

PROTECTING LIFE IN SCHOOLS

Identifying Warning Signs of Potential Suicidal Thoughts or Behaviour

Someone who is thinking about suicide will usually give some clues or signs to those around them that show they are troubled. Suicide prevention starts with recognising these warning signs and treating them seriously.

It is important to note that the following list is not exhaustive and these symptoms do not necessarily indicate suicide risk. It is, at best, a list of warning signs that may help teachers to identify pupils who may need particular support.

These include:

- Unexpected reduction of academic performance
- Ideas and themes of depression, death and suicide
- Negative changes in mood and marked emotional instability
- Positive changes in mood and calmness
- Significant grief or stress
- Withdrawal from relationships
- Physical symptoms with emotional cause
- Writing about suicide
- Speaking about suicide
- Listening to songs praising suicide
- Art work about suicide
- Threats and statements of intent
- Preoccupation with a known suicide
- Life threatening risk taking behaviour
- Break-up of relationships

It may also be important to have an awareness of the websites, social media or computer games that young people are engaged with.



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Responding to a Distressed Pupil

When a child or young person is emotionally distressed it can sometimes feel overwhelming to think about what to say or do. The immediate reaction by a member of staff to the alert that a pupil is in distress is crucial to the protection of that pupil. In every such response the two essential elements are:

- (i) To respond with empathy and in a non-judgemental way; and
- (ii) To follow usual child protection and safeguarding procedures, making appropriate referrals to ensure the child's safety.

The following list of key behaviours falls under these essential elements and they combine to form an effective approach to engaging with distressed pupils:

- **Listen.** It can be very difficult for a young person to disclose distress so it is essential that he/she is given time and attention. Privacy is also important.
- **Take it seriously.** Disclosures of distress should never be minimised. The young person should be taken seriously but the adult should not express alarm. The young person needs to feel safe and have confidence in adults.
- **Accept the possibility of suicidal thoughts.** These feelings are real and should not be dismissed.
- **Don't promise confidentiality.** Ensure that the young person knows that the information will be handled sensitively but that it must be shared with others to safeguard them.
- **Show a caring attitude.** It is acceptable to express care for the young person and a commitment to their wellbeing.
- **Be open.** If suicidal intent is suspected it is important to ask the young person whether they are thinking of harming themselves and if they have made any plans. This gives the young person permission to be completely honest and, therefore, be able to seek help.
- **Supervise closely.** Keep the child/young person with you until you can deliver them to the care of the Designated Teacher for Child Protection (or appropriate alternative) or whilst the Designated Teacher makes arrangements to safeguard the child. This will include the DT contacting the pupil's parents/guardian/carers to advise them of the content of the disclosure, the school's concern and ask them to the GP/Out of Hours Service requesting an 'emergency mental state assessment' and potential referral to CAMHS.



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Safeguarding Action Checklist

The Designated Teacher/Safeguarding Team may find the following checklist useful in helping to ensure that everything possible has been done to help the pupil. If there is a disclosure or strong suspicion of suicidal intent, ensure that:

The pupil is listened to and supported in the immediate term (e.g. is with a trusted member of staff).

Designated pastoral care teacher is informed.

Parents/guardians/carers are informed.

How was this done? Provide details below

Parent/guardian/carer comes to the school for the pupil and he/she leaves in their care (parents/guardians/carers are advised to monitor the child closely)

Teacher's Name: _____

Time: _____

Date: _____

Parents are advised to take their child to the GP and ask for a mental state assessment and appropriate action. (Concerns around negligence regarding a child's mental health needs should be followed up through the normal safeguarding procedures.)

School sends a follow-up letter to parents detailing concerns, action taken and advice given.

The designated teacher (or appropriate alternative) staff follows up with parent/guardian/carer within a short time frame. This should be as soon as possible but must be on the same day the incident has occurred.

Longer-term support is sought for the young person as appropriate.

Teachers' support needs are identified and action taken if appropriate.



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