

Considerations for Mediators who Encounter Suicidal Clients

BACKGROUND: According to Centers for Disease Control (CDC) data, suicides outnumbered homicides as a cause of death in the United States from 2011 to 2020.¹ During this time period, the suicide death rate was 14.1 people per 100,000 in the U.S.² While still unlikely that a North Carolina mediator will encounter the subject of suicide during mediation, the prevalence and persistence of suicide in our society makes it desirable for mediators to be aware of the issue and be prepared to respond should the need present itself.

ACTION PLAN FOR MEDIATORS: Warning signs of suicide include talking about death; feeling unbearable pain; feeling hopeless, worthless, or trapped; and feeling like a burden to others.³ Mediators who encounter clients exhibiting warning signs should consider taking the following steps:

1. Let the person know you're concerned.
2. Ask the person if they're having thoughts of suicide.
3. Listen without judgment.
4. Let the person know that you care about them.
5. Offer to connect the person with help.⁴

If the mediator believes the client may harm themselves, the mediator may also contact law enforcement without violating the Standards of Professional Conduct for Mediators. Standard 3, Confidentiality, allows mediators to reveal confidential information relating to public safety if a party to the mediation has communicated a threat of serious bodily harm to any person (presumably including themselves) and the mediator believes the person has the intent and ability to act on the threat.⁵

NORTH CAROLINA RESOURCES:

1. 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (dial 988): Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in crisis, 24/7. People can contact the Lifeline on behalf of themselves or another person. Those who contact the Lifeline will be connected with a trained crisis counselor.
2. Hope4NC Helpline (1-855-587-3463): Connects North Carolinians with emotional support and mental health resources free of charge throughout the state's 100 counties.

¹ [Suicide Deaths in the United States – Suicide Prevention Resource Center \(sprc.org\)](#) (last accessed 5 Aug 24).

² *Id.*

³ [Warning-Signs-of-Suicide-a-Fact-Sheet-for-Family-and-Community-Members.pdf \(sprc.org\)](#) (last accessed 5 Aug 24).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ [Standards of Professional Conduct for Mediators - Codified 18 June 2024.pdf \(nccourts.gov\)](#) (last accessed 5 Aug 24).