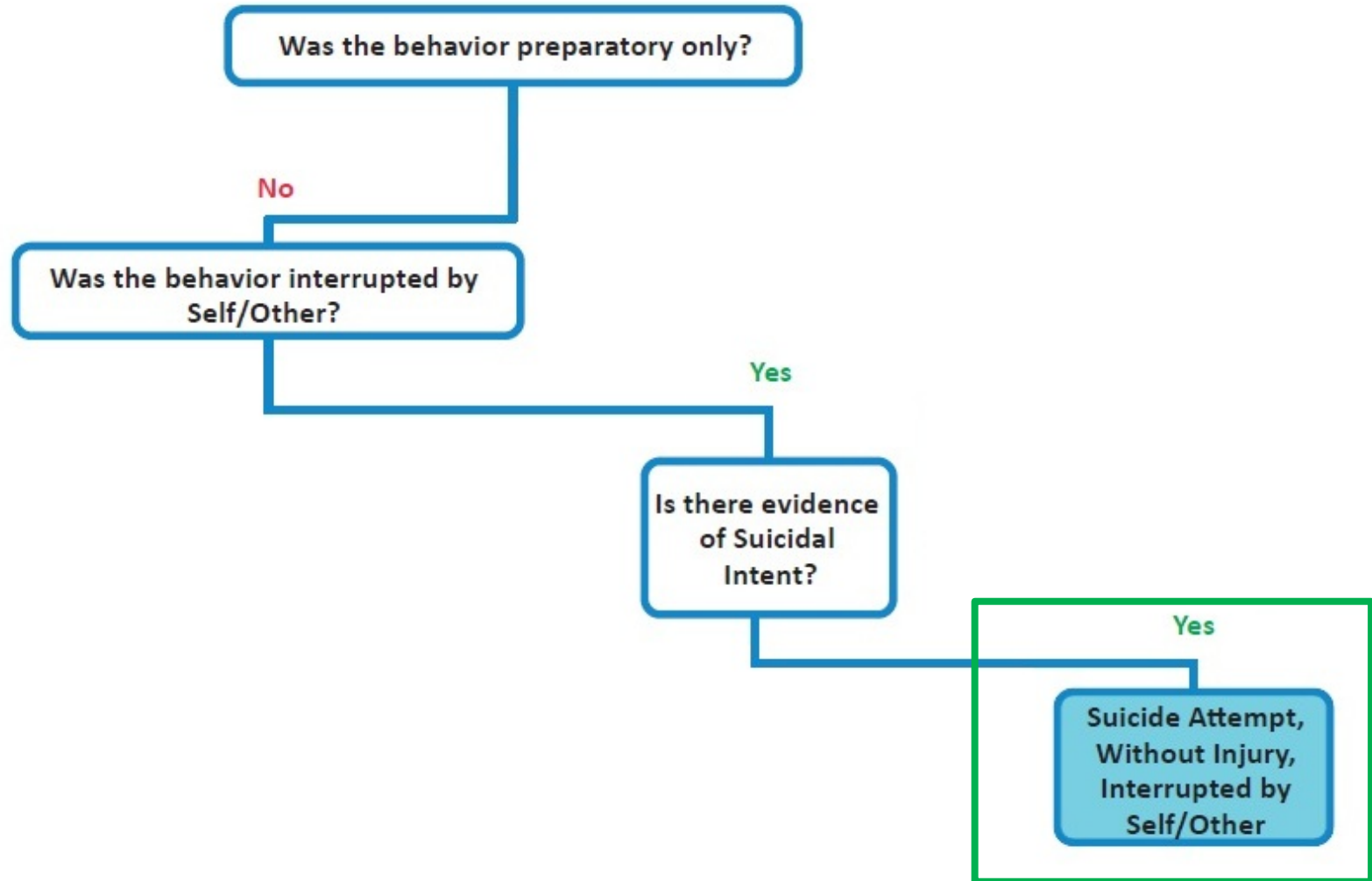
Let's review criteria for intent

There is past or present evidence (implicit or explicit) that an individual:

1. wishes to die
2. means to kill him/herself, and
3. understands the probable consequences of his/her actions or potential actions

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DECISION TREE B: BEHAVIORS, WITHOUT INJURY





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* Developed in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Example- Rhonda

Feeling bullied by her partner about losing weight, Rhonda calls a crisis line to get some support and feedback. She tells the responder that she recently imagined how sorry her partner would feel if she stopped eating altogether and ended up in the hospital.



Feeling bullied by her partner about losing weight, a female calls a crisis line to get some support and feedback. She tells the responder that she recently imagined how sorry her partner would feel if she stopped eating altogether and ended up in the hospital.

BEGIN WITH THESE 3 QUESTIONS:

1. Is there any indication that the person engaged in self-directed violent behavior that was lethal, preparatory, or potentially harmful?
(Refer to Key Terms on reverse side)
If NO, proceed to Question 2
If YES, proceed to Question 3

No.

2. Is there any indication that the person had self-directed violence related thoughts?
If NO to Questions 1 and 2, there is insufficient evidence to suggest self-directed violence → NO SDV TERM
If YES, proceed to Decision Tree A

No.



Original Example

A healthy 24-year-old female is brought by her boyfriend to the Emergency Department after she ingested all remaining pills in a bottle of regular strength Tylenol. She estimates there were 4 to 6 pills total in the bottle and she reports no ill effects. Lab tests done at the time of admission to the ED reported her acetaminophen level within the therapeutic range. During triage, she states that before she took the pills she was upset from arguing with her boyfriend and just wanted to die. She feels better now and requests to go home.



What is the behavior?

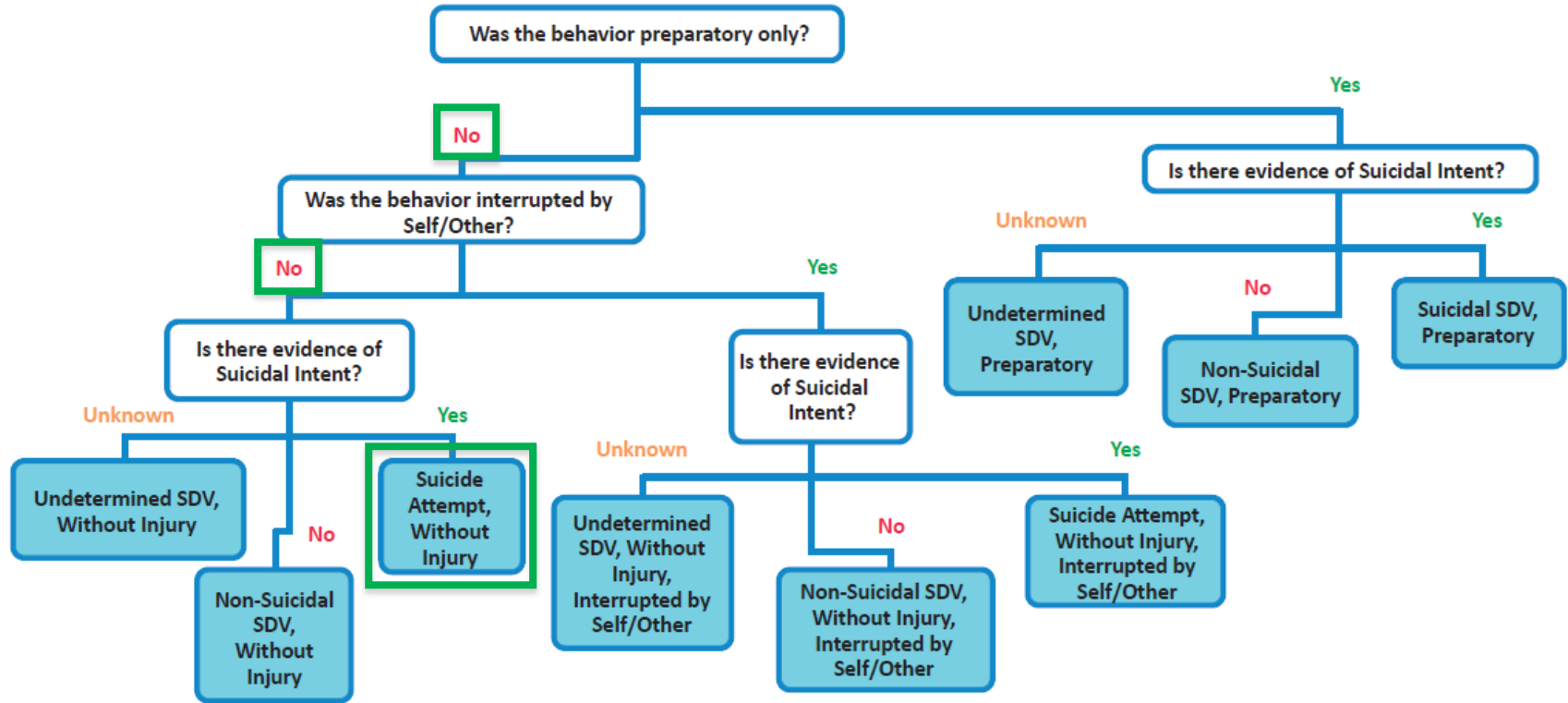
- Gesture?
- Threat?
- Acting Out/Manipulation?
- Attempt?
- Cry for help?
- Other?

What criteria did you use to decide?

- Lethality of method?
- Expressed intent?
- Number of pills ingested?
- Lab results?
- Other?



DECISION TREE B: BEHAVIORS, WITHOUT INJURY





The Nomenclature of Self-Directed Violence

- Aborted Suicide Attempt
- Attempted Suicide
- Committed Suicide
- Cry for Help
- Death Rehearsals
- Deliberate Self-Harm
- Failed Attempts
- Failed Completion
- Failed Suicide
- Intentional Self-Murder
- Intentional Suicide
- Non-Suicidal Self-injury
- Parasuicide
- Rational Suicide
- Self-Harm Behavior
- Self-Inflicted Behavior
- Self-Injurious Behavior
- Suicidal Episode
- Suicidal Gesture
- Suicidal Manipulation
- Suicidal Rehearsal
- Suicide Victim
- Successful Attempt
- Successful Suicide
- Unintentional Suicide

SDVCS

- Suicide Attempt
 - Without Injury
 - Without Injury, Interrupted by Self or Other
 - With Injury
 - With Injury, Interrupted by Self or Other
 - Suicide
- Suicidal Self-Directed Violence
 - Without / With / Fatal injury
 - Interrupted by Self or Other
- Non-Suicidal Self-Directed Violence
 - Without / With / Fatal injury
 - Interrupted by Self or Other
- Undetermined Self-Directed Violence
 - Without / With / Fatal injury
 - Interrupted by Self or Other

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Updated: 11 September 2017

Self-Directed Violence (SDV) Classification System and Clinical Toolkit

The field of Suicidology has long struggled with the lack of a universally agreed upon definition for suicide and associated terms. Synonymous with the word suicide is the term self-directed violence. A shared understanding of self-directed violence (SDV) in its various forms is critical. The VA has adopted a system that is consistent with the [CDC SELF-DIRECTED VIOLENCE SURVEILLANCE UNIFORM: Definitions and Recommended Data Elements](#) .

A two-page handout of the Self-Directed Violence Classification System is available for download .

Also available for download is the Clinical Tool (CT) . The Clinical Tool was created to aid clinician decision-making by facilitating rapid SDVCS term identification using a decision-tree model.

5 New Vignettes for SDVCS Training

We have just released five training vignettes that take real-life clinical situations and with the help of a consultant lead the clinician through the Self-Directed Violence Classification System. We plan to release 6 more vignettes, each a new challenge, in the coming months and build a dialog around using SDVCS. If you have an SDVCS challenge or question email us at RockyMountainMIRECC@va.gov.

SDVCS Introduction with Bridget Matarazzo, PsyD

In less than six minutes Dr. Matarazzo explains clearly why the adoption of the Self-Directed Violence Classification System is important for clinical practice and research related to suicide prevention. You may be surprised that exercise plays a part.



See Rocky Mountain MIRECC SDVCS Website for further training

<https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/education/nomenclature.asp>



Thank you!

Questions/Comments?

<http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19>



References

Brenner, L. A., Bresbears, R. E., Betthausen, L. E., Bellon, K. K., Holman, E., Harwood, J. E., ... Nagamoto, H. T. (2011). Implementation of a suicide nomenclature within two VA healthcare settings. *Journal of Clinical Psychology in Medical Settings*, 18, 116-128.