

Suicide Prevention: guidance for workers, volunteers and friends/family members



What is my role regarding suicide prevention?

We all have a role to play in preventing suicide. Some of us may be supporting people in a professional role (in which case this guidance should be applied alongside organisational and professional guidelines). This guidance aims to support you to have a conversation to help an individual who might be showing signs of suicidal thoughts and/or behaviours. Different staff groups will have different levels of responsibility in terms of understanding and responding to risk. If in doubt, always seek advice from a manager or safeguarding lead.

Some will be supporting people in a voluntary capacity and may feel unsure about their role in supporting someone who is talking about suicide. Always speak with the volunteer co-ordinator or support worker and follow organisational policies and procedures.

Others will be concerned about friends and family and wondering how you can also support people who are having thoughts of suicide – and this guidance is also for you.

Take the free 20-minute Zero Suicide Alliance training on how to have a life conversation: zerosuicidealliance.com/suicide-awareness-training

Why is suicide important to talk about?

- Talking about suicide not only reduces stigma but also allows a person to open up about how they are feeling.
- People who have felt suicidal often report feeling a huge relief after opening up to someone about how they are feeling, and evidence shows asking someone if they're suicidal could protect them.
- It is a myth that talking to someone about suicide puts the idea in their heads; talking to someone about suicide does not make it more likely to happen.
- One in five people have thought about suicide at some time in their life and not all people who die by suicide have mental health problems at the time they die. That is why it is important to ask the question if you know someone is struggling, even if they have not historically struggled with their mental health.

When urgent help is required

There may be situations when you feel unable to engage someone in a conversation, perhaps because you are too far away from them, or because their behaviour may be erratic, violent and frightening. If you think someone is in need of urgent help please see the box below:

- If it is an emergency and life is in danger please dial **999** (ask for ambulance, fire service or police)
- If it is a mental health crisis, please dial **111** to speak to the mental health triage team

Stay with the person if you are able – and continue to talk with them.

If you have witnessed a suicide

When someone takes their life and you were in some way involved or a witness, it can be really tough and upsetting. Even if you didn't know the person at all. Witnessing a suicide can be extremely traumatic and it is important to acknowledge how this could have affected a person or may affect a person in the future.

If you or someone you know has witnessed a suicide or have been impacted by a suicide in some way, please get in contact with services that can support you, such as Cruse Bereavement by Suicide Support Service: crusenow.org.uk

Self-harming behaviour may not mean that an individual is experiencing suicidal thoughts or thinking about suicide, however it is important to know that there is strong evidence to suggest that the risk of suicide among those who have self-harmed is greater than that of the general population.

For specific advice and support with self-harm, please visit hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/issue/crisis-self-harm-and-suicide for children and young people, or nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/behaviours/self-harm/getting-help for adults and children.

Further advice and information on urgent help (including Safe Havens) is available at the following websites:

Adults living in Hampshire but not Aldershot, Farnborough, Fleet and Yateley. hiowhealthcare.nhs.uk/help-crisis

Adults and children living in Aldershot, Farnborough, Fleet and Yateley. sabp.nhs.uk/our-services/advice-guidance/getting-help-crisis

Children and young people up to the age of 18 years in Hampshire. hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/help-im-in-crisis

Children and young people up to the age of 18 years in North East Hampshire (Aldershot, Farnborough, Fleet and Yateley). sabp.nhs.uk/our-services/services-a-z/crisis-intervention-service

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Signs and situations

Everyone copes and reacts to thoughts of suicide in their own way. You may not always be able to spot them, but here are some signs and situations that may suggest a person is in need of help. People may be more at risk at specific points in time, and we know some people are more at risk than others, but we should be vigilant to the signs in everyone – as suicide can affect anyone, at any time.

Signs

- Feeling restless and agitated
- Feeling angry and aggressive
- Feeling tearful
- Being tired or lacking in energy
- Not wanting to talk to or be with people
- Not wanting to do things they usually enjoy
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope with feelings
- Finding it hard to cope with everyday things
- Not replying to messages or being distant
- Talking about feeling hopeless, helpless or worthless
- Talking about feeling trapped by life circumstances they can't see a way out of, or feeling unable to escape their thoughts
- A change in routine, such as sleeping or eating more or less than normal
- Engaging in risk-taking behaviour, like gambling or violence
- Talking about their self-harming
- Feeling happy, elated or peaceful (which may indicate a person has made a decision about taking their life)

Risk factors

- Loss, including loss of a friend or a family member through bereavement
- Suicide or attempted suicide of family member, friend or public figure
- Relationship and family problems
- Housing problems
- Financial worries
- Job-related stress
- College or study-related pressures
- Bullying, abuse or neglect
- Loneliness and isolation
- Challenging current events
- Depression
- Painful and/or disabling physical illness
- Heavy use of or dependency on alcohol or other drugs

Risk groups

- Children and young people
- Middle-aged men
- People who have self-harmed
- People in contact with mental health services
- People in contact with the justice system
- Autistic people
- Pregnant women and new mothers

How to help someone who may have thoughts of suicide

If you recognise some of the signs above and feel concerned about the person, start a conversation with them about how they are feeling. Reaching out to someone could help them know that someone cares, that they are valued, and help them access the support they need.

If the person has shared with you that they are having thoughts of suicide, you could ask them any of the following (or other questions) to engage with them and to help keep them safe.

- What have they been doing that helps?
- What can they do that stops the suicidal feelings from getting worse?
- Do they have a friend or family member they can talk to about how they feel?
- What doesn't help?
- What do they feel would help right now?

Don't worry too much about saying the 'wrong' thing; what's most important is that you are listening and showing that you care.

Help to take the pressure off the person by suggesting that it may not be the best time today to make a decision about taking their life, eg it doesn't have to be a decision today about life or death (they can put their decision on pause).

Gain their agreement to put their decision on hold for now – eg 'So if you agree to put your decision on hold for now, shall we talk about what we can do together to help you stay safe?'

The Suicide First Aid training course identifies three steps to helping someone who may be suicidal:

1. **Recognise** and **Ask**
2. **Listen** and **Explore**
3. **Signpost** to **Support**

Step one: Recognise and Ask

- **Recognise** if someone isn't quite right – are they agitated, or distracted, do they seem 'down' or 'animated' in a way that leads you to believe they may be in some sort of crisis? Is their voice broken, or monotone, or just sounding different in some way? Is their body language suggesting that they may not be in a good place mentally?
- **Ask** if they may be thinking of taking their life or thinking about suicide and be direct. It may help to say something like 'Sometimes when people are going through a difficult time, they are thinking of suicide. Are you thinking of suicide?' There is still a taboo around talking about suicide which can make it even harder for people experiencing these feelings to open up and feel understood. Direct questions about suicide like 'Are you having suicidal thoughts?' or 'Have you felt like you want to end your life?' can help someone talk about how they are feeling. It is completely understandable to feel anxious about asking someone about suicide but please try to be as direct as you can to save a life.

- You may have to ask the same question a second or third time – the person may need some extra encouragement to be honest about their feelings.
- Asking someone if they are having thoughts of suicide or are planning to end their life may not feel like the right thing to do but in fact professionals do recommend asking direct questions about suicide. Some people worry that this might indirectly encourage the person who is feeling suicidal to act on their feelings, but in reality research has shown that speaking openly about suicide decreases the likelihood of the person acting on their feelings. Many people feel relieved and less isolated when they are asked.
- Try not to judge. You might feel shocked, upset or frightened, but it's important not to blame the person for how they are feeling. They may have taken a big step by telling you.
- Show you are listening and acknowledge their feelings.

Step two: Listen and Explore

- **Listen** carefully and use open questions to find out more about the issues. Open questions invite someone to say more than 'yes' or 'no' and include questions such as 'How have you been feeling?', 'What happened next?' There are more ideas for open questions on the [Samaritans](https://www.samaritans.org) website. Visit [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)
- Asking simple, direct questions can encourage them to be honest about how they are feeling.
- Give them time. You might feel anxious to hear their answers, but it helps if you let them take the time they need.
- Take them seriously. People who talk about suicide do sometimes act on their feelings – it's a common myth that they don't. It's best to assume that they are telling the truth about feeling suicidal.
- **Explore** the possible causes of their feelings and things that could help. Although it's understandable to want to immediately jump in with solutions, allow the person to express their feelings first. It is unlikely that you will be able to make their feelings go away, but you can help by encouraging them to see that there are some things worth living for. Talk to them about anything that might cause their suicidal feelings, and explore what could help in these situations.
- Refer to the person-centred language guide for tips on the best language to use when talking about suicide to avoid creating more stigma.

Step three: Signpost to support

- Reassure them that they are not alone and that you can look for support together.
- Avoid making promises and be realistic about what you can and can't do.
- Familiarise yourself with the support that is available in Hampshire and nationally (see the signposting on the following pages). Also consider supporting them to make an appointment to speak to/see their GP
- It may help the individual to remember a safety plan they may already have in place, or to consider drawing one up (an example can be downloaded from the Samaritans website).
Visit getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/safetyplan.pdf
- Agree some sort of follow-up, by phone, text, online, email or in person.

Remember that kindness, compassion and interest are what people report as the most important thing that helped them to speak up and find their voice when having thoughts of suicide.

Remember to also look after yourself as you support someone who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts or feelings. Speak to your manager or safeguarding lead. Other help can be found at hants.gov.uk/mentalwellbeinghampshire

Where to go for help

Advice and support for everyone

- Download the **Stay Alive app** – available on Google Play or the app store.
- Watch the 'save a life' suicide prevention training video: zerosuicidealliance.com/training
- Visit hubofhope.co.uk for support in your area.

When you need to talk to someone or need urgent help

- **Call NHS 111** or visit 111.nhs.uk for mental health support.
- Call **Samaritans** on **116 123** or email jo@samaritans.org
- **Text SHOUT** on **85258** (for an immediate call back) or visit giveusashout.org
- Visit Papyrus at papyrus-uk.org for young people.

In an emergency, always **call 999**.



Thoughts of suicide

If it is an emergency and life is in danger please dial **999** (ask for ambulance, fire service or police). If it is a mental health crisis, please dial **111**. NHS 111 provides triage support to people who are in self defined crisis. NHS 111 can refer directly into secondary care mental health services where required. They can also support the mobilisation of the mental health rapid response car should this be assessed as appropriate on the call.

- [hiowhealthcare.nhs.uk/help-crisis](https://www.hiowhealthcare.nhs.uk/help-crisis) – Support for adults living in Hampshire but not Aldershot, Farnborough, Fleet and Yateley.
- sabp.nhs.uk/our-services/advice-guidance/getting-help-crisis – Support for adults and children living in Aldershot, Farnborough, Fleet and Yateley. They also run a **Mental Health Crisis Helpline** for 24 hour support for people experiencing a mental health crisis. Visit sabp.nhs.uk/crisis-helpline, or call **0800 915 4644**.
- [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org) – 24 hour confidential emotional support. Call FREE **116 123**.
- [giveusashout.org](https://www.giveusashout.org) – Confidential 24/7 crisis text support for times when someone needs immediate assistance. Text 'HANTS' to **85258**.
- [rethink.org/advice-and-information/about-mental-illness/learn-more-about-symptoms/suicidal-thoughts-how-to-cope/](https://www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/about-mental-illness/learn-more-about-symptoms/suicidal-thoughts-how-to-cope/) – Visit for information for those with suicidal thoughts.
- thecalmzone.net/get-support (Campaign against Living Miserably) – Helpline **0800 58 58 58** 5pm-midnight every day, webchat/online help.
- [nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/urgent-support](https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/urgent-support) – NHS mental health information and advice.
- www.switchboard.lgbt – One-stop listening service for LGBTQ+ on the phone, by email and through instant messaging. The service is open 10am-10pm every day. All volunteers are self-identifying LGBTQ+. Ring **0300 330 0630**, email chris@switchboard.lgbt
- [expertselfcare.com/distract](https://www.expertselfcare.com/distract) – An app which provides information and advice about self harm/suicidal thoughts.
- [stayalive.app](https://www.stayalive.app) – This is a free mobile app for those at risk of suicide and people worried about someone. Contains information and tools to help people stay safe in crisis.

Thoughts of suicide in children and young people

- hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/help-im-in-crisis – Advice from Hampshire Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.
- papyrus-uk.org/papyrus-hopeline247 – A helpline for under 35s. Call **0800 068 41 41**. Text **88247**. Lines are open 24 hours every day of the year (weekends and bank holidays included) or email pat@papyrus-uk.org
- kooth.com (Hampshire) – This is an online counselling and emotional wellbeing platform for children and young people, accessible through mobile, tablet and desktop and free at the point of use. On Kooth you can chat to their friendly counsellors, read articles written by young people, get support from the Kooth community and write in a daily journal.
- childline.org.uk – For children and young people under 19 – **0800 1111**.
- **YoungMinds Crisis Messenger** – Free 24/7 support across the UK if you are experiencing a mental health crisis. If you need urgent help, text **'SHOUT'** to **85258**. All texts are answered by trained volunteers, with support from experienced clinical supervisors. Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus.
- sabp.nhs.uk/our-services/services-a-z/crisis-intervention-service – Support for children and young people up to the age of 18 years in North East Hampshire (Aldershot, Farnborough, Fleet and Yateley).

Training and other useful websites

- zerosuicidealliance.com/training/suicide-awareness-training-courses – Free online training we encourage everyone to take. This can be completed in under half an hour and there are specific modules covering Autism, Veterans, Students, and more.
- e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/mental-health-awareness-programme – Free online mental health awareness training (20 minutes).
- futurelearn.com/courses/psychological-first-aid-covid-19 – Provides tips on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of others during this challenging time.
- selfharmsupporthubhants.org.uk – Solent MIND self-harm support hub. Providing training for anyone supporting young people in Hampshire.
- easthantsmind.org/wellbeing-services/suicide-postvention – Havant and East Hants Mind workplace suicide prevention support, offering training and support to workplaces who want to better support their staff with suicide prevention or workplaces that have been affected by a suicide.
- easthantsmind.org/workplace-services-and-training/training-courses/connect-5/connect-5-rest-of-hampshire – Connect 5 training, five ways to wellbeing.

Supporting others

- rethink.org/advice-and-information/carers-hub/suicidal-thoughts-how-to-support-someone – How to support someone factsheet.
- samaritans.org – Information if you're worried about someone else.
- mind.org.uk – Supporting someone who feels suicidal.

A note for employees/volunteers

As an employee or a volunteer, if you are concerned about an individual, please **ring 999** if it is an emergency situation and life is in danger. If it is a mental health crisis that the individual (of any age) is experiencing, ask if they are in immediate danger (if yes, **call 999**), explain that you want to help them access suitable help and ask them to **ring 111** and ask for a call back to speak to the mental health triage team. The mental health triage team will be able to access patient notes and are mental health nurses, experienced in responding to the needs of the individual. Once triaged, if appropriate, the 111 team can send through a referral to the Crisis Team, Community Mental Health Team, or primary care which will be accessed the next working day. Off the back of this referral, the individual can make contact with primary care to request an urgent appointment, if one has not already been made for them.

If you have not advised the support of NHS 111, please consider contacting the individual's GP surgery to request primary care support for the individual.

Consider making a safeguarding referral alongside any actions above if this relates to a child. If this relates to an adult, then consider if they have or may have care and support needs and whether these thoughts of suicide would be considered abuse or neglect. Prior to making a referral for an adult into the Local Authority, please refer to the **4LSAB Multi-Agency tools document** to support decision makers in raising a safeguarding concern. If you believe that the person is not in immediate danger but may act on their thoughts about taking their own life, explain that you have an obligation to inform Adult Services (noting the above definition) or Children's Services, ensuring you review any notes. Tell them this is because you are worried about them and want to get them some help.

Guidance on making a (non-urgent) safeguarding referral is below:

- For those who are aged 18+ years – hants.gov.uk/socialcareandhealth/adultsocialcare/safeguarding
- For those who are under 18 years – hampshirescp.org.uk/report-a-concern

Please note that safeguarding referrals can take several days to be triaged and assessed – therefore please do not expect an immediate response as these are not emergency services.