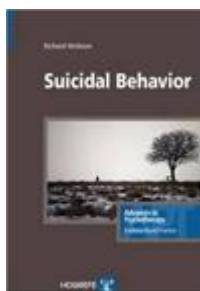


Saving Lives

A review of



Suicidal Behavior

by Richard T. McKeon

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Reviewed by

[Marc Hillbrand](#)

Summarizing the clinical and scholarly literature on suicidal behavior in fewer than 100 pages is a daunting task. This challenging topic requires accurately portraying the dense web of issues that underlie suicidality. Richard McKeon's *Suicidal Behavior* succeeds at what would seem to be an impossible task: making the complex clear, leaving nothing important out, and delivering a volume that is well written, thoughtfully organized, and enhanced by vignettes and clinical pearls.

Advances in Psychotherapy: Evidence-Based Practice is a series sponsored by the Society of Clinical Psychology (Division 12) of the American Psychological Association. Under the editorial leadership of Danny Wedding, Hogrefe and Huber has so far produced 15 attractive, compact, comprehensive, and readable tomes on topics including bipolar disorders, eating disorders, and substance use problems. *Suicidal Behavior* is the 14th volume in the series.

McKeon brings considerable expertise to the task. After earning a PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Arizona and an MPH from Columbia University, he held leadership positions in several community health centers, where he pioneered the use of empirically supported treatments including dialectical behavior therapy. After serving as clinical division director of the American Association of Suicidology, he has been coordinating suicide prevention initiatives at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Suicidal Behavior is divided into four sections. The first focuses on describing suicidal behavior and includes a discussion of definitional issues. A section on theories and models follows. Section 3 aptly combines risk assessment and treatment planning, eloquently illustrating the connection between the two. Finally, the largest section of the volume is devoted to treatment. In choosing to devote most of his text to treatment, McKeon avoids a common problem in past books on this topic, namely overemphasizing assessment and crisis management at the expense of treatment. He readily acknowledges a limitation of the literature on the psychotherapy of suicidal individuals: There are few clinical trials of interventions aimed at preventing suicides, and effectiveness studies are largely lacking.

McKeon's style is refreshingly engaging. He uses brief clinical vignettes effectively to illustrate points, as well as clinical pearls that provide the reader with concrete examples of how to address specific challenges. This includes guidance on what questions to ask regarding suicidal ideation and intent (e.g., "Do you ever feel hopeless? Have you ever felt so hopeless that you wanted to kill yourself?").

There are numerous tables that summarize important information (e.g., risk factors for suicidal behavior in individuals with alcohol use disorder, Shneidman's 10 commonalities of suicide, and Rudd's ICARE techniques to modify suicidal beliefs). Important points are also summarized in the margins, making it quite easy to review the contents of a section.

There are numerous references throughout the text to other valuable resources such as Shea's work on eliciting suicidal content. McKeon occasionally adopts a first-person narrative style, using personal stories to illustrate his points in a heartfelt, moving fashion. This effectively conveys the point that suicide prevention requires a strong personal connection between a psychotherapist and the person who wonders whether life is worth living. Both embark on this adventure hesitantly, but the journey has the potential to be a profoundly humanizing experience for both.

Berman and his colleagues have convincingly argued that the competent practice of psychotherapy requires solid foundational training in the assessment and management of suicidal behavior, ongoing continuing education on suicidality, and supervision and consultation (Maris, Berman, Silverman, & Bongar, 2000). All clinical psychologists should read and master the contents of *Suicidal Behavior*. They will be richly rewarded, and lives may be saved.

Reference

Maris, R. W., Berman, A. L., Silverman, M. M., & Bongar, B. M. (2000). Suicide and the law. In R. W. Maris, A. L. Berman, & M. M. Silverman (Eds.), *Comprehensive textbook of suicidology* (pp. 480–508). New York: Guilford Press.
