

Coping After Suicide or Sudden Traumatic Death

A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

PRODUCED BY

EMERGENCY RESPONSE INITIATIVE CONSORTIUM (ERIC)

CO-ORDINATED BY

JAMI, THE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE BASED IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

Jami

Introduction

Emergency Response Initiative Consortium (ERIC)

Coping After Suicide or Sudden Death : A Guide for Schools

ERIC is a partnership of voluntary sector agencies coming together to provide guidance and a face to face first responder service to Jewish schools after a student suicide. The consortium is co-ordinated by Jami, the mental health service for the Jewish community who work with partners Grief Encounter and other Jewish communal organisations Norwood, CST, JBCS and Pajes.

We are sharing this guide which has been adapted to have universal usage to support best practice and suicide prevention. Schools will need to work with their local partners to create the teams of First Responders suggested in this guide. Advice and guidance can be sought from the ERIC Co-Ordinator at Jami. They can be contacted by emailing ERIC@jamiuk.org

ERIC also provide guidance on “postvention” services. Postvention refers to the work we can put in place as a community to help prevent suicide. It comprises education, training and management systems that lend themselves to an awareness and understanding of suicide and how simple yet effective measures can help us feel more empowered and skilled in dealing with this sensitive area of our work.

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. We hope that in the longer term the clear and practical advice we give will save the school future stress and anguish.

The guide has been structured into **five sections** which are listed on the contents page then explored in further detail. We have also included handy appendix documents that can be used as proformas or templates.

Some of the information in this guide will also be transferable to other traumatic and sudden deaths such as death due to violence or sudden deaths on school premises. In the event of sudden traumatic deaths of this nature schools can contact us for support and guidance.

We have also included some guidance for coping with death by suicide of a staff member.

Acknowledgments

This document was informed by research done by ERIC members and we would like to reference two documents that were invaluable to us: headspace School Support, Suicide Prevention Toolkit, A guide for secondary schools, headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation Ltd, January 2012, Australia.

After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools (second edition) 2018 by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC), Education Development Center (EDC); Marshall, D. S et al

Thanks also to the team that developed this guide co-ordinated by Philippa Carr for Jami, with Sue Cohen, Norwood; Saville Kaufman, CST; Margi Abeles, JBCS; and Stacey Hart, Grief Encounter.

Thanks also to Rabbi Howard Cohen, JFS, for his peer review from a school's perspective and the Jami clinical governance group. Lastly thank you to Rabbi David Meyer, Pajes, for his support in the development of this guidance.

This document is intended as a guide and each school will make use of the information in line with their school community's needs and interests. Please do not hesitate to be in touch for further clarification or information about any of the areas included here.

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Reproduced with universal format, October 2020, Jami

You are welcome to share this document to help prevent suicide and share good practice in any school community.

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Section One:

Postvention (Before a suicide)

Appointing an in-school Emergency Response Team (ERT)

Schools should appoint an Emergency Response Team who will manage the crisis.

1. Make up of the team

Emergency Response Teams should consist of five or six people

The team should have a nominated leader and deputy

The team should include the Headteacher and other appropriate personnel such as pastoral care staff

All roles/tasks in the team should be assigned to more than one person in case the lead/other members are not available (see below for the tasks the ERT will need to cover)

The team should be able to work effectively under pressure ensuring they always maintain compassion and empathy

2. Establish communication methods of the ERT

Options include:

- WhatsApp group
- School broadcasting system
- Telephone and email contact

3. Tasks to be covered by the ERT

- Management of the scene of the suicide if this has happened at school
- Caring for and being with other students and staff, including setting up the support rooms for students and staff
- Handling communications with stakeholders
- Call emergency services and local education authority support
- Dealing with the press and monitoring social media
- The team should come together on a regular basis (e.g. once a term) to review policies and share learning
- We recommend that the team participate in the school briefing and one or two members of the team also take part in the further training for first responders delivered by ERIC
- ERT to put in place training for first responders from within school community or from schools working together with other agencies. ERIC can provide first responder training.
Contact ERIC@jamiuk.org

Have support networks ready

Identify spaces in the school which would be used as Support Rooms, these should provide privacy to either the groups or individuals who use them with the first responder teams providing support.

Ensure there is a stock of water and tissues available to be used in these rooms alongside art materials such as play dough, felt tip pens etc. which many young people will find comforting to use whilst they talk to the professionals.

Identify in-house team members who would be able and willing to help in support rooms and communicate with students during a difficult and upsetting time. In-house teams provide valuable tracking of the people using the service to be able to monitor vulnerability and need.

Ensure school counsellors have adequate training in supporting and recognising complex grief responses for ongoing work throughout the following year.

Provide opportunities through the school year to ensure parents/guardians are informed about mental health awareness and resources about local services and national help lines.

Utilise any Wellbeing Officers employed by the school to help deliver postvention initiatives.

Establish a safe, comforting online presence

A school's online presence can build relationships with all stakeholders to establish trust and confidence across the school community.

After a traumatic incident, people now turn to online media for information and support. The school can dispel rumour and role model appropriate responses to a suicide through their communications. See p.18 for a suggested letter/email to parents after a suicide.

Put in place mental health training

Suicide can be a preventable death. The variables around each tragedy are complex. Enabling staff and students to feel empowered to support each other and follow safety procedures can help safeguard everyone. Jami and other providers can train school staff in Youth Mental Health First Aid. Online options are available and providers can advise on a package for your school.

Ensure mental health awareness education for students is being delivered

Develop a curriculum around mental health awareness.

Ensure suicide prevention procedures are clear to all staff

Suicide prevention is usually managed with a different approach to other aspects of safeguarding such as abuse. Staff who have trained in YMHFA train to have a conversation with a young person who may be at risk in order to get them the appropriate support they need. Discuss how suicide prevention sits within your safeguarding framework with safeguarding leads.

Ensure future proofing has been considered

See our questions on page 23 to help you anticipate how to manage the aftermath of a suicide within a busy school life or during school holidays/weekends.

Section Two:

Manage the crisis

Tasks immediately after being made aware of a suicide

- Call 999 (if the incident is on site)
- Alert and mobilise the ERT
- Move any witnesses to safe locations (if on site)
- ERT members to support witnesses until police have taken statements or advised on next steps (if on site)
- Isolate the site of the suicide to prevent students and unauthorised staff from disturbing the scene (if on site)
- Do not move or disturb items from the scene until police have been to the site
- Continue to monitor any student witnesses (if on site)
- Confirm the suicide with the bereaved family (see below for details) and share condolences (if incident off site)
- Inform appropriate education services such as the local borough and D of E (ERT to create a list of who needs to be informed)
- Inform the Chair of Governors and other appropriate members of the governance body, alongside your pastoral teams and if appropriate other suitably trained individuals such as religious or lay leaders
- Ensure comfort is provided by ERT to students and staff before professional help arrives
- Plan the management of the support rooms (see further details below)

Taking control of the incident (1-4 hours)

- **INFORM STUDENTS IN SMALL GROUPS - DO NOT CASCADE NEWS OF A SUICIDE IN AN ASSEMBLY**
- All students need the opportunity for their own personal responses and to be able to digest the news safely. This is best managed in a smaller group environment where responses can be monitored and supported
- Give staff a script (suggested scripts are available in the appendix) to help them share the news in class groups or if possible smaller groups
- Have appropriate staff members ready to sit with deeply affected students
- Information about the suicide should be differentiated depending on whom it is being shared with as follows:
 1. Close friends of the deceased should be spoken to individually or in small groups
 2. Parent/carers of students who are deeply impacted by the news should be spoken to regarding arrangements for their children leaving school that day
 3. The affected class will require a modified statement of information to those in other year groups

in the school. They will want more information about when the event occurred, where and what is being done to support the family/siblings. Share minimal details of the death itself as this can be triggering for vulnerable students

4. Students in the same class as a sibling of the deceased will need extra information about how to support their friend when they return to school
5. Other year groups – keep the information brief (see guidance in the appendix of this document)

Set up support rooms for students and staff

These must be dedicated spaces. Co-ordinate the use of this service in the first 24 hours and ongoing for about the next three days.

- Put in place the school's First Responder team who should provide a first response support service and debriefing to students and staff affected by the suicide
- Put in place a system to monitor who uses the service and ensure staff follow-up with these students, checking in with them as to their wellbeing
- Consider opening the support room for an early or late shift for staff

Keep staff informed

The leader of the school ERT should inform staff about the news and what has been agreed with the family to share about the incident.

- Inform administrative staff about how to respond to parents who contact the school

Inform parents/guardians

Use the suggested letter in the appendix. Giving parents appropriate levels of information can help prevent unnecessary phone contact. Parents may also be impacted by the news and worry about their own children's safety.

- Set up opportunities for parent support evenings
- Provide the Grief Encounter helpline number for them to use: 0808 802 0111

Inform other nearby or affiliated schools

They may have students deeply affected by the suicide in your school and will need to know about the event to be able to put support measures in place.

Identify and step up monitoring of vulnerable students and student absences

When a suicide happens, there is a "ripple effect". Other students (and staff/parents/governors) who are vulnerable due to their own family history of suicide, or because the individuals have depression, anxiety and other mental health issues, can be deeply affected.

A cause for concern will be particularly if students close to the deceased/surviving sibling, have their own mental health issues which can then escalate after news of suicide.

It is vital that the staff team have potential vulnerable students on their radar.

The pastoral team who are in contact with CAMHS should share news of the suicide to alert services to potential escalation in risk to students currently in psychological assessment and treatment.

- **Think about vulnerable staff**
- **Collect the belongings of the deceased student for the police and the family. However, do not disturb the student's locker until being given the all clear by police**
- **Share information about reassignment of any duties to the staff team**
- **Assign extra support to the affected class**
- **Ensure they are encouraged to use the support room and offer alternative approaches to trusted teachers if they choose not to use these services**
- **Ensure staff also have support**
- **A student suicide can hit staff members very hard. Ensure all staff know who they can speak to for support**

Initial contact with the bereaved family

A designated member of the ERT should make contact with the family as soon as possible. It is important to discuss how they wish news of death to be broken to the school community.

Explain that:

- The school community will need to know of the death and that you want to work with the family to enable this process to be safe and appropriate
- Being able to share sensitive and accurate information about the student's death is very important. It is important to stop misinformation which can hurt people
- Ask how they would like to stay in touch with the school in the next few days – text, phone call or email. Respect the family's boundaries and be led by them
- Ensure they are in contact with a police family liaison officer
- Ensure they have the number of the Grief Encounter helpline: 0808 802 0111, alongside other appropriate helplines
- Let them know of the named person from the ERT (if it is not you) who will be their contact person

Liaise with the family's faith leader (if applicable)

A member of the ERT should reach out to the bereaved family's faith leader (if applicable) so that a joined-up approach can be adopted in terms of communications and support.

4 – 24 hours

Ensure all CAMHS services working with other students from your school have been informed

They may be at higher risk following the suicide of another student particularly if they are in the same class or year group.

Set up a condolences book in a space accessible to all students

To enable any student to write a message to help express their feelings. Encourage students to use this to share thoughts and feelings and messages rather than creating spontaneous memorials.

Designate a space to place flowers or other markers of respect

The ERT team may want to consult with relevant students and negotiate the designated place in the school community. Memorials must be time limited e.g. condolence book up to 2 weeks, flowers 2-3 days.

Other important tasks and considerations

- Send regular emails to staff about plans and key messages for students alongside resources provided in this pack on speaking to students about suicide
- Follow up contact with the bereaved family after the initial conversation with them and ascertain family's wishes for staff and students attending the funeral and/or other commemorations or memorials
- Convey this information to staff, students and parents as appropriate
- Consider staffing levels if the school release staff to attend the funeral
- Consider plans for enabling some students to attend the funeral whilst others return to school
- School is a safe space and some students will seek out their 'school family' at this time and want to be together in the school environment
- If there is discussion in SLT about any changes to the school day be aware that closing the school early may lead to some students going home to unsupervised environments, at a time when they are vulnerable due to suicide bereavement
- Monitor social media and counter "fake news"
- ERT members should keep up to date with online platforms discussing the suicide

Days 2 and 3

Return to routine but be prepared for instances of displays of grief by students

School routines are important. They keep students safe and staff contained. Return to normal routines as soon as possible after the suicide. For most schools normal routine is resumed a couple of days after the news breaks.

- Use our **Future proofing list** in the appendix to pre-empt the knock-on impact of a suicide. For example, a suicide occurring during exam periods will be particularly difficult for the grieving students, as students close to the deceased will have difficulty with concentration and returning to everyday routines
- Offer to support the family with handling media enquiries
- Ensure regular staff contact and that staff are offered support through appropriate channels including local provision and national helplines (See Appendix)
- Empower team leaders to reach out to their reports and encourage an environment of listening and care for each other
- Ensure monitoring and support of vulnerable students over the next week and then ongoing for the foreseeable future

Manage outpouring of student emotions/gestures of grief

Students may wish to demonstrate their grief by coming to school in black or bringing flowers in order to express feelings and demonstrate support of each other. This is well intentioned but the school needs to contain and manage the outpouring of grief in an appropriate manner.

A sensitive and effective communicator from the ERT should explain this to students in a respectful manner and work with them to support them through this time.

Encourage students to use their social media wisely

Class teachers should explain to students how hurtful some messages on social media can be for those who were close to the student. Students should be encouraged to be thoughtful about their posts during this time. Controlling students' social media use is impossible, however, by working with students, schools can use social media to share prevention-orientated messaging such as key helplines for young people.

Change the seating plan in classes if necessary

A few days after the news, seating plans need to be respectfully and sensitively rearranged. Empty chairs, labelled items etc that the deceased used, can be unsettling and evocative for others. Teachers should explain in advance the need to remember the student who died but also return to the everyday so that everyone can learn together safely and securely.

Section Three:

Returning to normality

School routine is important and schools will inevitably return to a flexible 'business as usual'. Some students will take time off school, others will want to be at school. A suicide or traumatic sudden death can create a 'hyper-vigilant' state in some people. Appearance will vary between individuals. Behaviour may appear tense, angry, tearful, or panicky and concentration and academic performance will be impaired.

Exams

Consider students taking exams that are deeply impacted by the bereavement. It may be helpful to make special arrangements for them such as having them in a smaller space where they can be monitored and extending their examination time, recognising their concentration may be impaired. Public exams will present more challenges (consider these situations in the future proofing document in the appendix).

Suicide bereavement

Bereavement after suicide affects everyone differently. Some people will experience an outpouring of grief soon after the news, for others grief will occur in the days, weeks, months or up to a year after the event. Be prepared to offer support when it is needed.

Use the resources offered in the back of this document to help both staff and parents continue to have supportive conversations with each other and with students.

Anniversaries

Plan for anniversaries/reminders of the loss of the student such as the student's birthday and the anniversary of the day the student died. Be aware of any events that mark the anniversary of the student's death in the faith of the student or their family. Schools should enable staff and students to attend these where appropriate and provide support to them if needed.

For other students, events like annual sports competitions, plays, school trips that the deceased student may have engaged with, may all be reminders of the student's death. Staff need to support each other to be aware of such reminders and anniversaries and seek to reach out to students and guide them to support.

Section Four:

Other traumatic events

Staff deaths

Members of the staff team are as much a part of the school community as students and a staff suicide will also have a profound effect. Breaking news of such a death should follow the same guidelines as above i.e. shared in smaller groups rather than mass assemblies.

Support should be made available and the school should consider letting students/staff know about the arrangements in place.

Suicides at other schools

Students may often have friendships with students in other schools.

When a death is known about in another nearby school it is important to ascertain which students may be adversely affected.

This can be done by informing parent/carers in the same year group and asking them to let the school know if their child had a friendship with the deceased and making families aware of support that is available.

Consider which parts of this protocol could be used as a minor protocol to assist in these situations.

Appendix

Emergency response documents

- I. Suggested scripts for teachers
- II. Notification to parents
- III. Helpful tips for parents supporting students after a suicide
- IV. Talking about suicide with young people
- V. Media communications
- VI. Future proofing conversations and plans
- VII. National helplines and resources

I. Suggested scripts for teachers disseminating the news to students

These statements are examples that can be modified by the ERT as needed

Important guidance

- Whole school assemblies are not appropriate for notifying students of a death by suicide because student reactions are hard to manage in this environment
- Friends closest to the student should be spoken to individually or in small groups
- Notification in class or form groups is recommended
- Different scripts are suggested for students in the year group of the student who has died by suicide and for students in the remainder of the school population
- Different scripts are suggested depending on the information that is known or can be shared. The death may have been ruled as a suicide, the cause of death may be unconfirmed or the family may request that the cause of death is not disclosed
- Ideally the teacher speaking to students will have the support in the room from another teacher/school counsellor
- Refer to How to Talk about Suicide with Young People information sheet for additional support on notifying students of a death

When death by suicide has been confirmed – students in same year group

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our year.....students, [NAME], has died. I'm also very sad to tell you that the cause of death was suicide.

This will be a very difficult time for the family and close friends of[NAME]. For a while it may be difficult to think about anything else. There are likely to be many feelings and many questions.

For this reason a support room has been set up in.....for any students to go to if they feel they can't manage in class over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times for you to talk to if you want to talk. The room is also a place where you can sit and be quiet. The people in the room to support you will be staff from school and professionals from other organisations who have come in to support us this week.

We will keep you informed as much as possible over the next week. Your parents will be informed of the death and will know that you might want to talk with them today or in the coming weeks.

If you are approached by anyone outside the school for comment please tell them they should speak with[NAMED MEMBER OF ERT].

Some of us may have known..... [NAME] well and others less well but we may all have strong feelings about this news. Each of us will react to[NAME]'s death in our own way and we need to be respectful and sensitive to each other. Please let me, someone in the support room or your parents know if you are worried about your reactions or about anyone else.

When death by suicide has been confirmed – students in general population

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our Year.....students, [NAME], has died. I'm also very sad to tell you that the cause of death was suicide.

All of us are thinking about his/her family and friends. Some students in school, particularly his/ friends in Year will be finding this news very difficult. Other students – not just close friends – may find this very upsetting, perhaps because it reminds them of another event in their own life. There are likely to be many feelings and many questions.

For this reason a support room has been set up in.....for any students to go to if they feel they can't manage in class over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times for you to talk to if you want to talk. The room is also a place where you can sit and be quiet. The people in the room to support you will be staff from school and professionals from other organisations who have come in to support us this week.

We will keep you informed as much as possible over the next week. Your parents will be informed of the death and will know that you might want to talk with them today or in the coming weeks.

If you are approached by anyone outside the school for comment please tell them they should speak with[NAMED MEMBER OF ERT].

Some of us may have known..... [NAME] well and others less well but we will all have our own reactions about this news. Each of us will react to [NAME]'s death in our own way and we need to be respectful of and sensitive to each other. Please let me or someone in the support room or your parents know if you are worried about your reactions or about anyone else.

When cause of death is unconfirmed/cannot be disclosed – students in year group

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our year.....students, [NAME], has died. We do not have information about the cause of his/her death/ we cannot say at this point anything about the cause of his/her death.

We are aware that there has been some talk that this might have been a death by suicide. Rumours may be going around, but please don't spread them. These rumours may turn out to be untrue and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to [NAME] and his/her family and friends.

This will be a very difficult time for the family and close friends of[NAME]. For a while it may be difficult to think about anything else. There are likely to be many feelings and many questions.

For this reason a support room has been set up in.....for any students to go to if they feel they can't manage in class over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times for you to talk to if you want to talk. The room is also a place where you can sit and be quiet. The people in the room to support you will be staff from school and professionals from other organisations who have come in to support us this week.

We will keep you informed as much as possible over the next week. Your parents will be informed of the death and will know that you might want to talk with them today or in the coming weeks.

If you are approached by anyone outside the school for comment please tell them they should speak with[NAMED MEMBER OF ERT].

Some of us may have known..... [NAME] well and others less well but we will all have our own reactions about this news. Each of us will react to[NAME]'s death in our own way and we need to be respectful of and sensitive to each other. Please let me or someone in the support room or your parents know if you are worried about your reactions or about anyone else.

When cause of death is unconfirmed/cannot be disclosed – students in general population

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our Year.....students, [NAME], has died. We do not have information about the cause of his/her death/we cannot say anything at this point about the cause of his/her death.

We are aware that there has been some talk that this might have been a death by suicide. Rumours may be going around, but please don't spread them. These rumours may turn out to be untrue and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to [NAME] and his/her family and friends.

All of us are thinking about his/her family and friends. Some students in school, particularly his/ friends in Year will be finding this news very difficult. Other students – not just close friends – may find this very upsetting, perhaps because it reminds them of another event in their own life or they may not know why they feel the way they do. There are likely to be many feelings and many questions.

For this reason a support room has been set up in.....for any students to go to if they feel they can't manage in class over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times for you to talk to if you want to talk. The room is also a place where you can sit and be quiet. The people in the room to support you will be staff from school and professionals from other organisations who have come in to support us this week.

We will keep you informed as much as possible over the next week. Your parents will be informed of the death and will know that you might want to talk with them today or in the coming weeks.

If you are approached by anyone outside the school for comment please tell them they should speak with[NAMED MEMBER OF ERT].

Some of us may have known..... [NAME] well and others less well but we may all have strong feelings about this news. Each of us will react to[NAME]'s death in our own way and we need to be respectful of and sensitive to each other. Please let me or someone in the support room or your parents know if you are worried about your reactions or about anyone else.

II. Notification to parents

Ensure that consent has been given if the name of the deceased student is used

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am sorry to tell you that one of our year students (name if consent given) has died. I'm also very sorry to tell you that the cause of death was suicide.

All of us are thinking about his/her family and friends. Some students in school, particularly his/friends in Year will be finding this news very difficult. Other students – not just close friends – may find this very upsetting. There are likely to be many feelings and many questions.

The school has set up a support room for students where there are people to talk to or a quiet space to sit if it feels too much to be in class. The support room will be staffed by people who have been trained to support young people after a death by suicide. If you are concerned about your son/daughter please encourage them to use the support room.

The support room will be available for students for (specify time if possible). We will return to normal routines as soon as possible whilst recognising that some of our students may have responses in the future or be affected by this death for some time.

If other losses or stressful events have occurred in a student's life, it may be more difficult to manage the news of this death. Help is available in school and outside school from GPs, school counsellors or therapists or other agencies if after a few weeks it is difficult to get back to regular life and routines. It can take some time for shock to subside and reactions may occur some weeks or months after hearing news of a suicide. If your son/daughter is already accessing mental health services please do let the professionals involved in their care know about this death.

Students will wish to talk with those around them at home, please refer to the attached information for advice on how to talk about suicide with young people.

Please feel welcome to contact the following staff for information about the school's response or if you have any concerns about your son/daughter.

(Insert contact details)

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

III. Helpful tips for parents supporting students after a suicide

Suicide is a difficult topic to talk about. Here are some thoughts to bear in mind when supporting your children.

Young people can have many different and sometimes contradictory feelings about a death by suicide including shock, confusion, anger, aggression, withdrawal, fear, guilt, denial, blame, betrayal, abandonment, hurt and sadness.

Try and support them as best you can. You don't have to be a therapist to do this. Just listening to their thoughts and acknowledging their feelings is a great help.

Try phrases like this

"It sounds like you have so many thoughts and feelings about how (name of the person) died. That's normal in this situation. It's okay to feel sad sometimes and then feel okay a bit later."

There is no right way to grieve

Be guided by your child

It might be hard to be around your child right now. If you need some support to manage this, let the school know. Also see the numbers of helplines below.

Has your family recently had any big changes or upsets?

If your child has recently had another stressful experience or trauma this might make this time even harder for them. If your child is already getting support from CAMHS please let them know.

Sometimes people don't react to this sort of news immediately

And that's fine. However, if you are worried about your child's behaviour or see any changes that seem worrying, check in with the school and ask about getting your child support from them or through your GP.

Use social media sensitively

We're asking students to think before they post. If families can do this together and be really thoughtful at this time, that would be appreciated by all.

Useful contacts:

- **Grief Encounter** www.griefencounter.org.uk | Helpline: 0808 802 0111 | griefftalk@griefencounter.org.uk
- **Other national helplines such as Papyrus:** 0800 068 41 41 | *Text* 07860039967 | pat@papyrus-uk.org
- **SHOUT** www.giveusashout.org | *Text* 82528

IV. Talking about suicide with young people - a guide for parents and teachers

Suicide or sudden death is a difficult topic for most people to talk about. Here are some thoughts to bear in mind if young people want to talk to you about the suicide that has occurred.

Questions or issues that may come up

Helpful things to say

Why?

We may not understand or know why the person took their life in this way. Perhaps we are aware of circumstances that have been difficult for the person who died. Coming to terms with the news is difficult for everyone no matter how close or distant they may have been to the person.

The cause of [NAME]'s death was suicide. Suicide is complicated; and always hard for us to understand. It is natural for us to search for reasons but this is something that's hard to know about.

Emotions

We can have many different and sometimes contradictory feelings about a death by suicide including shock, confusion, anger, aggression, withdrawal, fear, guilt, denial, blame, betrayal, abandonment, hurt and sadness. It is important to accept whatever feelings arise.

There can be lots of feelings around after hearing news of a suicide, or there could be no feelings. We all respond in different ways. There really isn't a right or wrong or normal way to respond, it's important to notice and accept however you're feeling and not make judgements about your feelings and reactions or anyone else's.

When we hear of a suicide or sudden death we need safe ways of expressing our feelings, space to talk and acceptance of whatever feeling is there.

How?

It is important not to focus on the method of death but think instead of how the death affects us and how we can manage the feelings that arise.

Let's talk about how you feel.

What helps you when you have strong or difficult feelings.

What can we think of that will help you cope with this news

Blame

Blaming or scapegoating is not fair or helpful. It is understandable that we look for answers or reasons why a death by suicide has happened. It is important to remember that any death by suicide is complicated and blame can hurt others a great deal.

Blaming isn't fair and it can hurt people a great deal.

We might want to use blame to answer the question why this happened and that's understandable but it's not fair on anyone.

V. Media communications

A death by suicide or sudden tragic death of a school-age student can attract a lot of media attention. It is important for a school to develop appropriate messaging and strongly encourage the media to adhere to the recommendations for safe reporting developed by leading suicide prevention organisations. These recommendations include:

- Do not glamorise the victim or the suicide
- Do not describe the details of the suicide
- Use preferred language, such as 'died by suicide' rather than 'committed suicide' or 'successful suicide'
- Include contacts for local and national mental health resources

Key messages for media spokesperson

This information is for use by the person designated by the school to speak to the media.

School's messages

- We are deeply saddened over the death of one of our students. Our thoughts and prayers go out to [HIS/HER] family and friends and the entire community
- We will be offering support for students and staff
- We have communicated with parents and will be hosting an evening for parents and the community to offer support and information

Information on suicide

- More than 6,500 people across the UK take their own lives each year and tens of thousands more attempt suicide. It is also the biggest killer of young people. Raising awareness of suicide and the fact that suicide can be preventable, can help reduce the risk
- The variables around each suicide are complex
- Bereavement by suicide has a devastating impact for family members and friends, as well as the wider community
- Public Health England has produced a useful guide to supporting people bereaved by suicide, 'Help is at Hand: A Resource for People Bereaved by Suicide or Traumatic Death' (Public Health England)

Available online: www.supportaftersuicide.org.uk

Hard copy order from www.orderline.dh.gov.uk by quoting 2901502/Help is at hand.

Sample press release to be provided to local media outlets either upon request or proactively.

School staff were informed that a [AGE] year old student at [SCHOOL NAME] has died. The cause of death was suicide. Our thoughts and support go out to [HIS/HER] family and friends at this difficult time.

The school is providing support to students and staff. This includes providing information about common reactions following a suicide, how adults can help young people cope and what to do if they have any concerns about their own children's behaviour.

A communication has been sent to all parents, who can contact the school for further support. Our aim is to return to normal routines as quickly as possible while recognising that some students will continue to be affected for some time.

If you are supporting someone experiencing suicidal thoughts, you can also use the helplines below. Trained suicide prevention workers will talk you through practical advice and tips.

For young people under 35 please call **Papyrus**, a charity which runs the Hopeline UK.

Call on 0800 068 41 41

Text to 07860039967

Email pat@papyrus-uk.org

Opening Hours: 10am – 10pm weekdays; 2pm – 10pm weekends and bank holidays

SHOUT www.giveusashout.org

Text 82528

Call your GP and ask for an emergency appointment

Dial 111

Contact your mental health crisis team if you have one

If anyone is in immediate danger call 999

VI. Future proofing conversations and plans

This is an opportunity to think through with SLT and the ERT what contingency plans need to be in place in school life should a critical incident like a suicide occur.

These events disrupt the flow of school life and so future proofing is an important aspect of future management.

Here are some questions to begin this process with the SLT and ERT.

- Which rooms in school can be requisitioned to become the support rooms that can be used both by students and, at appropriate times, by staff?
- How would the school cope if a suicide took place during a public examination period? And the death affected the year group sitting the exams?
- What would happen if the suicide took place in the school holidays? Could the school open the building to be able to set up a support centre? Are there are other premises that can also be used for this purpose?
- Where would a book of condolences be placed in the school for students to record their feelings at this difficult time?
- Which staff members have the skills to be particularly proactive in terms of checking-in with vulnerable students?
- Which agencies/individuals will we need to inform? See p.7 for suggestions
- Would any staff members such as wellbeing practitioners or student counsellors be able to complete First Responders training to become part of the first response team should an incident occur?
- Which members of the ERT will continue to review provision for sudden traumatic death and suicide.

VII. National helplines and resources

Helplines for Bereavement support

Grief Encounter

Grief Encounter provides support to bereaved children, young people and their families who have experienced the death of a parent, sibling or loved one

www.griefencounter.org.uk

0808 802 0111

Mon-Fri 9am-9pm

The Compassionate Friends

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) is a charitable organisation of bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents dedicated to the support and care of other similarly bereaved family members who have suffered the death of a child or children of any age and from any cause.

www.tcf.org.uk

0345 123 2304 helpline

Open every day of the year from 10:00 – 16:00
and 19:00 – 22:00

Also by email at helpline@tcf.org.uk

Winston's Wish

Freephone National Helpline on 08088 020 021 for therapeutic advice on supporting a grieving child or young person after the death of a loved one.

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Helplines for Young people in crisis

Childline

24/7 Helpline and online chat for young people
Call 0800 1111

Papyrus HOPELINEUK

Confidential support and advice service for children and young people under the age of 35 who are experiencing thoughts of suicide or for anyone concerned that a young person could be thinking about suicide

Call HopelineUK, on 0800 068 41 41, text to 07860039967 or email pat@papyrus-uk.org

Opening Hours: 10am – 10pm weekdays; 2pm – 10pm weekends and bank holidays

SHOUT

Shout is the UK's first 24/7 text service, free on all major mobile networks, for anyone in crisis anytime, anywhere. It's a place to go if you're struggling to cope and you need immediate help.

Text 85258

www.giveusashout.org

Self Care Workshop for Students

For a suggested self-care workshop for students please visit www.jamiuk.org/self-care-workshop

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Give support • Get support • Get involved



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