

Westcountry Schools Trust (WeST)

Suicide Prevention (Suicide Safer Schools) Policy

Mission Statement

Westcountry Schools Trust (WeST) holds a deep-seated belief in education and lifelong learning. Effective collaboration, mutual support and professional challenge will underpin our quest to ensure that all of the students and adults we serve are given every opportunity to fulfil their potential and succeed in life.

Person(s) responsible for updating the policy:	Richard Woodland, Director of Inclusion
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WeST Core Values

WeST holds four core values which underpin the engagement, motivation and retention of employees, no matter what their role in the organisation.

- Collaboration**
 Creating a shared vision and working effectively across boundaries in an equitable and inclusive way to skillfully influence and engage others. Building and securing value from relationships, developing self and others to achieve positive outcomes.
- Aspiration**
 Having high expectations, modelling the delivery of high quality outcomes. Showing passion, persistence and resilience in seeking creative solutions to strive for continuous improvement and excellence.
- Integrity**
 Acting always with the interests of children and young people at our heart, and with a consistent and uncompromising adherence to strong moral and ethical principles. Communicating with transparency and respect, creating a working environment based on trust and honesty.
- Compassion**
 Recognising need in others and acting with positive intention to promote well-being and improve outcomes.

Providing Accessible Formats

If you are unable to use this document and require it in a different format, please contact the Director of Inclusion.

Part One:

Suicide Prevention Policy - Building Suicide Safer Schools

This section is based around the document from Papyrus "[Building Suicide Safer Schools and Colleges - A Guide for Teachers and Staff](#)"

Statement of Purpose

Westcountry Schools Trust (WeST) and its individual schools are aware that:

- suicide is the leading cause of death in young people;
- we play a vital role in helping to prevent young suicide.

We want to make sure that our children and young people are as suicide safe as possible and that our Trustees, parents / carers, teaching staff, support staff, pupils themselves and other key stakeholders are aware of our commitment to be a suicide-safer multi-academy trust (MAT).

Our beliefs about suicide and its antecedents

WeST acknowledges that:

- Suicidal thoughts are common. We acknowledge that thoughts of suicide are common among young people.
- Suicide is complex. We believe that every suicide is a tragedy. There are a number of contributory factors surrounding a suicide and the reasons are often complex and individual to that person, some of which may not be immediately apparent. However, we believe that there are lessons that may be learned from each death that may help prevent future deaths.
- Stigma inhibits learning and stigma can kill. We recognise that the stigma surrounding suicide and mental illness can be both a barrier to help seeking and a barrier to offering help. WeST is committed to tackling suicide stigma. In our language and in our working relationships, we will promote open, sensitive talk that does not stigmatise and perpetuate taboos (see appendix 2) . This will include avoiding the use of language which perpetuates unhelpful notions that suicide is criminal, sinful or selfish. We know that unhelpful myths and misconceptions surrounding suicide can inhibit young people in seeking and finding appropriate help when it is most needed.
- Suicide is our business, too. WeST recognises that pupils seek out someone whom they trust with their concerns and worries. We want to play our part in supporting any pupil who may have thoughts of suicide.
- Safety is important. We know that pupils who are having thoughts of suicide may or may not also be behaving in a way that puts their life in danger (suicide behaviours). School children experiencing suicidal thoughts are potentially at risk of acting on these thoughts. Those who are already engaging in suicide behaviours are also clearly at risk of death or harm. WeST wants to work with our pupils who may be thinking about suicide, or acting on their thoughts of suicide. We want to support them, sometimes working in partnership with family, caregivers and other professionals where this may enhance suicide safety.
- Suicide is a difficult thing to talk about. We know that a child or young person who is suicidal may find it difficult to make their feelings known and speak openly about suicide. We will equip adults with the skills to identify when a pupil may be struggling with thoughts of suicide. These adults will be trained to keep our young people suicide safe.
- Talking about suicide does not create or worsen risk. We will provide our pupils with opportunities to speak openly about their worries with people who are ready, willing and

able to support them. We want to make it possible for schoolchildren and young people, and those who support them, to do so safely. This will be in a way that leads to support and help where this is needed. We will do all we can to refrain from acting in a way that stops a pupil seeking the help they need when they are struggling with thoughts of suicide.

Our Team and its Responsibilities

Our Trustees, Executive Leadership Team and individual School Leadership Teams will be clear about how we will respond in the event of death from a suspected suicide (Part Two - Responding to a child death from suspected suicide). Each member of our named response team will have a defined responsibility within our plan including leadership, family liaison and any communications with external agencies, including the media.

We will have a clear picture of who has received general suicide awareness education and commit to this being refreshed periodically (at least every three years). We will identify a team of people who are trained in Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) or STORM. This team will be drawn from across the whole school community, not just from one department (see appendix 1).

We will have clear procedures about how staff should work together where thoughts of suicide or suicide behaviours are known among our young people. We will manage the sharing information in a way that enhances safety.

Ongoing support and development of our policy and practice

Our Trustees, Executive Leadership Team and individual School Leadership Teams will keep our practice up to date by maintaining contact with best practice and on-going training.

Staff Training

All staff should receive, through their ongoing safeguarding refresher training, basic raising awareness on the steps that can be taken to ensure WeST schools are suicide-safer. This training should cover the key concepts listed below.

- Suicide is the leading cause of death in young people.
- Everyone has a responsibility in reducing the risk of suicide.
- Talking about suicide does not increase the risk of someone taking their own life. If staff have concerns about a child they should speak in plain language and not be afraid to ask if they are considering suicide / taking their own life. All such conversations should be followed-up according to local school safeguarding protocols.
- Every expression of suicidal ideation should be taken seriously and must be followed-up according to local school safeguarding protocols.

The Frequently Asked Questions (see appendix 9) should also be made readily available to staff as an *aide memoir*. Staff should be signposted to voluntary online training courses, such as those provided by the Zero Suicide Alliance.¹

Each WeST school will have at least one member of staff who is ASIST or STORM trained (see appendix 1). This person should be in a role where they are readily available to speak to those who

¹ **Zero Suicide Alliance:** www.zerosuicidealliance.com offer 10 minute online [Gateway](#) training and 20 minute [Suicide Awareness](#) training

may be at risk of suicide in a timely fashion. The named person's contact should be made known as part of regular safeguarding refresher training. They should be able to work alongside the Designated Safeguarding Lead and external professionals to ensure that a pupil deemed at risk from suicide is supported. This could include the co-production with the child, and parent/carers as appropriate, of a suicide-safety plan. See appendix 10 for a set of generic questions, based on materials from Papyrus, which can support the co-production of such a plan with a pupil at risk from suicide.

PART TWO:

Postvention - responding to a child death from suspected suicide

Often the term postvention is used to refer to the care and support given after a suicide. This section is based around the document from Samaritans, "[Help When we Needed it Most. How to prepare for and respond to a suspected suicide in schools and colleges.](#)"

Statement of purpose

Nobody likes to think about a death in school. Yet suicide is a leading cause of death for young people in the UK. Sadly it is always a possibility that a pupil might take their own life. WeST recognises that however upsetting this must be our schools play an important role in reducing the likelihood of copycat behaviour and helping recovery by preparing for and responding to such situations appropriately.

Creating a response plan

Although a school can be affected by many challenging incidents, including sickness and accidental death, it is suicide that presents unique risk of potentially being the trigger for another suicide². To mitigate against this risk all WeST schools should develop their own response plan, based upon their local circumstances. A template framework for such a plan is set out in appendix 3. This plan should allow the school to respond to a suspected suicide as soon as possible, but at least within 48 hours. This is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school routine, while facilitating the expression of grief, and reducing the risk of imitative behaviour.

Guidance on Media and Social Media Coverage

A child's death by suspected suicide may attract attention from the media. Social media platforms mean that news of such incidents can travel quickly and schools may be contacted by journalists seeking a comment within a very short period of time.

Whether schools are contacted by email, telephone or in person it is important that they do not feel under any obligation to make any statement without having had chance to properly consider their position.

Samaritans have produced [Media Guidance for Reporting Suicide](#) which details appropriate and sensitive reporting of suicide. They can be contacted to give further advice on how to respond to the media. Their guidance advises:

- Avoid details of the method used, or the location.
- Avoid speculation about the trigger for the suicide.

² Public Health England (2019) [Identifying and responding to suicide clusters: a practice resource](#)

- Avoid making the deceased appear heroic or brave, or that suicide was a solution to a problem.
- Avoid endorsement of myths around suicide, bear in mind the language used.
- Do not over emphasise the school community's expressions of grief.
- Be sensitive to the feelings of family and friends.
- Encourage sharing help lines and support organisation details.
- Bear in mind that interest is sometimes generated by campaign groups or bereaved families with the aim of raising awareness of the issues.

Supporting Staff and Pupils

WeST schools will:

- Support and respond to incidents of suspected death by suicide in collaboration with wider services and partnerships.
- Provide facilities for pupils and staff who require a quiet area and whom will be offered opportunities for further support.
- Ensure that relevant support resources (see appendices 6 and 7) are communicated to all staff and pupils.
- Reassure staff and pupils that grief is a normal response to death, and there is no wrong or right way to grieve.
- Believe everyone's expression of grief and offer support.
- Recognise that pupil distress might manifest in their behaviour or performance.
- Continue the conversation about suicide in a reassuring and safe way to reduce stigma and encourage openness.
- Use helpful language when talking about suicide (see appendix 2).
- Liaise with support agencies including CAMHS, Educational Psychologists and school nurses to develop a plan to support colleagues and pupils.
- Debrief staff and 'check-in' with pupils and encourage an ethos of care and support throughout the school.
- Ensure staff are familiar with this policy and receive relevant training on what to do if:
 - there is a concern about a pupil
 - what risk factors and signs to look out for, including self harm
- Consult with the family about disseminating the funeral arrangements.
- Remember the pupil who had died and consult with the family about an assembly memorial or short-term memorial sites, but will avoid romanticising suicide with a prolonged site.
- Be aware that longer term issues may arise, particularly for those at risk and that the anniversary of the young person's death, and will facilitate appropriate discussion and support.

Appendix 1 - Staff Trained in ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) or STORM

Name	Role	Contact Details

Appendix 2 - Language

Whilst the right language is helpful, the most important response is one which is non-judgemental, caring and calm.

Helpful Lanagage	Unhelpful Lanaguage
Ended their life / Took their own life / Killed themselves / Died by suicide	Successful suicide - if a child dies by suicide it cannot ever be a success. We don't talk about any other death in this way and we would never talk about a successful heart attack
	Commit suicide - suicide has not been a crime in the UK since 1961. Using the word 'commit' suggests that it is still a crime, which perpetuate stigma or the sense that is a 'sin'. Stigma shuts people up - children will be less likely to talk about their suicidal feelings if they feel judged
Attempted suicide / attempted to take their own life / Engaged in suicide behaviours	Unsuccessful suicide
Expressing a need for support	Just a cry for help
Person at risk of suicide	Suicide-prone person

Appendix 3 - Template response plan in the event of a suspected suicide

Statement of Purpose

Name of school recognises that:

- each case of a child death by suspected suicide is a tragedy and will have a serious impact on the school and wider community;
- it is likely to have been caused by unique and complex factors, some of which may not be immediately apparent;
- only a coroner can conclude that a death is by suicide but that treating a death as a case of suspected suicide is likely to be helpful in the immediate response;
- this plan serves to inform the decision-making processes in the event of a suspected suicide but will need to be adapted for each individual case.

Response Team

Role in Team	Name	Substantive Role in School (<i>generic suggestions in italics</i>)	Contact Details
Overall coordinator of Response		<i>Headteacher</i>	
Communication to staff		<i>Headteacher</i>	
Communication to pupils		<i>Heads of Year / Tutors / Class Teachers</i>	
Coordinating support for pupils identified most at risk		<i>Head of Year / Designated Safeguarding Leader</i>	
Liaison with family		<i>Headteacher</i>	
Liaison with media		<i>Headteacher / Deputy Headteacher</i>	
Liaison with external Services		<i>Designated Safeguarding Lead</i>	
Administrative support		<i>Headteacher's PA / Senior Administrator</i>	

The steps below form a framework by which the Response Team will coordinate its actions. Although set out as numeric steps some areas may overlap chronologically.

Step One - School receives notification of a child death by suspected suicide

- The Headteacher will gather as much information from the person / agency reporting the death and ensure that a clear line of communication is established if necessary.
- The Headteacher will notify members of the Response Team and convene an initial meeting.
- The Headteacher will notify the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of WeST.
- The CEO of WeST will notify the Chair of Trustees, the relevant Director of Education and the Director of Inclusion.
- The Headteacher will notify the relevant point of contact within the local authority.

Step Two - Initial meeting of the response team

- Establish and clarify what is known about the incident.
- Agree what information will be shared with staff, pupils and parents
- Agree a procedure for informing staff, pupils and parents
- Ensure that the relevant school administrators are made aware of the death so that any standard correspondence to the family is stopped.
- Ensure that reception staff are aware of the death and have a script to direct parental and media enquiries to the appropriate member of the Response Team.
- Identify which external agencies may be able to support, e.g. Local Authority Educational Psychologists may offer a 'crisis response service.' Schools buying the Plymouth MAST package have access to their support.

Step Three - Informing staff

- Where possible staff should be informed of the death face to face and with sufficient notice for them to have an opportunity to process their initial emotional response before they have to begin work.
- The following points provide guidance for notifying staff.
 - The pertinent facts about the death as agreed with the family, but without the details of the method of death.
 - Normalisation of the emotions experienced in response to the death.
 - Encouraging caring for each other and letting staff know if anyone has concerns about other pupils.
 - Encouraging positive ways of managing distress.
- Ensure that staff are signposted to the support available to them. This could include the offer of a dedicated space to gather during breaktimes, a colleague who may be available as a listening ear and a reminder of the Care First Employee Assistance offer (0800 174319).

Step Four - Informing pupils

- Pupils identified as being close to the deceased will be informed by a familiar member of staff, ideally face to face.
- Other pupils will be informed concurrently in class groups using a prepared script.
- The following points provide guidance for preparing such a script. A generic template is provided in appendix 4.
 - The pertinent facts about the death as agreed with the family, but without the details of the method of death.
 - Normalisation of the emotions experienced in response to the death.
 - Encouraging caring for each other and letting staff know if anyone has concerns about other pupils.
 - Encouraging positive ways of managing distress.
 - Information on how pupils can access further support.
 - Reminding pupils about respectful use of social media in such scenarios.

Step Five - Identifying pupils most at risk of suicide

- The named person in the response team will liaise with pastoral leaders and external agencies such as CAMHS and Education Psychologists to identify those pupils most at risk of suicide. These may include those:
 - closely involved

- who identified with the deceased (e.g. same tutor group, class, team, club or interests)
- previously affected by suicide or the sudden loss of a close family member or friend
- affected by depression, substance misuse, known to self-harm or who may lack family or social support
- The named person should then work with staff, services and partners to consider what additional monitoring and support these pupils may need.

Step Six - Working with services and partners

- The named person in the response team will consider which services and partners should be contacted for advice and support. This may include:
 - Local Authority Educational Psychology Service
 - Plymouth MAST (for schools who buy-in their services)
 - CAMHS
 - Mental Health Support Team
 - School Nurse
 - Children's Social Care
 - Local Children's Safeguarding Board
- The named person will notify, as necessary, the Headteachers of any schools who may need to be aware of the death to increase vigilance for their own pupils. This may include:
 - Feeder primary schools
 - Schools attended by the deceased sibling's / relatives
 - Other networks where they maybe connections³

Step Seven - Parent / carer and community group communication

- The school should notify parents / carers by letter following agreement with the family of the deceased. The following points should be considered for inclusion in such a letter. A generic template is provided in appendix 5.
 - Brief pertinent information about the death including what year the pupil was in.
 - Confirmation of when and what the pupils were told.
 - Encouragement to the parents to let their child know that the letter has been received and that they as parents listen to concerns.
 - Acknowledge any parental concerns about their child's reaction to the news, and to normalise grief reactions.
 - Encouragement to discuss with their child positive strategies to cope.
 - Advice to staff connected with their child to support them in the general sense.
 - Advice to contact their GP if they or their child would like further support.
- The named person in the response team should work with external services to identify whether there are any community groups who should be made aware of the death, and if so what information should be shared.

³ For example, given the geographical proximity of schools within Plymouth it may be appropriate to inform Plymouth Learning Trust, or Plymouth Association of Primary Headteachers.

Step Eight - Media notification and social media coverage

- The named person from the response team should agree a prepared statement from the school in the case that the media makes an approach for information. This should be prepared in conjunction with a recognised expert, e.g. a Local Authority Press Officer.
- All media enquiries should be directed to the named person to ensure a consistent response to enquiries.
- All other staff and pupils should be told not to respond to journalists or engage in any sharing of information or comment on social media.

Appendix 4 - Suggested script for tutors / class teachers to read to pupils

We have some sad news to share with our school community. A year XX student, Name, has tragically died. This is going to be an emotional time for our school community. Support is going to be available through Name of LA Educational Psychology team and the Name of other external or internal support team.

For Year XX students, who are likely to be most affected, they will be supported in location by details of staff members.

We must respect the family's wishes in terms of the detail surrounding the death. We appreciate your sensitivity and support at this time for both the family and the school community.

Appendix 5 - Suggested Letter to Parents / Carers

This could be sent by email and also posted on the school website with an appropriate picture.

Dear parents / carers

It is with great sadness that I write to inform you that one of our much-loved students (Name and year group), tragically died on insert day/date.

We've been in contact with the family to express the sadness of the whole school community about this news and to offer our support. Understandably, the family is still coming to terms with what has happened and they would appreciate having some privacy for now.

You can express your condolences by emailing in the first instance. Please contact condolences@SCHOOLADDRESS.co.uk.

We have shared this news with students via their tutor group / class, or via an assembly for the (most affected year group) students.

We'll be in touch soon with details about:

- *How we will come together as a school to celebrate Name's life*
- *How we will provide further support for children as they grieve*

If you have concerns about how your child is coping with this news, you can contact your child's tutor in the first instance. Westcountry Schools Trust and the Local Authority are supporting in school and will be providing educational psychology professionals to help us.

Thank you for your help and understanding at this difficult time.

Yours faithfully

Headteacher

Appendix 6 - Useful Websites

PAPYRUS: www.papyrus-uk.org

Offer one, free 30 minute SP-ARK (Suicide Prevention - Awareness, Resource, Knowledge) presentation to organisations. They also offer other training packages, including ASIST at cost.

Samaritans: www.samaritans.org

Have a 24 hour, 365 days a year helpline.

Call: 116 123

Email: jo@samaritans.org (48h response time)

They also provide a “[Step by Step](#)” service to schools affected by suicide.

Call: 0808 168 2528

HOPELineUK

This is a service run by PAPYRUS with trained advisors offering support to children and young people having thoughts of suicide and to anyone who is concerned about a child or young person. Lines are open 10am-10pm weekdays, 2pm-10pm weekends and 2pm-5pm on Bank Holidays.

Call: 0800 068 41 41

Text: 07786 209 697

Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

Zero Suicide Alliance: www.zerosuicidealliance.com

Offer 10 minute online [Gateway](#) training and 20 minute [Suicide Awareness](#) training aimed at supporting adults to have supportive conversations with those at risk of suicide.

Grief Encounter: www.griefencounter.org.uk

Support for bereaved children and their families

Child Bereavement UK: childbereavementuk.org

Support for families when a child dies

Resources to equip pupils with coping skills for bereavement, now and in later life

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/pages/category/elephants-tea-party>

Winston's Wish: www.winstonswish.org/

Support for children and young people after the death of a parent or sibling

CRUSE: www.cruse.org.uk

Support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies. There is a section for schools www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-schools

Appendix 7 - Useful books

Books for Children under 5 Years:

I Miss You - A First Look at Death

P. Thomas ISBN 0764117645

Goodbye Mousie

R.H. Harris ISBN 978-0689871344

Goodbye Grandma

D. Brauna ISBN 1405219017

Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine: Your Activity Book to Help When Someone Has Died

D.Crossley and K.Sheppard ISBN-10: 1869890582

The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back: A Story for Children Who Have Lost Someone They Love: 2 (Helping Children with Feelings)

M. Sunderland ISBN-13: 978-0863884634

Books for Children Aged 5-8 Years:

Badgers Parting Gifts

S. Varley ISBN 978-0006643173

Always and Forever

A. Durant ISBN 978-0552548779

Flamingo Dream

D.J. Napoli ISBN 978-0688167967

(About a father who is ill then dies)

The Sunshine Cat

M. Moss ISBN 978-1841215679

(A child's cat gets killed in a road accident)

When Dinosaurs die

L.K. Brown and M. Brown ISBN 031611955

(A factual book exploring issues about why someone dies and feelings about death)

Books for Children Aged 9-12 Years:

Michael Rosen's SAD BOOK

M. Rosen ISBN 978-1406313161

(Refers to Michael Rosen's son dying and how it affects him)

Milly's Bug Nut

J. Janey ISBN 978-0-9539123-4-6

(About a girl whose father dies)

Water Bugs and Dragonflies

D. Stickney ISBN 978-0264674414

(A pocket book explaining death)

What on Earth to do when someone dies

T. Romain ISBN 978-1575420554

Books for Young People Aged 13-16:

Help for the Hard Times

E. Hipp ISBN 1-56838-085-5

(Refers to different types of loss and grief and skills to help teenagers)

The Spying Game

P. Moon ISBN 978-1842750049

(About a boy whose father dies and reveals the boys response)

Vicky Angel

J. Wilson ISBN 978-0440865896

(A girl's friend is run over and killed)

Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers: How to Cope with Losing Someone you Love

E.A. Grollman ISBN 978-0807025017

Appendix 8- Talking to children and young people after a death

The following information can be helpful to parents and staff when discussing difficult and painful situations:

Listen to children:

- Create a time and place for children to ask their questions. Don't force children to talk about things until they're ready.
- Remember that children tend to personalise situations. For example, they may worry about their own safety or that of their friends.
- Help children find ways to express themselves. Some children may not be able to talk about their thoughts, feelings, or fears. They may be more comfortable drawing pictures, playing with toys, or writing stories or poems directly or indirectly related to current events.

Answer children's questions:

- Use words and concepts your child can understand. Make your explanation appropriate to your child's age and level of understanding. Don't overload a child with too much information.
- Give children honest answers and information. Children will usually know if you're not being honest.
- Be prepared to repeat explanations or have several conversations. Some information may be hard to accept or understand. Asking the same question over and over may be your child's way of asking for reassurance.
- Acknowledge and support your child's thoughts, feelings, and reactions. Let your child know that you think their questions and concerns are important.
- Be consistent and reassuring.
- Remember that children learn from watching their parents and teachers. They are very interested in how you respond to events. They learn from listening to your conversations with other adults.
- Let children know how you are feeling. It's OK for them to know if you are upset, anxious or worried about events. However, don't burden them with your concerns.
- Don't confront your child's way of handling events. If a child feels reassured by saying that things are happening somewhere else, it's usually best not to disagree. The child may need to think about events this way to feel safe.

Appendix 9 - Frequently Asked Questions

These FAQs are based on the Papyrus resource [“Building suicide safer schools and colleges: a guide for teachers and staff”](#)

- **What do I do when I have a concern about child?**

A concern is just that. It is not a judgement or an outcome; it's a concern. Whatever it is that makes you worried or questioning about the child, may well be worth exploring. This may include a conversation with others, for example colleagues, parents and carers, but it is very important that the child is your central focus. Check out how the child is, by communicating directly with them. Let the child know what you're concerned about. What have you seen, do they seem sad or not their usual self? What have you heard them say that makes you concerned? Is your instinct telling you that something is concerning?

- **How will I know if a child or young person is suicidal?**

If children are having thoughts of suicide, they will usually communicate this. However, this is unlikely to be an explicit verbal communication about suicide. Few young people feel that they can be open about suicidal thinking or tell someone when they are struggling with their emotional health and well being. When suicide is part of children's thinking, they usually show this in their behaviour, in how they interact and in how they communicate. Every child is different. However when you notice changes in the way a child is behaving or communicating, and it is causing you concern, you must explore your concern with the child. If your concern is because the child says or does something to indicate that suicide is an option, your concern is now about suicide. The only way to check whether your intuition is correct is to ask the child directly and clearly about suicide. The child who is thinking about suicide may be longing for someone to ask them about this. They don't need you to interrogate them. They don't need you to fix it for them. They just need you to ask. Just do it.

- **What things can I look out for?**

The first step in talking about suicide is recognising that the child may be at risk. There is no definitive guide on how to know if somebody is thinking about suicide because anybody can be at risk. However, there are some things you can look out for. Often children thinking about suicide would have experienced a stressful event associated with the feeling of loss. This might be something others might consider to be small but hold great meaning for them. For example, the loss of a family pet or life events such as changing courses at college, bullying or violent assault. Young people who are experiencing thoughts of suicide may give out invitations to ask for help. These may manifest themselves as changes in behaviour (self harm, giving away possessions), the words they use (“I wish I wasn't here”, “It doesn't matter anymore”), physical indicators (sleep disturbance, weight loss) or they have overwhelming feelings of anger, hopelessness, loneliness, or a sense of being ‘worthless’. Almost anything could be an indicator and often the key is if something feels not quite right it is worth trusting your intuition and exploring what might be happening for the child.

- **How do I ask about suicide?**

Ask them directly, are you thinking about suicide? By using the word suicide, you are telling them that it's OK to talk openly about their thoughts of suicide with you.

You could use one of the phrases below

- It sounds like you're thinking about suicide, is that right?
- Are you telling me you want to kill yourself?
- Sometimes, when people are feeling the way you are they think about suicide. Is that what you're thinking about?
- It sounds like life feels too hard for you right now and you want to kill yourself, is that right?

Some children may not be familiar with the word suicide, but this does not mean that they don't understand what it means. Tragically, many children who may not have known the word suicide have taken their own life, and many more think about not being here anymore. You could say:

- When you say you don't want to be here anymore, do you mean that you want to be dead forever?
- Suicide means hurting ourselves on purpose so we die and are dead forever, is that what you are thinking about?

- **What should I do if a child tells me they are thinking about suicide?**

Listen and allow the child to express their feelings they will likely feel a huge sense of relief that someone is willing to hear their darkest thoughts without judgement. Reassure them that they are not alone and you can look for support together. Let the young person know that there is help and hope.

- **How do I talk about suicide safely?**

There are some ways you can continue a conversation about suicide in a reassuring, safe way:

- It's hard and scary to talk about suicide but take your time and I will listen.
- Can you tell me more about you why you want to die?
- Things must be painful for you to feel like there is no way out. I want to listen and help.
- It's not uncommon to have thoughts of suicide. With help and support many people can work through these thoughts and stay safe.
- There is hope. There is help available and we can find it together.
- It sounds as though things are really hard at the moment . . . can you tell me a bit more?
- Take your time and tell me what's happening for you at the moment.
- You have shown a lot of strength in telling me this. I want to help you find support.
- I'm so sorry you're feeling this way. Can you tell me more about how you are feeling?

- **I know that young person has self-harmed but how do I know whether it is suicide related?**

Self-harm is often a precursor to suicide but not always. Those who engage in self-harm do not all go on to take their own life. Those who died by suicide do not always have a history of self-harm. If you have a concern about a child self-harming, you should treat it like any other concern. You may need to explore with the child what is happening for them and if you think that suicide may be part of their thinking, ask them directly about suicide.

- **I know that a child is having thoughts of suicide - what do I do?**

This can be challenging and you may feel ill equipped. Be assured that you cannot make things worse by asking the child whether they are considering suicide.

- **What should I do if a child talks about suicide during a class?**

If this happens you should respond in a calm and sensitive way. Don't dismiss what the child is saying. They are asking for help and you need to respond. Your calm and sensitive response will let the child and other children in the class know that they can talk about suicide openly and non judgmentally. As soon as possible encourage the child to move to a more private place where you can have an open conversation about their disclosure. You should also check in with the class and let them know where they can find sources of support. When a child makes a disclosure about suicide you must refer this to your Designated Safeguarding Lead.

- **I know that a child has engaged in suicide behaviour - what do I do?**

If a child has acted in a way that puts their life in danger act quickly to keep the child safe and ensure that there is no imminent risk. If there is immediate risk to life you may need to get urgent professional help to protect the child. You may need to contact the emergency services. You should follow your school's procedure and ensure that your Designated Safeguarding Lead is informed.

If a child has taken steps to end their life it is important the child does not feel judged or shamed for their suicide behaviour. Try to remain calm, even though you might be feeling scared, confused, upset or frustrated, it is helpful to ask the child whether they are having thoughts of suicide. It may seem obvious in their behaviour, but asking clearly about suicide allows you to have an open and non-judgmental conversation. Ensure that you are able to have a conversation in private and that other children are not around. You may have called for professional help, but in the mean time you might be best placed to stay with the child and talk about how they are feeling. Once you have determined that suicide is their focus just listen. Ask them to tell you about how they're feeling. They might not want to talk, but you can let them know that you will remain with them in supportive silence, and if they do want to talk you are there to listen. Your reassurance will help the child to feel understood and supported.

If you determine that the child's behaviour has not put their life in danger, but there has been an injury, you should seek support from the school's first aider (or equivalent) who will offer care and advice. You should speak to your Designated Safeguarding Lead about this.

If the behaviour in question is historical behaviour, then the focus will be on what the child has learned from this behaviour and using that learning to keep the child safe. You should also speak to your Designated Safeguarding Lead about this.

- **Do I have to share everything the child has told me and do I need to share the reasons why they are thinking about suicide?**

Confidentiality is not boundless. Make no promises to keep what they say is secret or 'just between us'. Be clear from the outset that you may need to get some help in keeping them suicide-safe. Make sure you keep informing the child you are supporting that you may need to share some information with other people in order keep them safe. Unless there is good reason not to, the child's parents/carers should be informed of any concerns relating to the child's thoughts of suicide or suicidal behaviour. This decision should be made by the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead, in accordance with the local Safeguarding Children Board's protocols around children who are at risk of immediate harm.

- **How do I support a child with their return to school after they have engaged in suicide behaviour?**

Before the child who attempted to take their own life returns to school, meet with him or her and their parents/carers. When you meet you should explore supporters in place, and also what further support the school can provide - ask the child what they need.

The child who attempted to take their life may not currently be suicidal, however suicide may still be an option for them, or become an option again in the future. It is important that the child has a suicide safety plan: a plan that they have created with support that details how they want to stay safe from suicide. It is essential that the plan is created together with the child - with them at its centre. Create the plan with them, not for them. The plan must be something that they feel that they are able to agree to.

A good suicide safety plan always includes the following: helpline numbers where available and appropriate (including 24 hour help lines); safety contacts, including people and organisations that the child can contact when they feel they can't keep themselves safe; a safety contact for when they are at school. Appendix 10 provides a generic template for a suicide safety plan.

Arrange for regular 'check-ins' with a child once they have returned to school to see how they are doing and to check the plan is OK for them. Be prepared to amend the suicide safety plan based on their needs, it is a live document and may change overtime. Suicide safety plan might also include professional support from a counsellor or therapist during school time and you should accommodate this within their timetable.

Appendix 10 - Suicide safety plan

This outline is based on the document which can be downloaded from [Papyrus](#), which they also present in [leaflet form](#). Either of these versions could be completed with the child, depending on which feels more accessible by way of their presentation.

Alternatively the questions could be discussed with a supportive adult and then presented in a way that the child finds most helpful, e.g. they may have a particular preference on fonts, colour and layout.

1. What is a suicide safety plan?

When thoughts of suicide are overwhelming, staying safe for even 5-10 minutes takes a great deal of strength. This plan is to use during those times. It isn't a plan for how to rid yourself of thoughts of suicide, it looks at staying safe **right now** so that you still have the chance to fight another day and access support for whatever is impacting on those thoughts overall. These thoughts and feeling can change, it doesn't mean you will feel like this forever. Let's concentrate on what you can do **right now**.

2. Why do I want to stay safe?

What are the reasons I don't want to die today? Are there people or animals that make me want to stay safe? Do I have hope that things might change? Am I afraid of dying? Do I want to stay alive just for right now?

3. Making my environment safer.

Whilst I'm focusing on safety, how can I make it harder to act on any plans I might have for suicide? Where can I put things I could use to harm myself so they are harder to get to if I feel overwhelmed?

4. What might make it harder for me to stay safe right now and what can I do about this?

- a. Do I use any drugs, alcohol or medication to cope? These can make it harder to stay safe if they make me more impulsive or lower my mood. What can I do to make these safe?
- b. If I have acted on thoughts of suicide before, what makes it harder to stay safe that I might need to consider for staying safe today?
- c. Do I have any mental health concerns or symptoms that make it harder to stay safe? How can I help with these?

5. What can I do right now that will keep me safe?

What coping strategies can I use? What has worked in the past? Is there anywhere I can go that will feel safe?

6. What strengths do I have that I can use to keep myself safe?

What strengths do I have as a person and how might this keep me safe? What do people who care about me say about this? Am I creative / determined / caring? Do I have any faith or any positive statement that I use for inspiration? How can I use this in my plan to stay safe right now?

7. Who can I reach out to for help?

If I can't stay safe, who is available to help me? Who has helped me in the past? What help

lines or emergency contacts can I use?

101 or 999 for emergency support

NHS 111 for medical advice

08000 068 4141 for Hopeline UK

8. Long-term support plan

After staying safe for now from suicide, what longer term support do I want? How might I access this? What do I need to change for my thoughts of suicide to change? Where might I start to get help with this?