

## Ability to develop a formulation

The term 'formulation' is used here to mean the development of an understanding of a person's feelings, thoughts and behaviours, the contributing and maintaining factors, stressors and protective factors.

The scope and extent to which an individual working with a person at risk of self-harm or suicide is able to understand and make sense of that person's problems will vary depending on the context in which the person is being seen and on the individual's role and responsibilities. However, the principles set out in this document are relevant to all settings.

## Knowledge

An ability to draw on knowledge that the aim of a formulation is to explain the development and maintenance of a person's difficulties, and that formulations:

comprise a set of plausible explanations that help to make sense of the information obtained during an assessment

are tailored to a person and where relevant their family or carers

integrate a focus on self-harm and/or suicide into the broader context of a person's life and their circumstances

An ability to draw on knowledge of the factors that are associated with self-harm and suicidal behaviour, and that can help to guide the content of a formulation

An ability to draw on knowledge of factors that are often relevant to a formulation, such as:

risk factors that might predispose to the development of self-harm behaviours and suicidality (e.g. trauma or mental health problems)

precipitating factors that might trigger the onset or exacerbation of difficulties (e.g. acute life stresses, transitions, such as relocation or starting a new job, change in home or family circumstances)

maintaining factors that might perpetuate difficulties once they have developed (e.g. unhelpful coping strategies, inadvertent reinforcement of problematic behaviours)

protective factors that might prevent a problem from becoming worse or that may help a person manage their situation (e.g. good communication with significant others, supportive peer group)

An ability to draw on knowledge that one of the main functions of a formulation is to help guide the development of an intervention plan or course of action

an ability to draw on knowledge that the intervention plan usually aims to reduce the effects of precipitating and maintaining factors and to promote protective factors (and so reduce the risk of self-harm and suicidality)

### **Ability to construct a formulation**

An ability to evaluate and integrate assessment information into an understanding of key factors that significantly influence the development of the presenting problem(s), drawing on sources of information such as:

a person's perception of significant factors and their explanation for the presenting problem(s)

associations between the onset, intensity and frequency of self-harming or suicidal thoughts and behaviours and factors in a person's psychosocial environment (e.g. relationship breakdown, traumatic life events, parental ill health)

An ability to construct a comprehensive account that:

identifies issues relating both to self-harm/suicide and to associated presenting problems

demonstrates an understanding of the way a person views the world

An ability to identify a course of action that accommodates and addresses the issues identified by the assessment and formulation