

FAQS

This document contains information about:

- Clear guidelines and boundaries for staff and volunteers
- What to do if someone is having suicidal thoughts or is in immediate crisis
- Support when talking about mental health and suicide

Q: I'm not a mental health professional – what is the role for staff and volunteers and where are the boundaries?

A: The role is about listening and signposting - it's important to have clear guidelines and boundaries for staff and volunteers

It might be helpful to set boundaries when you start speaking with someone about their mental health and wellbeing so that you are both clear about your role and its limitations.

For instance you could say:

"I can listen to you to find out more about your situation and help you to find the most appropriate support for you, however I'm not able to offer ongoing support or offer any specific mental health support. I will work with you to keep you safe. I just wanted to be clear so that we both know what I can and cannot do."

It's important to know when and how to refer someone to more specialist sources of help where needed. The Creating Hope signposting resource can help you with that.

The awards scheme is not intended to replace any of your own organisation or group's policies and procedures.

Q: What should I do if someone is having suicidal thoughts or is in immediate crisis?

A: Use the 'Be Suicide ALERT' steps to guide what you do

First, you need to be alert to the signs that someone may be thinking about suicide. If someone is contemplating suicide, they may:

- Talk about wanting to die, or saying that there's no point or that they can't do it anymore
- Talk about feeling trapped, hopeless or being a burden to others
- Be stressed, empty or numb and seem to be not coping
- Appear careless, moody or withdrawn
- Have lost interest in their appearance
- Be misusing drugs and/or alcohol
- Give away prized possessions, or be putting their affairs in order for no obvious reason.
- Someone who has appeared stressed or distressed may appear calm and in control once they have made a suicide plan.

The suicide ALERT model provides a framework for having a conversation about suicide:

Ask if you think someone may be thinking about suicide.

You can use direct language, and the question won't put the idea into someone's head, if they aren't already thinking about it. People who have thoughts about suicide say that they felt a huge sense of relief, just at someone asking them the question "Are you thinking about suicide?"

Listen carefully to what the person is saying.

You don't need to try to make it better, tell them how important they are, or how much they have to live for. Just allowing someone to talk, and acknowledging their feelings will let them know that you care.

Encourage them to talk further.

Family, friends, their GP, a counsellor, telephone support services or someone else they trust are all potential sources of support. There are contact details for various organisations on the opposite page, or on the United to Prevent Suicide Lifelines card.

Right Now contact emergency services or a crisis line if you think someone has immediate suicide plans.

This means they have a plan, the means to carry out their plan and an immediate timeframe. Don't leave someone alone if they have a plan and the means to carry it out.

RESPONDING TO SUICIDAL CRISIS AND IMMEDIATE RISK

If someone is in suicidal crisis and at immediate risk of suicide you should contact the emergency services by calling 999.

You should explain to the person that as they have disclosed information that you believe means that they are not safe, you will be contacting the emergency services.

If possible you should ask someone else to make the call to 999 so that you can stay with the person. You should stay with the person until the emergency services arrive.

If you are unsure whether the person is at immediate risk or not, you can ring the NHS24 Mental Health Hub on 111 for urgent mental health support.

For information about further support please see the Creating Hope signposting resource.

Talk to someone.

Supporting someone who is suicidal can be a difficult experience. You may need time and support to process your own emotions about it

Q: Is there support for me if I've been talking about mental health and suicide?

A: Yes. You can also access support, it's important to have a 'debrief'

As per the Talk stage in the ALERT model it is important for you to talk to someone if you have been having a conversation with someone about mental health or suicide, as this can be distressing.

You should contact your manager or supervisor following the conversation to let them know that you have been supporting someone.

Talking with someone who is thinking about suicide can be a stressful experience. Your manager or supervisor will work with you to consider what support, if any, that you need.

You may experience a sudden surge of emotion after you've spoken with the person, or your energy levels might drop. You may benefit from a short space of time out, or going for a walk, or you might want to talk with someone more fully to debrief.

If you do not have the opportunity to speak to someone in your setting, you may wish to talk to Breathing Space or Samaritans about how you are feeling.

The Papyrus HOPELINE247 is available for any professional who has had an experience with suicide and would like to talk it through with a trained professional. Anybody can access the debrief service after they've had an encounter with suicide, this is available through the Papyrus HOPELINE247 by calling 0800 068 41 41.

Q: Do you have a question that we have not answered here?

A: Please get in touch with us to ask directly by emailing health.improvement@borders.scot.nhs.uk