



7.10. Observation of children/young people at risk of self-harming

- An ability to draw on knowledge that the aim of observation is to maintain the safety of children/young people who have been appropriately assessed and identified as being at high risk of self-harming
- An ability to draw on knowledge that observation of children/young people who are self-harming is an intervention in its own right
- An ability to draw on knowledge that the integrity of continuous or intermittent scheduled observation can be compromised:
 - when carried out by practitioners who are untrained or lack direct experience of children/young people who are very distressed and actively at risk of self-harming
 - when carried out by practitioners who are not familiar with the child/young person and their history
 - when carried out as a 'tick-box' exercise (e.g. where observation comprises a minimal or very brief check-in)
- An ability to draw on knowledge that the effectiveness of observation can be compromised if the practitioner is unclear about their remit and so restrict the extent of observation, e.g.:
 - not checking when the child/young person is in their bedroom because of concerns about invading a 'private' space
 - feeling unable to check that the child/young person is safe when they are in bed and under covers (and observation would involve disturbing them)
- An ability to draw on knowledge that observation can be distressing and experienced as punishing, shaming or degrading for the child/young person (e.g. if continuous monitoring means that the child/young person has no/limited privacy when carrying out activities, particularly related to personal hygiene)

Conducting observations

- An ability to use observation as a constructive opportunity:
 - to interact with and engage the child/young person and gain their trust
 - to engage in purposeful activities with the child/young person
 - to understand the sources of their distress and help them to express themselves
 - to help assess mental state
- An ability to draw on a range of communication skills to respond to distress, with the aim of helping the child/young person express their feelings and make use of basic coping skills



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- An ability to adapt observation to the moment-to-moment needs of the child/young person e.g.
 - interacting and/or engaging in activities, if the child/young person is open to this
 - if the child/young person is uncomfortable or distressed by contact, being silent or reducing proximity to them

- An ability to detect to indications of impending aggression or violence and to respond appropriately (e.g. by withdrawing to a safer distance or using de-escalation techniques)

- An ability to detect when observations may be inadvertently reinforcing risk behaviours and to contribute to an multidisciplinary team care plan on how to manage this most appropriately

Organisational competences

- An ability to ensure that observation is seen as the responsibility of the multidisciplinary team
- An ability to draw on knowledge that because observation can become reinforcing (increasing the likelihood of risk behaviour occurring), the way observations are conducted needs to be monitored and reviewed by the multidisciplinary team
- An ability to ensure that, as far as possible, observation is seen as a partnership, and so informing the child/young person and their family/ carers/significant others
 - about observational policies and procedures
 - about the reasons for the level of observation
 - about any changes to the level and frequency of observation

- An ability to ensure that the multidisciplinary team has procedures in place to ensure:
 - that the frequency of observations is matched to the estimation of active risk
 - that observations are carried out at the rate agreed by the service
 - that the frequency of observations is continually reviewed, in relation to assessments of the child/young person, their mental state and their needs
 - that the frequency of observations is reviewed regularly, to assess whether it is reducing risk behaviours
 - that there is a robust system in place that identifies who is responsible for conducting observations ay any one time



- An ability to ensure that observations are conducted by people who have had training in observation, have an appropriate level of background training, and who understand their role and responsibilities
- An ability to ensure that practitioners conducting observations are supported and supervised, in line with their level of experience
- An ability to ensure that practitioners are briefed about how to respond (and who to alert) when there is a serious threat to observation that may place the child/young person at risk (e.g. leaving a ward by themselves without permission)