

Understanding the sensitive subject of Suicide

Suicide can be defined as “An act deliberately initiated and performed by a person in the full knowledge or expectation of its fatal outcome” (WHO).

It is common within society

- More than 700 000 people die due to suicide every year.
- For every suicide there are many more people who attempt suicide. A prior suicide attempt is the single most important risk factor for suicide in the general population.
- Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death in 15-19-year-olds.
- 77% of global suicides occur in low- and middle-income countries.

Every year 703 000 people take their own life and there are many more people who attempt suicide. Every suicide is a tragedy that affects families, communities and entire countries and has long-lasting effects on the people left behind.

Suicide is a serious public health problem; however, suicides are preventable with timely, evidence-based and often low-cost interventions. It is one of the most preventable causes of death.

Suicidal Ideation or suicidal thoughts are an even more everyday occurrence and may range from fleeting thoughts to continuous thoughts and can sometimes lead to detailed planning how it could be accomplished. However most people who have these thoughts do not go on to take their own life. It is often a wish to escape an unbearable emotional pain.

Why do people plan and complete suicide? The reasons are many, and possibly to the onlooker incomprehensible, however the individual who is suicidal is not necessarily able to rationalise what is happening in their life. This might be due to a recent trauma or life event, e.g. relationship difficulty, illness, bereavement or an enduring mental health issue such as bipolar, or borderline personality disorder. The individual might be feeling trapped with no idea of a way out due to problems at work, or with money. As a result they may have a sense of hopelessness or helplessness and feel very isolated, even though this may actually not be accurate.

Research shows that people who are talking about suicide do not necessarily want to be “dead forever” they just want this awful thing to stop. The feelings they are experiencing at this stage are commonly....

- Despair
- Desperation
- Helplessness
- Hopelessness

With some individuals there can be a sense of inevitability about their decision and their actions, whilst for others they plan very carefully, research their means, sometimes put all their affairs in order and seemingly out of the blue - take their life. This can be most shocking to those they leave behind who then are left to wonder why and piece together the reasons. Suicide can be likened to a bomb going off inside a family, it has a destructive power which can sometimes wreak havoc down the generations as other family members gain the message that when times get tough this is the solution. Thankfully, this is not always the case and others may make different decisions but are often hypervigilant as a result. Suicide causes a ripple effect which impacts individuals, families and the community.

It is necessary for everyone to have some knowledge about suicide and be able to manage a basic conversation about it.

Remembering that suicide is one of the most preventable causes of death here are some tips to understanding how to have the “conversation”

Step 1

- Be aware of some of the signs to look out and listen for
- Tell the person what you may have noticed about them in terms of what they may have said or how they are acting
- Explain your concerns and ask them are they thinking of taking their own life (it is better to ask than not and the person may be relieved that you have asked)

Step 2

- Demonstrate you care in the way you respond to them
- Listen carefully to what they're saying and what may be causing their pain
- Talk things through with them
- Explore options and explain that now might not be the time to make such a major decision

Step 3

- Explore what they need to do to stay safe
- Ask what support they may have
- Build on the strengths they may have and suggest other avenues of support

Finally, acknowledge that suicide is just one option, but it isn't the only option. Have a list of supportive organisations to hand and offer to help with this.

What can you do to help someone? The simple answer is to ask directly if you feel someone may be considering taking their life, whilst also understanding that they may feel like killing themselves without accepting this will necessarily be the outcome. Know what you can do (within your role and/or organisation) and try to stay with what the person is saying; their thoughts and feelings without moving too quickly to find solutions for them, because at that moment they probably will struggle to accept your solutions.

Given this situation how can you secure help? A call to Care first if you or the individual wants to talk it through, Counsellors are available to you 24/7. But you could also call the persons GP for an emergency appointment and referral to the Crisis Team or take your member of staff to the nearest

accident and emergency (A&E) department. At the end of this document you will find other sources of help and support.

Have you been bereaved by suicide? If so there is specialist support available for you besides Care first. **SOBS – Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide**, is a national charity providing support to individuals, their **Helpline is available 09.00 – 21.00 Mon to Fri, 0300 111 5065 and you can also email them; email.support@uksobs.org**

Additional Resources

Samaritans support service anytime on 116 123

PAPYRUS HOPELine UK on 01925 572444 if you are a young person (or have concerns about a young person)

Mind on 0300 123 3393

Maytree - <https://www.maytree.org.uk/> Maytree's house is open to people when they are suicidal and offer a one time only free 4 night/5 day stay for adults which incorporates counselling sessions as part of the stay.

If you would like to view the Webinar on **'World Suicide Prevention Day: Understanding Suicide'** a recording of the session can be accessed using the link below -

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7484175948243923472>