

Episode 18 - RTI Series – After Processing Suicidal Ideation

This podcast episode is the second part of a series that addresses how to intervene when dealing with suicidal ideation in children and youth.

It emphasizes the importance of training for counselors and aims to make discussing this sensitive subject more approachable. An important focus is for counselors is to help clients understand suicidal ideation as a symptom rather than delving into the "why" behind it, which is a task for therapists. The episode emphasizes the need to distance clients from these thoughts and work on developing their executive skills, especially stress tolerance.

The counselor's role involves empathetic listening, establishing a sense of belonging, and helping the client tolerate their negative feelings and thoughts without using harmful behaviors. If suicidal ideation includes gestures, attempts, or plans, the counselor should assess the situation in terms of risk and rescue factors and consult with an on-call clinician.

After a check-in around suicidal ideation, there are important communications and documentation to the rest of the team. There may also be structural interventions put in place such as Scheduled Check-Ins, Increased Structure, Staff Shadowing, Re-entry Plans, and various restrictions that can be documented on a Safety Watch form. That documentation helps everyone on the immediate team, and involved in follow up the next day, to work as a team to help keep the client feeling and acting safe.

Another powerful intervention is the creation of a Safety Contract, which serves as a formal agreement between the at-risk client and staff to ensure safety and offers personalized support.

The episode also underscores the partnership between therapy and counseling, with therapy addressing the "why" and counseling addressing the "how" of maladaptive behaviors.

Lastly, the podcast reminds listeners of the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (988) as a resource for those needing guidance and emotional support outside of their work lives.