

## Emergency Department “Means Restriction” Education

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### Description

The Emergency Department “Means Restriction” Education (ED-MRE) program is an evidenced-based, focused and timely education protocol for the parents of youth who are suicidal or experiencing a serious mental health episode that might predispose them to suicide. “Means Restriction” programs seek to reduce or eliminate easy access to suicide methods (i.e., means), especially those associated with impulsive suicides. Suicide methods that have been successfully limited with means restriction include poisons and toxic fumes, prescription and over-the-counter medications, firearms, and bridges and tall buildings. Means restrictions are most beneficial in preventing suicides due to sudden impulses during a crisis, but there is general agreement that if a person is determined, they will find a way. However, reducing the opportunity for an impulsive suicide extends the period where detection and intervention may occur, thus helping individuals and families while reducing the overall suicide rate.

The ED-MRE program is a simple training protocol for emergency department personnel to educate parents of youth at risk for suicide about ways to reduce easy access to lethal means. The ED-MRE protocol itself is available at no-cost from the author. It is a timely intervention in that the parent is likely to be in an emotional state where they need a concrete activity to respond to their teen’s crisis and are very likely to perform the means reduction activities. It has the added advantage as part of a state sponsored suicide prevention strategy in that it is virtually cost-neutral once an emergency department has been trained in the protocol.

In a consult out of the presence of the at-risk youth, an emergency room staff person informs the parent of their assessment that their child is at increased suicide risk and how the determination was made. The staff person then gives the parent information regarding steps they can take immediately to reduce the suicide risk by limiting access to lethal means, including poisons, medications, firearms, etc. This includes problem solving on ways to limit access unique to the youth’s home and other environments. The program also includes suggestions on ways to ensure the safe storage of firearms in the home or to work with local law enforcement to provide for secure storage of firearms at the local police department.

### Characteristics

- Population
  - Parents of 6-19 year olds who have attempted or are at-risk for suicide or are experiencing a serious mental health episode that might predispose them to suicide.
  - Non-specific to gender, race or ethnicity. The study group in the original research included:
    - 50% male, 50% females
    - 75% white, 24% African American, 2% Hispanic
- Risk, Protective & Causal Factors
  - Risk factor - easy access to lethal means of self-harm
  - Protective factor – lowered access to lethal means of self-harm
- IOM Category (level of care)
  - Selective – the person has one or a small number of risk factors for suicide or mental health issues that might predispose the person for suicide.
  - Indicated – the person has multiple risk factors for suicide or mental health issues that might predispose the person for suicide.

### Effectiveness

The target group for the ED-MRE program is the *parents* of youth at risk for suicide as determined by a mental health assessment conducted by emergency department staff. Follow-up interviews found that the parents who received the ED-MRE program made dramatic reductions in the availability of common means of suicide compared to a comparison group. Parents receiving means restriction education were:

- 27% more likely to restrict access or dispose of prescription medications (75% in the treatment group vs. 48% in the comparison group);
- 26% more likely to restrict access or dispose of over-the-counter medications (48% in the treatment group vs. 22% in the comparison group);
- 36% more likely to restrict access or dispose of alcohol (47% in the treatment group vs. 11% in the comparison group); and
- 63% more likely to restrict access or dispose of firearms (63% in the treatment group vs. 0% in the comparison group).

#### Program delivery

The ED-MRE program is delivered by emergency department staff trained to follow the suicide means restriction protocol. Part of the ED-MRE program's effectiveness may stem from the emotional distress and openness to receive help that most parents would experience during an emergency room visit following a suicide attempt or other critical mental health emergency involving their child. It may also serve to give the parent a targeted activity at a time when they have a serious need to act, to do something. These factors may account for the high rate of change in the parent's behavior achieved by the ED-MRE program.

#### Considerations for use in Idaho

The ED-MRE program is a virtually free education program delivered to the parent at crucial time when they need answers and concrete actions they can take to protect their child from suicide. Its low cost and high level of effectiveness makes it a valuable part of a state suicide prevention plan. The intervention takes little time to deliver and has been found to have a strong reduction on the availability of suicidal means in the ordinary home. It is particularly successful in reducing suicides due to sudden impulse combined with easily available means, but should be used in combination with other methods to fully manage a suicidal episode.

The ED-MRE could also be effective in preventing suicide in adults with suicidal or serious mental health episodes. Family or friends could limit access to easy means for the adult. The at-risk adult himself could follow the protocol to limit his access to easily available means, especially if the means reduction education occurred during the remorseful period that often follows unsuccessful attempts.

#### Training & costs

There is no cost for the ED-MRE protocol – it is available for free from the program developer. Training is available from the program developer; please contact Dr. Kruesi for cost and details. The only delivery cost is the amount of time the emergency room personnel spends with the parent.

#### Dissemination & support

The ED-MRE protocol is available from the Dr. Kruesi, the primary author of the ED-MRE program. The ED-MRE mechanism is primarily information conveyance and shouldn't require support from the program developer. However, should support be desired, he may be contacted at the address below.

#### Contact information

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#### Other program synopses

- [http://www.sprc.org/featured\\_resources/bpr/ebpp\\_PDF/emer\\_dept.pdf](http://www.sprc.org/featured_resources/bpr/ebpp_PDF/emer_dept.pdf)

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