

**SAMARITANS**

# Help when we needed it most

How to prepare for and respond to a  
suspected suicide in schools, colleges  
and other youth settings in the UK

Postvention

This guidance forms part of Samaritans' Step by Step service, which offers specially trained volunteers who can assist schools, colleges and other youth settings with their response to a suspected suicide. Step by Step has a dedicated email and phone number, see below. We aim to respond to you within 24 hours.

### To request support:

Email

[stepbystep@samaritans.org](mailto:stepbystep@samaritans.org)

Call

**0808 168 2528**

Calls are free from landlines and some mobile providers.

### Further information:

Visit

[samaritans.org/stepbystep](https://www.samaritans.org/stepbystep)

Nobody likes to think about the death of a member of staff or young person, and it's even harder to imagine someone taking their own life. However, it is important to remember that statistics show suicide remains the leading cause of death for young people in the UK. Sadly, it is always a possibility that a school or college may have to face dealing with a suspected suicide of a young person or staff member.

Educational and youth settings have a vital role in responding appropriately to an attempted or suspected suicide in order to help the process of recovery, improve the long-term outcomes for those impacted and reduce the likelihood of contagion. Further information about bereavement by suicide, the myths and facts about suicide, support available from Samaritans and other services and information for parents and young persons can be found on our website:

[samaritans.org/stepbystep](https://www.samaritans.org/stepbystep)

This document guides you through the process of preparing for and responding to a suspected suicide appropriately and constructively, in order to help rebuild the wellbeing of the school community and reduce the risk of further deaths. We based this guidance on research and best practice in postvention<sup>1</sup> responses within school communities from across the world.

Every situation is different, and Samaritans has been learning from the communities we have supported so that we can share our learning with others. We have specialist knowledge and skills, and in the event of a suspected suicide, we can offer support, advice, guidance and local contacts, all based on over 65 years' experience working towards our vision that fewer people die by suicide.

#### **Our Step by Step service has been developed to:**

- Reach out to communities to reduce the risk of further suicide.
- Support the staff and student community to prepare for, respond to and recover from a suspected suicide.
- Provide information and support to help the communities come to terms with what has happened and prevent stigma and isolation.

**“ I cannot thank Samaritans enough and the Step by Step team, the service is utterly brilliant and they deal with one of the most devastating things that can happen to a school. ”**

Head teacher

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All quotes are from the 2013 evaluation of Samaritans' Step by Step service, carried out by Sherbert Research.

<sup>1</sup> Postvention "is the term given to activities and programmes that are intended to assist those who have been bereaved by suicide to cope with what has happened. Suicide prevention and postvention are closely related in that postvention can also prevent further deaths." (p.3, New Zealand Ministry of Youth Development, 'Guidance for community organisations involved in suicide postvention', 2005)



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# Why is effective postvention so important?

A postvention plan addresses the need to respond effectively to a suspected suicide in the community. Effective postvention has an impact on suicide prevention for the future.

**In the first UK-wide study conducted recently to compare the effects of bereavement by suicide to bereavement by other causes in young adults, it was found that those bereaved by suicide were 65% more likely to attempt suicide, compared to those bereaved by sudden natural causes<sup>1</sup>.**

These findings stayed the same no matter what the relationship was between the bereaved and the deceased, which indicated support should be offered to family, friends and peers/colleagues and to anyone who may be exposed to the suspected suicide and affected by what has happened.

People can be very uncomfortable talking about death, and suicide in particular is often perceived as a taboo subject. There is often a perception that talking about suicide will increase the likelihood of suicide, whereas research, and our experience, tells us otherwise.

This guidance forms part of Samaritans' Step by Step service to schools, colleges and other youth settings, which offers specially trained volunteers who can assist leadership teams with their response to a suspected suicide in the educational community.

Contact [stepbystep@samaritans.org](mailto:stepbystep@samaritans.org) or **0808 168 2528** for further information.

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<sup>1</sup> Bereavement by suicide as a risk factor for suicide attempt: a cross-sectional national UK-wide study of 3432 young bereaved adults: Alexandra L Pitman, David P J Osborn, Khadija Rantell, Michael B King Jan 2016

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# What is Step by Step?

Samaritans has offered the Step by Step service to schools in the UK since 2010. We are available to offer practical support, guidance and advice to schools, colleges and other youth settings that have been affected by a suspected suicide or attempted suicide.

“ We made decisions in that first week that I don't think we would have made if we had been supported by Step by Step early on. ”

Head teacher

Samaritans offers this service in order to support the educational community and reduce the risk of further suicide. Recent research on 'copycat' suicides and suicide 'contagion' suggest that, in young people especially, exposure to suicide can lead to increased risk of suicidal thoughts. A Canadian study found that the suicide of a schoolmate increased the risk of suicidal thoughts or attempts among young people aged 12–17 years (especially 12–13 year olds) for up to two years following the suicide, and had an impact that was even greater than the suicide of a family member.

Our service is designed to lessen the risk of further suicide by assisting educational communities to handle the situation sensitively and responsibly, while returning to normal routines as quickly as possible.

Samaritans' Step by Step service is unique: we have a team of trained volunteers called Postvention Advisors based all around the UK

“ Samaritans gave us the confidence to do things the right way. ”

Head teacher

and Republic of Ireland who are available to offer postvention support and guidance. They also provide ongoing support, reassurance and advice to staff and students who have to deal with a suspected suicide. Postvention Advisors work alongside local Samaritans branches who can also provide outreach support and resources for the institution and continued support in the longer term. Postvention Advisors are there to provide help when you need it most, for as long as you need it.

Contact our Step by Step service [stepbystep@samaritans.org](mailto:stepbystep@samaritans.org) or call **0808 168 2528** and we will do all we can to help you manage an effective and safe response.

Samaritans emotional support is available round the clock, every day of the year by phone, email, letter or face-to-face visits in the branch for anyone who might be struggling to cope. We have provided contact details for support services at the end of this booklet.

There are other organisations that offer specific advice and support at this time. Step by Step aims to work alongside other support that you may be offered. There is a list of some of these organisations at the back of this booklet.

2 Swanson, S. A., & Colman, I. (2013). Association between exposure to suicide and suicidality outcomes in youth. *CMAJ: Canadian Medical Association Journal = Journal De L'Association Medicale Canadienne*. Date of Electronic Publication: 27 May 2013.

3 Sherbert Research (2013). Full report: Step by Step Evaluation.

# Creating a critical incident plan

Although a school can be affected by many challenging incidents, including sickness and accidental death, it is suicide that presents the unique risk of potentially being the trigger for another suicide.

“ They helped to point out pathways, when you couldn't see the wood for the trees. ”

Teacher

The key to coping with a crisis is to plan. It is particularly important that the educational setting responds to a suspected suicide within 48 hours. This is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the educational setting's routine, while facilitating the expression of grief, and reducing the risk of imitative suicide.

Educational settings with critical incident plans for a suspected suicide are best equipped to deal with a crisis situation, should it ever arise. Good planning for the aftermath of a suspected or attempted suicide makes it easier for people to respond effectively at a time when emotions are running high and resilience may be low.

A postvention<sup>4</sup> protocol is an agreed approach to responding to a suspected suicide. In a school, college or other youth setting this protocol should ideally:

- be a written protocol, developed in advance of an incident
- include working with the local community

- involve the formation and training of a postvention team – be clear about who will do what
- involve training for key roles, such as suicide awareness training and supporting vulnerable people
- include procedures for notifying staff, parents and young people about a suspected suicide
- include guidelines on how to inform the community and handle the media
- identify appropriate postvention services and support for the bereaved
- include procedures for recognising 'at risk' individuals (including staff) and identifying where people would be referred to for additional support
- include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the postvention and any follow-up protocol.

It is good practice that all staff would be aware of essential information included in such planning, including who to tell, what to say and what not to say, and who is vulnerable.

<sup>4</sup> Postvention "is the term given to activities and programmes that are intended to assist those who have been bereaved by suicide to cope with what has happened. Suicide prevention and postvention are closely related in that postvention can also prevent further deaths." (p.3, New Zealand Ministry of Youth Development, 'Guidance for community organisations involved in suicide postvention', 2005)



# Breaking the news

Samaritans' Step by Step service can work with you to consider how you become aware of a suspected suicide, how to respond to prevent rumour and misinformation and to consider the best actions to take in such cases. Any information shared should be with prior agreement from the family.

- Establish the facts before acting on news of a suspected suicide. Contact the family as soon as you can. This is a difficult time and the pain and distress felt by all needs to be acknowledged. Ensure the staff member who is speaking to the family has support with this. Be aware that it is likely to be many months before an inquest is held, and that in many cases the death is not officially recorded as suicide. It is important to note that there may be a great deal of speculation within your educational community, and that schools, colleges and other youth settings often have to act on the basis that the death is being treated or suspected to be a suicide.
- Consider safe and responsible messaging at all times. It is important to be factual and, where possible, address rumours that may be circulating. Avoid sharing details of the death, such as the method used, if there was a note and the contents of the note.
- While only a coroner can give a verdict of suicide, if a death is talked about or, indeed, reported as a suspected suicide, consider acknowledging this in appropriate communications.
- Notify your critical incident management team. It is important to act quickly, while at the same time preparing the leadership team and administration for continuous enquiries.
- Breaking the news to young people can be extremely difficult. Tell staff first and give them time to take in the news before addressing students. Make sure that staff know where, and to who, they can turn for emotional support.
- Best practice suggests that, where possible, it is better to break the news to young people in small groups or classes.
- When breaking the news, it is important to be factual but to avoid detail about the suicidal act itself. Rumours may be circulating and people may ask directly but do not disclose details about the method used, whether there was a suicide note, or its contents.
- Provide information and reassurance about emotions and responses to the news. Encourage support and care for each other. Include information about where to go for support and information.
- Prepare a statement for staff to use when talking to families and young people to ensure consistency across the school.
- Consider providing immediate counselling or emotional support to young people and staff at the school.
- Try to strike a balance between sensitivity to those who are grieving and in shock, on the one hand, and the need to maintain the school routine, on the other. It may be helpful to set aside a room where students can go if they are upset. This room should be supervised.

# Handling the media

Having to handle media enquiries and reporting of the incident can add to what is an already stressful situation. We advise you to appoint a single media spokesperson for the institution and to ensure staff know who this is.

The spokesperson should prepare a statement for the media. Avoid giving details of the suicide method or contents of any suicide note or giving simple 'explanations' for a suspected suicide. Suicide is complex. There is never a single reason or circumstance that leads to a person taking their own life. It is therefore not possible, or helpful, to generalise.

While research shows there are risks associated with reporting suicide, it also shows appropriate coverage can help raise awareness of the issues surrounding suicide, such as what can lead a person to becoming vulnerable and the possible signs which may indicate a person is struggling to cope with life. Although it's important to note it is not always possible to spot the signs and recognise that someone is struggling. Appropriate coverage of mental health issues and suicide can also help to highlight the importance of talking, valuable sources of support and encourage those who are suffering to seek help.

Language is important when you are talking about suicide eg, phrases like committed suicide or successful suicide should be avoided, use sensitive alternatives such as died by suicide or took their own life.

It is important to use any communications shared in the aftermath of a suspected suicide as an opportunity to encourage help seeking behaviour and support any students who may be affected by the death. All information and communications shared, including responses to media enquiries, should include sources of support for those who need it.

Samaritans works closely with the media to encourage sensitive and responsible reporting of suicide. Samaritans produced guidelines for the media, you can find them here:

**[samaritans.org/media-centre/media-guidelines-reporting-suicide](https://www.samaritans.org/media-centre/media-guidelines-reporting-suicide)**

Samaritans' Media Advice team can support you in handling the media in the aftermath of a suspected suicide. You can email them on: **[mediaadvice@samaritans.org](mailto:mediaadvice@samaritans.org)**

# Contacting the school community

In the event of a suspected suicide, you will need to consider how to inform the wider community. The Samaritans Step by Step service can advise and assist with this.

## Parents/carers and all staff need to know:

- in brief what has happened (include pertinent facts without going into details)
- what support the school is putting in place
- what actions the school will take with regards to memorials and funerals
- where to find further information about suicide and grief
- what support is available
- the importance of talking and seeking support
- the importance in supporting and looking out for each other
- where to access support for themselves
- what to do if they are worried about someone else.

## Communicating sensitively and appropriately about suicide

Exposure to suicide, whether through a personal connection or through media, is an established risk factor for suicide<sup>5</sup>.

## Information shared in the immediate aftermath of a suspected suicide should include and reinforce:

- facts (not rumours)

“When parents asked things that were, on the face of it, nonsensical, Samaritans answered them very calmly and never made parents feel they were asking stupid questions.”

Head teacher

- an understanding that death is permanent
- an exploration of normal and wide-ranging reactions to suspected suicide (expressions of anger and guilt are entirely normal) and an understanding that, with support, people can and will cope
- an understanding that fleeting thoughts of suicide are not unusual and what to do if you experience this
- an awareness of suicidal warning signs and resources available to help
- how the community can remember the person who has died.

## When discussing any suspected suicide, it is strongly recommended the information given:

- is factually correct but does not include detail of the suicide or the method used
- does not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death
- does not include details of any suicide note
- does not include speculation over the motive for suicide
- includes messages of hope eg, talking helps
- focuses on the person and where those affected can find support and help should they need it.

<sup>5</sup> Bereavement by suicide as a risk factor for suicide attempt: A Pitman et al 2017

# Identifying and supporting vulnerable young people

Those exposed to a suspected suicide are themselves at increased risk of suicidal feelings and suicidal attempts. All members of the community should be asked to identify any young people who may be vulnerable, and efforts should be made to provide additional support or referral to specialist services.

“One thing that we did that made a big difference was a card to take home, which had the school mobile phone number on it. If they wanted to talk to someone they knew, they could, which was a really great idea and we received a few calls as half term was three weeks after the suicide.”

Teacher

Suicide is a complex issue, usually with no single cause. However, there is evidence to suggest people who have previously experienced bereavement or undergone a personal crisis; people with mental health problems and vulnerable people are at greater risk of suicidal ideation and attempts. Teachers who know the students best should be alert to any students who are extremely upset or disturbed by the death. These young people should be offered appropriate support without delay.

## Research shows the people more vulnerable to increased risk of suicidal feelings and attempts after a suspected suicide are those:

- who have a geographical connection to the deceased (eg, close to the place of death, lived with the student, in the same classes etc.)
- with social proximity (eg, close family or friends or those that identify with the student in some way, same problems, faith group etc.)
- with digital proximity eg, through online social channels
- who identify with or feel close to the person who died, may have shared likes or characteristics

- with physical health problems, mental health problems, a history of self-harm, previous suicidal ideation, excessive alcohol or drug use and those previously bereaved.

## Support available

Keep in mind that vulnerable people may not seek out support or refer themselves to services. They may not be obvious to identify even though they could greatly benefit from support. It will be useful to have different support options available that can be accessed in different ways and are made widely known to all. Some may want to have the support of their peers and some may want to learn about how others have been able to cope with the news.

It may be helpful to provide a space for students to talk in groups, with staff support, about what has happened and how they can support one another; how to look out for anyone who may be in distress and to allocate time for them to express their feelings. Remember staff should also be given the opportunity to discuss and share their own grief. Samaritans Postvention Advisors can support you with this.

# Starting difficult conversations

## If you're worried about a young person, try to get them to talk to you

- Often people want to talk, but won't speak until someone asks how they are. Try asking open questions (eg, 'What happened about...?', 'Tell me about...?', 'How do you feel about...?')
- Reflect back what they say to show you understand and ask more questions.
- Focus on their feelings instead of trying to solve the problem - it can be of more help and shows you care.
- Respect what they tell you. Sometimes it's easy to want to try and fix a young person's problems, or give them advice. Try and let them make their own decisions.

## How do I start a conversation with someone I'm concerned about?

You may feel you don't know how to help someone, because you don't know what to tell them or how to solve their problems. You don't need to be an expert. In fact, sometimes people who think they have the answers to a problem are less helpful. They may not expect or want you to solve the problem, just sharing and talking can be an enormous relief and help in itself.

Don't forget that every person is different, so that what worked for one will not always work for another.

“ I asked them the most bizarre questions because the kids had asked me bizarre things and they responded so well. I was really impressed with the way they spoke to us. ”

Teacher

## Find a good time and place

Ask gentle questions, and listen with care. Ask them how they feel. If you're gentle and calm it's ok to bring up the subject of self-harm or suicide.

The more open the question the better. Questions that help someone talk through their problems instead of being able to say 'yes' or 'no' are the most useful.

### Questions such as:

- When – 'When did you realise?'
- Where – 'Where did that happen?'
- What – 'What else happened?'
- How – 'How did that feel?'
- Why – be careful with this one as it can make someone defensive. 'What made you choose that?' or 'What were you thinking about at the time?' are more effective.

## Find out how they feel

Revealing their innermost emotions – anger, sadness, fear, hope, jealousy, despair and so on – can be a huge relief.

It sometimes also give clues about what the person is really most worried about.

## Check that they know where to get help

### Useful questions you might ask them include:

- 'Who else have you talked to about this?'
- 'What do you think about getting some help?'
- 'Would you like me to come with you?'

### If you say something that appears to cause more upset, don't panic:

- show you are listening;
- look after yourself, and talk to someone too.

# Memorials

Following any death, there is a natural wish to pay tribute to the person who has died. Following a death by suspected suicide, there is a need for careful planning and management of any memorial in the school, college or elsewhere.

Memorials should be handled with great care and sensitivity. It is important to acknowledge the desire for the memorial but also to recognise the potential risk of glamorising or sensationalising a death that is rumoured or known to be by suicide. This can unintentionally increase the risk of others taking their own lives.

## Temporary memorials

Some people will want to leave flowers, messages or other mementos. The school or college can take partial control of this by choosing the place where a memorial is sited. Placement of any flowers or memorials needs careful consideration. Temporary memorials should not be placed at the location of the death, or in a place that is very public. Everyone should feel able to visit the memorial site by choice and not have to see it if they do not wish to. All memorials should be monitored by a member of staff for messages of concern or inappropriate items or comments. This will also enable staff to support students and move them on gently after a time.

Deciding when to remove the temporary memorial is always difficult, as it carries the risk of evoking a negative reaction. One way to mitigate this risk is for a senior staff member to discuss the removal of items in the memorial with close friends of the person who has died, before the flowers, mementos and messages fade or become damaged. These can be gathered and sent to the family.

To encourage a healthy grieving process within the community, some practitioners

have recommended a policy of allowing temporary memorials for no more than two weeks, or removing them soon after the funeral or memorial service. It is important to communicate clearly the wishes of the family and when the memorial will be removed.

Any further tributes should then be taken down at the end of each day.

Vulnerable people may be at risk of interpreting any memorial, or recognition eg, a posthumous award, as giving positive attention to suicide and presenting suicide as a viable choice for dealing with problems. Bear this in mind when planning memorials.

## Social media and online memorials

Institutions cannot control online memorials and other social networking activity following a suspected suicide. However, staff and students should be warned about the risks of inappropriate messages, warning signs to look out for, what to do if you are concerned about a post or message and the benefits or risks of online memorials.

Social media and the internet enable messages to reach a huge audience immediately. It may be that students, parents and staff first hear news of a possible suicide through social media.

Social media has advantages and disadvantages as a way of communicating following a death. People increasingly use online resources and social networking sites in their daily lives, and this may be a way in which some people feel most comfortable in discussing their

thoughts and feelings. The period following a suspected suicide is one that can involve a great deal of trauma and confusion. There is no right or wrong way for people to react. Some may be more willing to talk than others about the death, some may prefer to discuss their feelings outside of the school or college community.

Social media is now the common place location of an online memorial after the death of a person. It is very common for RIP pages to be set up following the death of a student or staff member. These can be a helpful place to share memories, support one another and share details of funerals. Bereaved families have found that it can be a way of keeping in touch with the deceased's friends. Most of these are established by a friend and are unmoderated (meaning there are no controls over what is posted), which makes them effectively unmanageable. While these memorial sites seem to be an important part of the grieving process for many, and a focal point for both grief and support, they can also attract inappropriate comments. These could include accusations, blame and deliberately inflammatory comments which can evoke very strong reactions, far beyond the virtual world. It is helpful if the team responsible for social channels can monitor these. More information can be found here:

**[facebook.com/help/1506822589577997](https://www.facebook.com/help/1506822589577997)**

While controlling or closing these sites is almost impossible and would likely be counterproductive, some have had success in mitigating these risks by asking an appropriate group of students, to offer support to the site's founder in reviewing and moderating any material posted to the site. In doing so, inappropriately-worded comments or direct accusations can be referred back to the person posting them and more appropriate wording or approach can be used. This can also help

identify and respond to those who could be at risk themselves and offer guidance with sources and offers of support.

#### **Some points for consideration to enable a safe response to a suicide and reduce the risk of contagion are:**

- educate the community on safe messaging and using social networks responsibly
- send out messages signposting to support both in and out of the school or college
- send out supportive messages to the community emphasising inclusion
- provide links to online resources about coping strategies, self-help and encourage help seeking behaviour
- set up a memorial page that is monitored by students or support staff.

#### **To monitor social media online communities for:**

- messages of concern from students
- rumour or speculation
- details of the method of suicide
- messages that suggest suicide was a positive outcome
- suggestions as to why someone took their own life
- messages that indicate someone identifies closely with the deceased
- offensive comments.

#### **To encourage students to:**

- send positive supportive messages
- not collude with rumours
- report any concerns with friend's posts or messages to staff
- report any impromptu gatherings to support staff.

There is further information about supporting someone online available from Samaritans here: [samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/supporting-someone-online](https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/supporting-someone-online)

You should always be mindful that many conversations take place in private spaces such as WhatsApp and it is not possible to monitor everything.

However, it is important to be aware of the toll that reading online posts and comments about the death can have on the team taking responsibility for this. Support should be available and offered to these members of staff.

Warnings should also be given to students about the potential toll that reading posts and comments about the death can have on their emotional state and wellbeing.

## Final thoughts

There is a delicate balance between celebrating and protecting the memory of the person who has died and supporting friends and family in their feelings after the event. For many young people, this could be their first close experience of death or sudden death and they may not know how they should respond. Staff are often looked to for examples of how to respond appropriately at such a time. They can reduce students' anxiety by helping them recognise that there is no right or wrong way to grieve and that talking openly can help. It's important to reassure people that what they are feeling is normal.

Samaritans is available round the clock, every single day of the year. We can help you talk through whatever is troubling you, find the answers that are right for you and offer support: **116 123** (this number is free to call), email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

## If the family does not want the nature or cause of death to be disclosed

While the fact that someone has died may be disclosed immediately, information about the nature and cause of death should not be disclosed until the family has been consulted and have agreed to this. If the death is rumoured to be a suicide but the family does not want this disclosed, the Lead member of staff should talk to the family about this. It is essential to respect families wishes but possible to explain that students are already talking about the death as suicide, and that talking openly about suicide to students as well as discussing how the death has impacted them, the importance of seeking support and where to get help, can help to keep students safe.

If the family want the death explained as accidental or unexplained, the organisation can simply state that the family has requested details are not shared. Staff can still take the opportunity to talk about suicidal thoughts and feelings without referring to the death being by suicide. Addressing the topic of suicide in a responsible way plays a key part in the prevention of further suicides.

## Further information about Samaritans

For further information and support either about suicide or developing a critical incident plan that includes suicide, please contact [stepbystep@samaritans.org](mailto:stepbystep@samaritans.org) or see our website [samaritans.org/education](https://www.samaritans.org/education)



# Funerals

The nature of the student's death should not by itself encourage greater attendance at the funeral than it would for any other death of a student or staff member.

Attendance at a funeral should be managed in the same way as any other death. Share funeral arrangements with staff and students and make sure you support those who wish to attend the funeral as much as possible. Liaise with the local faith leader to provide further support to individuals and their families who may wish to attend.

## Coroners Inquests

When someone dies suddenly, the circumstances are investigated to establish the cause of death. In England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland this is done by a coroner, through an inquest. And in Scotland, it is investigated by the Procurator Fiscal.

An inquest is a public court hearing to establish who has died, and how, when and where the death happened. It is possible students and staff who lived with or knew the deceased well may be summoned to attend the inquest.

This is a difficult and distressing time for those involved. Samaritans can be available to offer you emotional support before and after the inquest. You can ask for Samaritans to attend the court and be present to talk to for support.

Further information is available at [nosp.gov.uk](https://nosp.gov.uk)

# Responding to attempted suicide

While suicide is the second most common cause of death among young people aged 10–24, most suicide attempts do not result in death.<sup>6</sup> Young people usually return to their school or college following a suicide attempt, and educational settings should not underestimate the impact of this on others.

**It is imperative that anyone who has attempted suicide is appropriately referred to and cared for by mental health professionals. Mental health professionals will be able to work alongside the organisation in the following key areas:**

- Planning support for a student who has attempted suicide.
- Helping meet the immediate counselling needs of affected students.
- Identifying other vulnerable young people.

If an organisation is informed of an attempted suicide without other students being aware, there is a small possibility the spread of information may be contained. If complete containment of information is a real possibility, it should be discussed with the family as soon as possible. In such circumstances, any communication with staff, young people and parents will be on a “need to know basis” only, in

consultation with the young person, their family and appropriate mental health professionals.

If the details of the attempted suicide are already known in the community, staff may understandably be anxious about addressing this. Advice should be sought from the mental health professionals caring for the young person as they may be able to provide considerable assistance. It is essential that a support plan is developed and approved by an identified staff member, the young person, the family and the mental health professionals before the young person returns to school.

**When meeting with the young person’s family, critical areas for sensitive discussion are:**

- what information is shared with whom
- the support plan for their young person’s return
- the support for any siblings and close friends in the school or college
- liaison with the mental health professionals.

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<sup>6</sup> The World Health Organisation states that “...suicide attempts... are up to 20 times more frequent than completed suicide.” [www.who.int/mental\\_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en](http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en) downloaded 3 December 2012.

# Further information about Samaritans

For further information and support either about suicide or developing a critical incident plan that includes suicide, please contact us.

#### Email

**[stepbystep@samaritans.org](mailto:stepbystep@samaritans.org)**

#### Call

**0808 168 2528**

Calls are free from landlines and some mobile providers.

#### Visit

**[samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)**

### Samaritans can offer:

- phone, email and face to face support, advice and guidance on responding to a suspected suicide
- workshops and talks to raise awareness of emotional health issues among young people
- further resources and information from our website.

# Other sources of support

## **Aware NI (Northern Ireland)**

Aware is the depression charity for Northern Ireland, with programmes aimed at young people to maintain good mental health and build resilience.

[aware-ni.org](http://aware-ni.org)

## **Breathing Space (Scotland)**

Breathing Space is a free, confidential phone and web based service for people in Scotland experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety.

[breathingspace.scot](http://breathingspace.scot)

## **British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy**

Through the BACP you can find information about counsellors in your area.

[bacp.co.uk](http://bacp.co.uk)

## **ChildLine**

Provides support services for children and young people. Phone the free, 24-hour helpline for children and young people in the UK about any problem.

Tel: 0800 1111

[childline.org.uk](http://childline.org.uk)

## **Choose Life: The National Strategy and Action Plan to prevent suicide in Scotland**

[chooselife.net](http://chooselife.net)

## **Cruse Bereavement Care**

Promotes the wellbeing of bereaved people and enables anyone bereaved by death to understand their grief and cope with their loss. The organisation provides support and offers information, advice, education and training services.

[cruse.org.uk](http://cruse.org.uk)

## **Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland**

[crusescotland.org.uk](http://crusescotland.org.uk)

## **Facing the Future**

Support groups for people who have been bereaved by suicide developed by Samaritans and Cruse Bereavement Care.

[facingthefuturegroups.org](http://facingthefuturegroups.org)

## **Lifeline (Northern Ireland)**

Lifeline is the Northern Ireland crisis response helpline service for people who are experiencing distress or despair.

Tel: 0808 808 8000

[lifelinehelpline.info](http://lifelinehelpline.info)

## **NAPEP UK: Local Authorities Educational Psychology Services Crisis Response Team Network**

A support network for peers involved in Local Authority Educational Psychology Services that offer support to school communities following a traumatic incident. The network shares information, discusses best practice and provides the opportunity to respond to large scale cross border incidents in a co-ordinated way.

[napep.info](http://napep.info)

## **Samaritans**

Can provide support day or night, 365 days a year to anyone, regardless of background or religion. Whatever you're facing, we're here to listen.

Tel: 116 123 (this number is free to call)

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

[samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)

*Please note these are the main Samaritans contact details and not for the Step by Step or Schools service.*

### **Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)**

Aims to provide a safe, confidential environment in which bereaved people can share their experiences and feelings, so giving and gaining support from each other. It is staffed by many who have been bereaved by suicide.

[uk-sobs.org.uk](http://uk-sobs.org.uk)

### **Winston's Wish**

Winston's Wish is the largest provider of services to bereaved children, young people and their families in the UK. They have lots of information and support available for children who are bereaved through suicide.

[winstonswish.org](http://winstonswish.org)

### **YoungMinds**

YoungMinds is the UK's leading national charity committed to improving the mental health and emotional well-being of all children and young people.

[youngminds.org.uk](http://youngminds.org.uk)





# SAMARITANS

## Contact Step by Step

### Email

[stepbystep@samaritans.org](mailto:stepbystep@samaritans.org)

### Call

**0808 168 2528**

Calls are free from landlines  
and some mobile providers.

### Visit

[samaritans.org/stepbystep](https://samaritans.org/stepbystep)