

## **DEATH BY SUSPECTED SUICIDE**

### **INFORMATION FOR STAFF**

1. The term suicide should not be used by a school until it is determined by the Coroner's Office. Where an inquest is required it may be a considerable period of time after the death.
2. When providing support for vulnerable pupils, it would be prudent to make a working assumption of suicide, if all reasonable indicators suggest that this might be the case. Pupils and members of the community may be inclined to describe a death as a suicide before this has been established. Phrases such as 'tragic event' or 'sudden death' should be used by the school when talking to pupils.
3. In the aftermath of a sudden death within the school community pupils' vulnerability may increase. Teachers should realise that some pupils may develop suicide ideation and/or self harm. Staff need to be proactive in identifying and monitoring these pupils. Pupils considered to be 'at risk' should be immediately referred to the Designated Teacher for Child Protection who will then notify parents and advise them of the referral pathway to obtain support for their child. This will include the child's doctor and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.
4. Schools should maintain contact with parents to ensure that appropriate action has been taken to protect and support the pupil. Careful records should be kept and securely stored as set out in the school's data protection guidelines. Action must also be taken to identify other at risk groups in the school, including close friends and relatives and to direct them to appropriate support. Information for parents can be found at Appendix 14. At any time parents, school staff or pupils can contact the "Lifeline 24/7" crisis response helpline service (Tel: 0808 808 8000).
5. Where there appears to be an emerging cluster of perceived suicides in a school or a number of schools in close proximity, the education and library board's Critical Incident Response Teams will liaise with the relevant Health and Social Care Trusts. This coordinated response will ensure an appropriate community response to the situation while minimising sensationalism and avoiding the glamorising of suicidal behaviour.
6. As with any death, schools may wish to remember the person who has died and to pay tribute to their memory. When an apparent suicide has occurred, schools should be careful to remember the person without condoning the means of death. It is important that events are reported in a sensitive and measured way so that other vulnerable young people are not put at risk. The language used is very important.
7. Schools should remember to be vigilant around the time of the inquest, court cases and the anniversary of a death and access any support services as may be required.

## GUIDELINES FOR STAFF

### Your Responsibilities

You have two major responsibilities:

1. To respond with empathy and in a non-judgemental way to the pupil in need.
2. To follow the usual safeguarding procedures with an appropriate referral to ensure the pupil's safety.

### Responding to a Distressed Pupil

- **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.
- **Do NOT 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 well-being.
- **Be open.** If suicidal intent is suspected it is appropriate to ask the young person whether they are thinking of harming themselves and have any plans.
- **Supervise closely.** Keep the pupil with you until you can deliver them to the care of the Designated Teacher for Child Protection (or appropriate alternative). Sometimes it is more helpful for the teacher to whom the pupil expressed their distress to be the one who stays with him or her while the designated teacher makes safeguarding arrangements.

## Response to Suicide Ideation Disclosure

The Designated Teacher for Child Protection (or appropriate alternative) should ensure that the pupil is safeguarded by doing the following:

**Continue to supervise closely.** The pupil should not be left unsupervised at this stage.

**Contact parents.** Parents should be advised of the content of the disclosure, the school's concern and asked to take the child or young person to the doctor for an 'emergency mental state assessment' and potential referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

**Safely hand over the young person into the care of parents.** Parents should be advised to supervise very closely.

**Contact the young person's doctor.** It may be helpful if schools also contact the doctor directly to inform him/her of the concerns.

**If the above is not possible.** If the school cannot safely deliver the young person into the care of parents, or has concerns that appropriate support will not be sought/provided, it is possible for school staff to bring a child or young person directly to an Accident and Emergency Department acting in loco parentis.

**Follow-up.** The Designated Teacher (or other member of staff) should remain in contact with parents and plan to support the young person upon return to school. In planning to support the young person the school should consider seeking medical/psychiatric advice.

## Available Support

1. School's Key Contact for Pastoral Care
2. Independent Counselling Service for Schools
3. Lifeline – 0808 808 8000

Lifeline offers immediate help over the phone 24/7. It is a helpline service for those experiencing distress or despair and deals with issues such as suicide, self harm, abuse, trauma, depression and anxiety. Pupils can phone directly for individual counselling. Lifeline can also put an individual in touch with follow-up services to ensure the best possible response meets individual needs. Lifeline also gives support and guidance to families and carers, concerned friends, professionals, teachers, youth workers, clergy, faith workers and communities about how to support a young person that may be a risk. A number of other agencies provide support to pupils and others. These include:

- NSPCC – 0808 800 5000
- Samaritans – 0845 790 9090
- Childline – 0800 1111