

Repeated Suicidal Attempts in Foster Teenagers: Breaking the Cycle using a Stepped Care Approach

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Abstract : In a paradoxical way, teenagers nowadays seem to use suicidal attempts to elaborate on their trauma abuses and regain some kind of control in their lives. As their behavior becomes life-threatening, the hospital offers a variety of expertise to address their need, with Child Protective Services also joining in, to a point when teenagers could have a feeling of losing control of their lives, which results in them making more suicidal attempts. Our goal here is to walk with these foster teenagers long enough to step therapy up first, then as their mental health is restored enough to step the therapy down in a way that is secure and will give them their life back. This would prevent them from making suicidal attempts to get a feeling of control over their life. We'll present a clinical case of a 14-year-old girl named Sofia, who was suffering from parental deprivation, an identity disorder, and severe depression disorder. Our intervention took place in January 2024, after Sofia had undergone four hospitalizations, including a two-month period in a specialized clinic. In a stepping-up effort, a substantial setting has been built around Sofia. She was coming three days a week to therapeutic activities at the Child Psychiatry Day Hospital, she had one psychotherapy session a week at the Medical-Psychological Center, and she was meeting with the Adolescent Psychiatrist on a regular basis. However, her suicidal attempts frequency continued to increase to the point when she couldn't stay more than four days outside the hospital unit without harming herself and being brought back to the Emergency Unit. We were all stuck in some kind of medical deadlock, writing to clinics that had no room for her while social workers were calling foster homes that wouldn't even accept her either. At some point, a clinical decision was made by the psychiatrist to stop what appeared to be a global movement of traumatic repetition, which involved Sofia's family, the medical team and the social workers as one. This decision to step therapy down created a surprise and put an end to the cycle. It provided a new path, a new solution where Sofia could securely settle without being unfaithful to her family. Her suicidal attempts stopped for four weeks. She had one relapse, then didn't make another attempt so far. There is a fine line between too little and too much, a pathway with the right amount of care and support. We believe it is not a steady line but rather a path up and down the hill. It's about building up this moment when medication and mental processes have improved the subject's condition enough to allow the medical team to step therapy down and give more control back to the subject. These needed variations used to come from a change of hospital or medical team. Stepped care avoids any breaking of bonds and appears to be decisive in stopping teenagers' suicidal attempts.

Keywords : child protection, adolescent psychiatry, teenager suicidal attempt, foster teenagers, parental deprivation, stepped care

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