



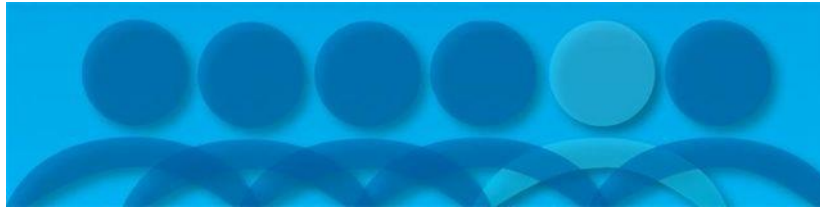
# **Medway Council**

## **Suicide Prevention in the Workplace – Guidance for Staff and Managers**

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## 1.0 Background

In 2018 there were 6,507 suicides in the UK and deaths by suicide rose by 10.9%. Rates particularly rose in those under 25 and in middle aged men. One in five adults experience suicidal feelings at some point in their lives. It is, however, important to remember that suicides are not inevitable and can be prevented with the right support at the right time. With a third of our lives spent at work, it is highly likely that there will be people struggling to cope in the workplace and possibly trying to hide it. The reality is that the reasons for suicide are complicated and hard to define but there are things that we can do to reduce the risk of suicide at work. Ruth Sutherland, CEO Samaritans points out *“Organisations have an opportunity to create open and supportive environments, to raise awareness about suicidal thoughts and feelings, and help reduce the stigma that still surrounds this area, reducing the chance that someone we know and maybe see every day at work might take their own life.”*

## 2.0 What causes suicidal thoughts?

People will think of suicide for different reasons. If someone is exposed to a ‘risk factor’ it needs to be assumed that suicidal thoughts are more likely to happen.

A risk factor might include:

- difficult life events: such as a traumatic childhood or experiencing physical or emotional abuse.
- Something upsetting or life changing such as a relationship ending or a loved one dying,
- anger at other people,
- misusing drugs or alcohol,
- living alone or having little social contact with other people,
- having a mental health condition such as depression, schizophrenia or personality disorder,
- having a physical health condition, especially if this causes pain or serious disability; or
- problems with work or money.

## 3.0 Why might someone end their life?

There are lots of reasons why someone may end their life. Some reasons are:

- to escape what they feel is an impossible situation,
- to relieve unbearable thoughts or feelings, or
- relieve physical pain or incapacity.

## **4.0 Warning Signs: What are the warning signs that someone feels suicidal?**

A change in someone's personality and behaviour might be a sign that they are having suicidal thoughts. Managers and colleagues may be the best judge of when someone you know is behaving differently.

Changes can include:

- becoming anxious,
- being more irritable,
- being more confrontational,
- becoming quiet,
- having mood swings,
- acting recklessly,
- sleeping too much or too little,
- not wanting to be around other people,
- avoiding contact with friends and family,
- having different problems with work or studies, or
- saying negative things about themselves.

There are some indicators that suggest someone is more likely to attempt suicide. These include:

- threatening to hurt or kill themselves,
- talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide,
- preparing to end their life. Such as storing up medication, or
- putting affairs in order. Such as giving away belongings or making a will.

Signs that something is wrong can be difficult to spot. Don't ignore your gut feeling if you are concerned about someone. A lot of people try to seek help before attempting suicide by telling other people about their feelings. If someone tells you about how they are feeling don't ignore them.

## **5.0 Helping someone**

### **5.1 How can I help someone who is feeling suicidal?**

If you think that someone may be feeling suicidal, and you feel comfortable approaching them, then encourage them to talk about how they are feeling. Remember that you don't need to find an answer, or even to completely understand

why they feel the way they do. Listening to what they have to say will at least let them know you care.

If you are not sure that someone is feeling suicidal, ask:

- “Are you thinking about suicide?” or
- “Are you having thoughts of ending your life?”

These questions are direct. It is better to address the person’s feelings directly rather than avoiding the issue. Asking about suicide won’t make it more likely to happen. Reassurance, respect and support can help someone to recover from a difficult time. Some resource websites for having conversations about this issue are below:

**Medway Council:**

[https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200231/mental\\_wellbeing/966/suicide\\_prevention](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200231/mental_wellbeing/966/suicide_prevention)

**Rethink Mental Illness:** <https://www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/carers-hub/suicidal-thoughts-how-to-support-someone/>

**MIND:** <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/550657/resource4.pdf>

**Samaritans:** <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/550657/resource4.pdf>

If you don’t feel comfortable having these conversations then talk with your line manager or contact the HR Business Partner and Consultancy Team on 01634 334499.

## **5.2 How to respond if you believe someone is at immediate risk?**

This is very similar to what you would do if you came across a colleague who had a physical accident or health issue like chest pain.

### **Take the following steps right away:**

- make sure the person is not left alone and call 999,
- stay with the person until professional help arrives,
- encourage the person to talk but do not promise to keep the conversation confidential,
- encourage them to call someone like the Samaritans or mental health professional. If they agree give them space (or if they need it give them help to call) so that they have someone to talk to immediately,
- Inform your Line Manager and contact the HR Business Partner and Consultancy Team, 01634 334499, to let them know what is happening,
- get support for yourself. Don’t underestimate the impact this can have on yourself once the immediate risk has passed. Colleagues and Managers can

access counselling and support from Care First. You can also contact the organisations in section 5.0.

## 6.0 What support is available/can I signpost to?

There are resources that the individual can access as a Medway Council employee and as a member of the general public.

### For immediate help:

- all Medway Council employees have access to counselling services through Care First. They are contactable on free phone number 0800 174319 24/7, 365 days per year or online at [www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk](http://www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk), any individual can contact the Samaritans on 116 123. They are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Samaritans also offer a 3<sup>rd</sup> party referral process for them to call individuals at risk – for example over the weekend
- Papyrus on 0800 068 4141,
- Release the Pressure on 0800 107 0160
- The Stay Alive app on [Google Play](#)
- the 111 urgent care service.

### For ongoing help:

- Medway Council employees can be referred to our [Occupational Health](#) service to provide advice on how we can continue to support them at work/whether they are fit to be in work.
- Medway Council [Wellbeing Champions](#)
- Contact their GP and ask to be referred to their local Mental Health team for counselling.
- NHS <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Suicide/>
- Talk to HR about post-vention support for bereaved colleagues and communication to colleagues.