

Risk Assessment Case Example -- Deborah

Deborah, age 17, has been in therapy on-and-off for several years following identification of sexual abuse by a distant relative. The abuse began at age 10 and continued until age 15 when Deborah disclosed it to her mother. Although Deborah currently describes her relationships with her parents as supportive, they fought violently at times during her childhood and she reports having “flashbacks” to their altercations.

Deborah’s clinical history includes suicide attempts, some serious and others relatively passive. She has been hospitalized twice for psychiatric reasons, once for attempting suicide by overdose and the other for cutting her wrist with a broken piece of glass. Deborah has previously been diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder. The recent pattern of her illness has featured intense feelings of loneliness, hopelessness, and helplessness.

Deborah has used a wide variety of drugs. She is currently using marijuana 3-4 times per week and drinking alcohol with friends most weekends at parties. Deborah dropped out of high school about 2 months ago; she concluded that it didn’t make sense to pursue a diploma because she is so far behind in credits. School records indicate that Deborah has a high IQ and is very creative. Deborah has said that she would like to become a computer graphics designer. She has begun working part-time at a convenience store but finds the job boring. Deborah is contributing financially to her parents’ household but she also stays with friends or family members for extended periods, especially when she gets into arguments with her parents about her plans for the future.

Last week, Deborah went into self-imposed isolation, cutting off all contact with friends and family. When she called to talk with you, she was in an extreme state of anxiety, indicating that she “didn’t know what to do.” She also said that she “could not stand living this way anymore.”

What are Deborah’s risk factors for suicide?

How would you proceed in working with her?

How might you work with her family and friends?