

The Interpersonal Theory of Suicide

The Interpersonal Theory of Suicide, first described by Joiner (2005), suggests that suicidal ideation is driven by three factors.

1. **Thwarted belonging.** This means that individuals do not feel like they belong or are accepted by others. This might be because they find it difficult to maintain relationships with others or have experienced bullying or exclusion.
2. **Perceived burdensomeness.** This means that the individual feels as if they are dragging other people down, and that others would be better off without them. Research suggests people who rely on others for their care needs to be met are more likely to experience perceived burdensomeness.
3. **Capability for suicide.** This means that the individual is able to make a suicide attempt. This might mean that they have procured the means to die by suicide or have been engaging with content which is pro-suicide in nature.

Whilst this model was designed for use in the general population, autistic individuals have been shown to be at greater risk of experiencing thwarted belonging and perceived burdensomeness than non-autistic people (Pelton et al., 2020). Autistic individuals are more likely to be unemployed than non-autistic individuals and are more likely to live with their parents as adults, which can contribute to a feeling of perceived burdensomeness. Masking, or hiding your autistic traits, has also been associated with reduced feelings of suicidality and thus higher risk of suicidality (Cassidy et al., 2020). Moreover, non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) is associated with increase in suicidality regardless of an individual's perception of their self-injury, perhaps because NSSI increases individual's pain threshold and decreases danger perception (Moseley et al., 2020). Therefore, NSSI increases an individual's capacity for suicidality.

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