Ten Commonalities of Suicide

In his book *The Suicidal Mind*, Edwin Shneidman (a co-founder of the American Association of Suicidology, www.suicidology.org) outlines what he calls "the 10 psychological commonalities of suicide":

1. The common purpose of suicide is to seek a solution: A suicidal person is seeking a solution to a problem that is "generating intense suffering" within him or her.

2. The common goal of suicide is cessation of consciousness: The anguished mind of a suicidal person interprets the end of consciousness as the only way to end the suffering.

3. The common stimulus of suicide is psychological pain: Shneidman calls it "psychache," by which he means "intolerable emotion, unbearable pain, unacceptable anguish."

4. The common stressor in suicide is frustrated psychological needs: A suicidal person feels pushed toward self-destruction by psychological needs that are not being met (for example, the need for achievement, for nurturance or for understanding).

5. The common emotion in suicide is hopelessness-helplessness: A suicidal person feels despondent, utterly unsalvable.

6. The common cognitive state of suicide is ambivalence: Suicidal people, Shneidman says, "wish to die and they simultaneously wish to be rescued."

7. The common perceptual state in suicide is constriction: The mind of a suicidal person is constricted in its ability to perceive options, and, in fact, mistakenly sees only two choices—either continue suffering or die.

8. The common action in suicide is escape: Shneidman calls it "the ultimate egression (another word for escape) besides which running away from home, quitting a job, deserting an army, or leaving a spouse ... pale in comparison."

9. The common interpersonal act in suicide is communication of intention: "Many individuals intent on committing suicide ... emit clues of intention, signals of distress, whimpers of helplessness, or pleas for intervention."

10. The common pattern in suicide is consistent with life-long styles of coping: A person's past tendency for black-and-white thinking, escapism, control, capitulation and the like could serve as a clue to how he or she might deal with a present crisis.