

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 support people who are having thoughts of suicide – and this guidance is also for you.

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**

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

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. [Help in a crisis: Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust](#)

Adults and children living in Aldershot, Farnborough, Fleet and Yateley. [Get help in a mental health crisis: Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust](#)

Children and Young People up to the age of 18 years [Help! I'm in crisis – CAMHS](#)

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.

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)

Situations

- 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

About self-harm

People often self-harm to regain control of their situations, emotions or thoughts. Self-harm can involve cutting parts of the body, burning, scratching, picking skin or pulling hair. Some ways of self-harming are not always obvious: for example, older people may neglect their nutritional needs or wear ill-fitting slippers or shoes. It is often assumed that people who self-harm are suicidal, but for many people it can be a way of coping or surviving. However, many people in Hampshire, as well as nationally, who take their own life do have a history of self-harm, so it is important to take this seriously as a risk factor for suicide. These feelings vary from person to person in terms of intensity and length of time they last.

Self-harm is usually someone's way of managing very hard feelings or experiences and in most cases it is different from having thoughts about suicide. People who are self-harming may appreciate your support or assistance and there are several things you can do to help. You can find resources for anyone self-harming on [page 8](#).



How to help someone who may have thoughts of suicide

- 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?'

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.

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.

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 website](#).
- 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.
- 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.
- **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.

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) [SafetyPlan](#).
- 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 also to look after yourself as you support someone who may be suicidal. Speak to your manager or safeguarding lead. Other help can be found at [Mental Wellbeing Hampshire](#).



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.

- Adults living in Hampshire but not Aldershot, Farnborough, Fleet and Yateley. **Help in a crisis: Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust**
- Adults and children living in Aldershot, Farnborough, Fleet and Yateley. **Get help in a mental health crisis: Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust**. They also run a **Mental Health Crisis Helpline** for 24 hour support for people experiencing a mental health crisis. Call **0800 915 4644**
- **Samaritans** – 24 hour confidential emotional support. Call FREE **116 123**. Email jo@samaritans.org.uk
- **Shout** – confidential 24/7 crisis text support for times when someone needs immediate assistance. Text 'HANTS' to **85258**
- **The Silver Line for older people** – 24 hour confidential free helpline for older people. Email: info@thesilverline.org.uk or call **0800 470 8090**
- **Rethink Mental Illness advice** and information for those with suicidal thoughts

- **CALM** (Campaign against Living Miserably) Helpline **0800 58 58 58** 5pm-midnight every day, webchat/online help
- **Every Mind Matters** – NHS mental health information and advice
- **Switchboard LGBT+ Helpline**. 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 LGBT+. Ring **0300 330 0630**, email chris@switchboard.lgbt
- **distrACT** App which provides information and advice about self-harm/suicidal thoughts
- **Stay Alive** 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: Children and young people

- **Help! I'm in crisis** – advice from Hampshire Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
- **Papyrus Hopeline UK for under 35s** – **0800 068 41 41**. Text **07786 209697**. Week days 9am-10pm, weekends 2pm-10pm or email pat@papyrus-uk.org
- **Kooth** (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 our

friendly counsellors, read articles written by young people, get support from the Kooth community and write in a daily journal

- **Childline** 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 'YM' 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

Signposting to strengthen mental health

- **Every Mind Matters**
- **iTalk** (Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies) NHS service (everywhere in Hampshire except Aldershot, Farnborough, Fleet and Yateley)
- **Talk Plus** (Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies NHS service) (Aldershot, Farnborough, Fleet and Yateley)
- **MIND Wellbeing Centres**
- **ChatHealth Hampshire** (support for 11-19 year olds)

Self-harm

- **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
- **Hampshire Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service**
– Crisis, Self-Harm and Suicide in Young People
- **Childline** for children and young people under 19 – **0800 1111**
- Adults living in Hampshire but not Aldershot, Farnborough, Fleet and Yateley. **Help in a crisis: Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust**
- Adults and children living in Aldershot, Farnborough, Fleet and Yateley. **Get help in a mental health crisis: Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust**
- **Every Mind Matters** – NHS mental health information and advice
- **distrACT** App which provides information and advice about self-harm/suicidal thoughts
- **Harmless** User-led organisation that supports people who self-harm, and their friends and family
- **LifeSIGNS** User-led self-harm guidance and support network

Support for those affected by suicide

- **Amparo Support** for those affected by suicide. Call **0330 088 9255** or email amparo.service@listening-ear.co.uk



Mental health

- **Every Mind Matters**
- **CALM** (Campaign against Living Miserably) Helpline 5pm-midnight every day, webchat/online help
- **iTalk** (Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies) NHS service (everywhere in Hampshire except NE Hampshire)
- **Talk Plus** (Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies NHS service NE Hampshire)
- **MIND Wellbeing Centres**
- **ChatHealth Hampshire** (support for 11-19 year olds)
- **Kooth** is a free, anonymous online counselling and emotional wellbeing support service for young people aged 11-25 years (up to 26th birthday). Access safe support for emotional health and wellbeing needs from professional qualified counsellors. Available 12noon-10pm weekdays, 6pm-10pm weekends, 365 days. No referral needed.
- **Hampshire County Council Mental Health and Wellbeing Support Guide for Adults**
- **Hampshire County Council Mental Health and Wellbeing Support Guide for Staff and Volunteers**
- **Hampshire County Council Mental Health and Wellbeing Support Guide for Manager**

Mental Wellbeing Hampshire

- **The NHS Little Blue Book of Sunshine**
(Hampshire, Southampton and IOW edition)



Signposting support for other common worries

- Money/debt worries
- Domestic abuse
- Relationship issues
- Bereavement

Please see information and support available on a local and national basis at; connecttosupporthampshire.org.uk



Training and other useful websites

- **Zero Suicide Alliance training:** free online training in three modules (the longest taking around 20 minutes to complete)
- **We need to talk about Suicide:** free online training (around 90 minutes to complete)
- **Mental Health Awareness:** free online training (20 minutes)
- **Psychological First Aid training** provides tips on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of others during this challenging time
- Review any notes you have made and make a direct referral to Adult/Children's Services (details below)
- If you need support or advice on this you can speak to a Safeguarding Officer within your organisation
- Children's Services: **0300 555 1384** (evenings/weekends: **0300 555 1373**)
For more information please see hants.gov.uk/socialcareandhealth/childrenandfamilies/safeguardingchildren/childprotection/mash

Supporting others

- **Rethink Mental Illness – suicidal thoughts:** How to support someone factsheet
- **Samaritans** – information if you're worried about someone else
- **MIND** Supporting someone who feels suicidal
- Adult Services: **0300 555 1386** (evenings/weekends: **0300 555 1373**)
Online Referral: hants.gov.uk/socialcareandhealth/adultsocialcare/contact (please anticipate a 2-3 day response time if you make an online referral)
- For more information please see hants.gov.uk/socialcareandhealth/adultsocialcare/safeguarding

A note for employees/volunteers

As an employee or a volunteer, 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 or Children's Services. Tell them this is because you are worried about them and want to get them some help.