The adolescent suicide attempt: A cardinal symptom of a serious psychiatric disorder

Causes. Suicide is an act that represents the end result of a combination of factors in any individual. One model that has been used by clinicians to explain why people suffering under the same life stresses respond differently is known as the stress/diathesis model. Diathesis is a medical term for a predisposition that makes some people more vulnerable to thoughts of suicide. A person who has attempted suicide and who is considered a serious danger to him- or herself or to others can be hospitalized against their will. American Psychiatric Association. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. 4th edition, text revised. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000. Eisendrath, Stuart J., MD, and Jonathan E. Lichtmacher, MD. “Psychiatric Disorders.” Serious mood disorders, such as major depressive disorder or bipolar disorder, may present in adolescents in several ways. Some adolescents may come to the office with complaints similar to those of depressed adults, having symptoms, such as sad or down feelings most of the time, crying spells, guilty or worthless feelings, markedly diminished interest or pleasure in most activities, significant weight loss. In the presence of a recent suicide attempt, the lack of current suicidal ideation may also be misleading if none of the factors that led to the attempt have changed or the reasons for the attempt are not understood. Vigorous treatment of the underlying psychiatric disorder is important in decreasing short-term and long-term risk of suicide. Suicide and attempted suicide are not psychiatric disorders, but rather, symptoms of emotional distress which may be associated with certain psychiatric disorders such as depression. Consequently, there are no true diagnostic criteria. Several characteristics of a suicide attempt are pertinent to determining its severity. These include the intensity of suicidal ideation prior to the attempt, method of attempt, the precipitant of the attempt, and suicidal intent accompanying the attempt. 5.18.3.1 Ideation. The potential for a medically serious suicide attempt increases when prescription drugs are available, regardless of whether or not the drugs have been prescribed for the adolescent or another family member.