

Supporting a Young Person at Risk of Suicide

Suicide is a self-inflicted, intentional act to end one's life, linked with emotional distress.

Statistics:

In the UK, suicide is the leading cause of death in young people - 14% in 10-19 year olds. Of those under 20 years old who completed suicide in 2016 the majority were male. (Office of National Statistics)

10 TOP TIPS for supporting a young person at risk of suicide:

- 1 Notice & approach.** Don't dismiss extreme and persistent changes in behaviour, appearance and mood, such as feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness. If you're concerned, approach and ask "Are you ok?". Knowing that you care, can really help.
- 2 Listen.** Be patient and allow the young person to speak without interruption or judgement. You don't need to know the answers, sometimes listening can be enough. It helps to use open questions, to summarise and clarify to check you've understood.
- 3 Take it seriously.** Don't undermine their feelings or ask 'why' as this can sound challenging and put them on the defensive. Young people who talk about suicide do sometimes act on their feelings.
- 4 Ask.** Research indicates that asking about suicide can reduce the risk of them ending their life and help them to explore their feelings further. Try to be clear by asking direct questions like "Are you thinking about suicide?".
- 5 Give support.** Treat them with dignity and respect and let them know you want to be there for them and offer emotional and practical support to stay safe.
- 6 Encourage self-help.** Help them explore who and what could help them. What family and friends can they count on to listen and support them? Consider their interests and strengths and encourage self-help strategies. Give information, websites and apps.
- 7 Make a support plan.** Explore what has or hasn't helped them before. Write down how they can take care of themselves, how they'd like to be supported and who they can contact in an emergency.
- 8 Seek professional help if needed.** Give information on local specialist services and encourage them to seek help. In an emergency call 999 immediately or take them directly to the nearest A&E department.
- 9 Hope and recovery.** Convey hope that recovery is possible and very common. With help, support and self-care, they can achieve good wellbeing.
- 10 Look after yourself.** Supporting someone who feels suicidal can be emotionally draining. Look after your own wellbeing, be kind to yourself and seek support too.

Self-help links:

- Moray guidance for people working with children and young people at risk of suicide - www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_117484.html
- www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/suicidal-feelings
- www.papyrus-uk.org
- www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/suicide
- www.preventsuicideapp.com – App

