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thriving business.

Shining a Light
on **Suicide**

Ripple^{&Co}

Bolton
Council

Suicide is the leading cause of death in men under the age of 50, and the rate of female suicide is at its highest in more than a decade.

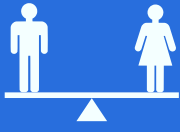
Yet there is still a widespread tendency to brush the subject of suicide under the carpet leading to the risk of ignoring the early warning signs of someone experiencing significant mental distress and who is at real risk of taking their own life.

The biggest myth we need to bust is that talking about suicide increases the risk of someone taking their own life, when in reality talking is the most powerful first step towards safety, yet the hardest thing to do when we are distressed.

The causes of suicide are complex, and sometimes cannot be singled out. Cumulative negative life events and a 'final straw' can lead to suicidal behaviour if someone is unable to cope, or wants a way to end the pain. Suicide is complexed and there is no simple answer for why people take their own lives. Risk factors are not static; they vary through the life course and will be different for each person.

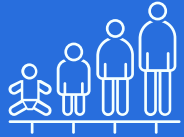


Risk factors



Gender:

Men remain the most at risk group and are three times more likely to die by suicide than women. Some men are less likely to seek help and there are an increasing range of innovative ways being used to reach men, and to ensure services are accessible and relevant for them. The suicide rate for women is increasing.



Age: The highest suicide rate is 45 to 59 years, for men and women.

Bereavement:

Men and women are at higher risk of suicide after the death of a family member or friend. A death by suicide is a significant risk factor.



Sexual orientation and gender identity:

The risk of suicide is significantly higher among the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Many LGBT people feel unable to be open about their sexuality or gender identity. They are more likely to suffer from bullying and discrimination and are at an increased risk of drug/alcohol abuse and homelessness – factors which affect mental health.



Mental illness : Around one-third of people who die by suicide have been under specialist mental health services in the year before they die. This includes treatment for illnesses such as depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.



Socio-economic status: There are systematic socio-economic inequalities in suicide risk. Socio-economic position can be defined in many ways – by job, class, education, income, or housing. Whichever indicator is used, the greater the disadvantage, the higher the risk of suicide. Even after accounting for underlying mental health issues, suicides increase among those in lower social classes.



Behavioural: Some patterns of behaviour can indicate a risk of suicide. These include alcohol and substance dependence, and self-harm, which is most common in people under 25.

Psychological and attitudinal:

Risk factors include perfectionism, over-thinking, feeling defeated, hopelessness, feelings of not-belonging and being a burden to others

Whether you meet someone in your personal or professional life who may be struggling with such thoughts, you can become suicide aware, and be more confident in knowing how to spot the signs that a person may be thinking of suicide.

Zero Suicide Alliance have created a 5-10 online training about how to approach and help someone who may be considering taking their own life. You can access that training at zerosuicidealliance.com



Looking out for changes

We all face uncertain and challenging times in life, and we have to deal with loss, grief, sadness. The following signs may indicate someone is struggling:

Changes in productivity

- Deterioration in performance at work
- Lethargy in a previously energetic person
- New pattern of unexplained lateness or absences
- Recent inability to concentrate on work
- Recent inability to complete work

Changes in social functioning

- Deterioration in social functioning
- Withdrawal from colleagues, isolation

Changes in personality or behaviour

- Extreme mood swings
- Acting anxious or agitated
- Showing rage, uncontrolled anger
- Behaving recklessly
- Increased alcohol or drug use

Changes in eating and sleeping patterns

Signs of (self-inflicted) physical harm

Not everyone who is thinking about suicide will display these warning signs. Some people will show no outward signs of suicidal thoughts prior to planning suicide, and you will not always be able to see that someone's behaviour has changed.

Someone might be:

- Laughing and joking
- Talking about future plans
- Telling you not to worry about them
- The safest way is to ask them
- Busy
- Chirpy
- Living life as normal
- Going to work

Why it's important to ask

If someone is suicidal, they are likely to be feeling:

- Cut off from everyone around them
- Frightened and ashamed about wanting to die
- Desperate for help but afraid to ask. Often they need someone to start the conversation for them. This gives them permission to talk about it, to not feel desperate and isolated and instead, share how they feel.

It's important to trust your gut instincts. If something about the person doesn't look or feel right, say something. **Saying something is safer than saying nothing.** Saying the word won't make it happen. It is better to over-react than to later ask yourself whether you could have done more.

It can be scary starting a conversation about suicide but it could be life-saving. Here is a guide:

- 1.If the danger for self-harm seems imminent, make sure the person is not left alone and call 999.
- 2.Stay with the person (or make sure the person is in a private, secure place with another caring person) until professional help arrives. Remove anything they could use to take their own life, e.g. tablets, firearms, rope
- 3.If there is no immediate danger, encourage them to talk, explore how they're feeling. If something bad has happened to them, ask, "How has it made you feel?" They may shrug and say, "I'm OK." If they don't seem OK to you, keep trying, quietly and gently
- 4.Listen attentively. Try to keep the dialogue open by asking questions like, "How bad is it?" or "What's that like?"
- 5.Don't deny what they're telling you, don't pretend you know how they feel and don't try to negotiate with them
- 6.Ask the 'S' question. If they give any indication that they're feeling hopeless or can't see the point in going on, ask clearly and calmly, "Are you having any thoughts of suicide?"
- 7.Don't be too quick to accept denials or joking responses
- 8.Get support for yourself. Don't underestimate the impact supporting someone in this situation can have on yourself.

Support is available for anyone who is thinking about suicide or who has been affected by it.

Useful resources:

The Samaritans

08457 90 90 90 (24 hours)

National Suicide Prevention Alliance

nspa.org.uk

PAPYRUS - Prevention of Young Suicide

0800 068 41 41

(Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm and 7pm–10pm; weekends 2pm–5pm)

www.papyrus-uk.org

SANE

0845 767 8000

(7 days a week, 6pm–11pm)

www.sane.org.uk

Maytree - A sanctuary for the suicidal

020 7263 7070

www.maytree.org.uk/index.php

