

# Supporting young people with suicidal thoughts



Guidance for professionals  
working in universal services

WAKEFIELD & DISTRICT  
**safeguarding  
children board**

**“Nearly 25% of young people feel suicidal at least once in their lives. Suicidal feelings can dominate your ability to think so much that it makes it hard to understand that you can be helped”**

**Young Minds 2018**



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This guidance is aimed at anyone who works with children and young people in universal and early help services - for example GPs, nurses, health visitors and school nurses, teachers and teaching assistants, Children First Hub teams and voluntary sector organisations.

It supports professionals in understanding risk factors and warning signs, talking about suicidal feelings with young people, and knowing where to seek further support.

Young people are likely to disclose difficult thoughts and feelings to someone they trust, not necessarily to a mental health 'expert'. They might decide to talk to a GP, teacher, support worker, school nurse or an adult who helps at their sport or hobby.

It can be difficult to know how to support a young person who is expressing suicidal thoughts, or who you are worried may be feeling suicidal, but it is important that everyone working with young people knows the warning signs and what to do next.

This is general guidance, and your profession or agency may have protocols that supersede it. Follow them if so.

This free, twenty-minute online training from the Zero Suicide Alliance is a great starting point for anyone working with young people.

[www.relias.co.uk/zero-suicide-alliance/form](http://www.relias.co.uk/zero-suicide-alliance/form)

This guidance has been developed on behalf of Wakefield & District Safeguarding Children Board by Wakefield Council Public Health department, Wakefield CCG and partners (2018).



## Quick Look

**Levels of risk and what to do if you are worried about a young person, or they tell you about suicidal thoughts:**

Don't be afraid to ask about suicidal thoughts.  
Consider the warning signs and risk factors on page 5

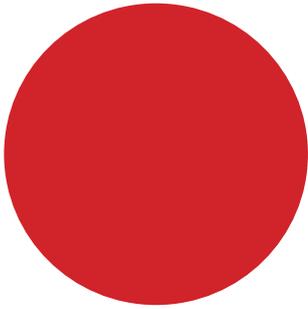
Have an open conversation with the young person -  
the prompts on page 7 may be useful

Consider who else needs to be informed -  
guidance on information sharing and consent is on page 8

More information on what to do and support and advice services available in Wakefield can be found on page 12 onwards.

*How is this making you feel?*

*What do you think needs to happen for you to feel better?*



## HIGH RISK

- Injury or overdose with danger to life
- Current situation felt to be causing unbearable pain and distress
- Plans to act on suicidal thoughts. Plans may be detailed with time, location and method. Choosing a place where the plan is unlikely to be disrupted is a very high risk factor
- Self-harm increasing in severity, frequency or both
- Significant drug or alcohol use
- Evidence of current severe mental health problems

## WHAT TO DO

If someone is at immediate risk or requires immediate medical attention call 999 or support them to A&E

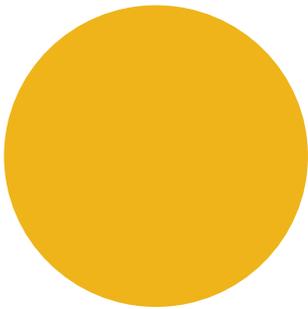
Stay with the young person until they are safe (but also remember you need to keep yourself safe too)

Contact the young person's parent or carer

Ring CAMHS on 01977 735 865,

or out of hours support is available via A&E

Make a referral to Social Care Direct on 0345 8 503 503



## RAISED RISK

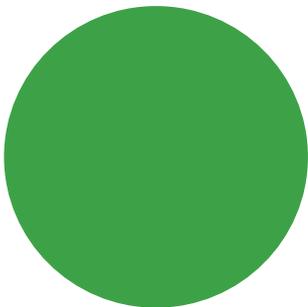
- Suicidal thoughts are fleeting but are experienced frequently
- Situation felt to be painful but not an immediate crisis
- No specific plan or expressed immediate intent
- Regular acts of self-harm
- Increasing drug or alcohol use
- Previous suicide attempts
- Severe anxiety or significant low mood/ depression

## WHAT TO DO

Ring CAMHS on 01977 735 865. They can advise whether the young person is in need of CAMHS request for service (referral), or signpost to other support

Encourage/ support the young person to register with Kooth or contact one of the other advice services on page 10, and to speak to their parents, GP or social worker

Encourage and support the young person to think about some strategies to cope with how they are feeling



## LOW RISK

- Suicidal thoughts are fleeting, not very frequent and soon dismissed
- Current situation felt to be painful but bearable
- No plan of how they could complete suicide
- Occasional self harming behaviour with little injury
- No/ few signs of depression (low mood, loss of interest in everyday activities, lack of motivation)
- No signs of psychosis (eg hearing voices telling them to harm themselves)

## WHAT TO DO

Encourage and support the young person to speak to their parents, GP, teacher or other involved professional

Encourage the young person to register with Kooth or contact one of the other advice services on page 10

Request support for the young person from Future In Mind Primary Practitioners via their school/college

## Suicide risk factors and warning signs

Thoughts and feelings are very different and thoughts do not have to be acted out. However, we know that young people can act impulsively when a stressful event feels like the 'final straw', so it is important to spot signs early and offer support. Support can help the young person see things more clearly and realise there are other options. It also allows time for the difficult feelings to pass. Any young person who expresses thoughts about suicide should be taken seriously.

### Physical and verbal warning signs

- Talking about being useless or 'nothing to live for'
- 'Everyone would be better off without me'
- Withdrawn and isolated, not wanting to talk or be around people
- Significant change in behaviour e.g. increased anxiety, loss of interest in things they previously enjoyed doing
- Symptoms of depression e.g. low mood, loss of interest, lack of motivation
- Finding it hard to cope with everyday things
- Recent self-harm
- Apparent fascination with death (writing, talking or drawing about it)
- Statements of suicidal intent e.g. letters, comments, Facebook and social media posts
- Searching the internet for information about suicide
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope with difficult feelings
- Visiting people they care about and almost (or actually) saying 'goodbye'
- Giving things away, especially items that are important to them



## Who is at greater risk?

Any young person may have suicidal thoughts at any time, but someone may be at higher risk if:

- They have previously attempted suicide
- They have previously self-harmed
- They have lost a friend or relative  
People who have been bereaved through suicide are at particularly high risk
- They have recently had a major disappointment in their life (exam failure, relationship break-up, dropped from the team. This can be the 'final straw' precipitating an impulsive act)
- They have or have had depression, low mood or an eating disorder
- They have been a victim of bullying, violence or sexual abuse
- They lack a real friendship group
- They are going through exam stress
- They are under pressure or being bullied on social media
- They are questioning or struggling with their gender identity or sexual orientation
- They have witnessed domestic violence at home
- They misuse alcohol or drugs
- They are in care or are care leavers



## Questions to ask if you are concerned

If you are worried that a young person is thinking about suicide, don't be afraid to ask them straight out if they are feeling suicidal or wanting to harm themselves.

It won't encourage them to do it but often it can start the conversation that they want to have but didn't know how to start.

These are the sorts of questions you could use to start an initial conversation with a young person you are worried about.

(NB these are prompts not a checklist - you don't have to work through them all!) .

### Initial concern

- You're looking troubled, what's the matter? (home, family, friends, school)
- How is this making you feel?
- How often have you had these thoughts?
- Have you ever felt like ending your life?
- Have you ever tried to hurt yourself or kill yourself? (e.g. taking tablets) Are you thinking about this often at the moment?

### Assessing risk and offering support

- How often do you think about hurting or killing yourself?
- Do you have a plan? (place, method etc.)
- When do you think most about this? (day or night)
- How long have you been having these thoughts?
- What has stopped you acting on these thoughts?
- When things have been really hard before what's helped you get through?
- Do you have contact details of where you can get support? (see page 12)
- Who is aware of how bad you are feeling? (friends, family, teachers, other professionals)
- Who can you call at any time if you need to talk?
- What do you think needs to happen for you to feel better?

### When having a conversation don't

- Panic or try quick solutions
- Ignore, dismiss or belittle what the young person is saying or feeling
- Think because a young person hasn't acted to harm themselves in the past, they won't in the future
- Disempower the young person
- See it as attention seeking or manipulative

## Consent, safeguarding and who to tell

### Thinking about consent:

- Where possible you should ask for the young person's consent to share sensitive personal information. Tell the young person what information will be shared, why it should be shared and what will happen if it is shared
- If the young person does not give consent, you can still lawfully share information about them if you are concerned for their safety and well-being
- If the young person is at risk of significant harm or in immediate danger (e.g. if they disclose an overdose) this overrides the wishes of the young person. Call 999 or support them to attend A&E
- If you are unsure whether you should override a young person's wishes, always seek guidance from your line manager or supervisor
- The resources on this page are also helpful:  
[www.wakefieldlscb.org.uk/professionals-and-practitioners/information-sharing/](http://www.wakefieldlscb.org.uk/professionals-and-practitioners/information-sharing/)

### Safeguarding and risk of significant harm:

- If information comes to light that the young person or other people are at risk of significant harm (including alleged abuse from parents or other adults), follow your organisation's safeguarding procedures and speak with your supervisor or line manager
- Concerns can be reported to Social Care Direct on 0345 8 503 503, and a referral made if appropriate
- Social Care Direct should also be contacted whenever a young person may be at high risk (see page 4) so appropriate support can be put in place for the young person and their parents/carers

### Who to tell:

- If you think the young person is at high risk you should always try to contact their parent or carer, and seek medical assistance if necessary.
- Parents or carers and the young person's school or college can be key to providing the right support, so it is important to consider informing them of any concerns. How readily you are able to do this will depend on the young person's willingness to co-operate and the level of information available to you

## Parents/carers

- In most cases it would be expected that parents/carers would be informed that a young person was having suicidal thoughts, particularly if they were at raised or high risk (see page 4)
- A young person may require a lot of support to speak to their parents, but parental/ carer involvement can make a huge difference
- You may also want to think about what support the parents/carers might need  
Information for parents/carers, including where they can go to get support, is available here:

[www.wakefield.gov.uk/childrensmentalhealth](http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/childrensmentalhealth)

- If the young person does not wish their parents/carers to be informed, explore the reasons for this with them. Discuss any concerns with your line manager and/or refer to your organisation's safeguarding procedures
- If the young person discloses that their suicidal thoughts relate to alleged abuse from their care givers, you should always consult your line manager and/or follow your organisation's safeguarding procedures

## Schools or colleges

- Schools or colleges see young people on a near daily basis and may be in a good position to offer support
- Discuss with the young person and seek consent to talk to their school
- Encourage and support the young person to talk to a member of school staff they trust (form tutor, pastoral lead, student support, head of year)
- Contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead at the young person's school or college  
Contact details for the school/ college will be available on their website



## More information: what to do

- If you are concerned that a young person is at high risk of suicide then please act immediately
- If someone is at immediate risk or requires immediate medical attention call 999 or support them to A&E. Stay with the young person until they are safe, but also remember you need to keep yourself safe too
- Contact the young person's parent or carer
- If it is between Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm ring CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) on 01977 735 865 for advice and assistance
- If out of hours support is required for the young person, then support can be accessed through A&E
- A referral should also be made to Social Care Direct on 0345 8 503 503



### **If a young person falls into the raised risk category:**

- Ring CAMHS on 01977 735 865 for advice on if the young person is in need of CAMHS request for service (referral), signposting for support or where to access support online. More information on the service, and referral forms, can be found here:

[www.southwestyorkshire.nhs.uk/services/camhs-wakefield](http://www.southwestyorkshire.nhs.uk/services/camhs-wakefield)

- Encourage the young person to register with Kooth ([www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)) or contact one of the other advice services on page 12, speak to their parents, GP or social worker. Kooth provides an online counselling service to support young people aged 11 to 25. Young people can register for this service online.
- Encourage and support them to think about some strategies to cope with how they are feeling. Further information on this, and information on creating a 'safety plan' can be found here:

[www.wakefield.gov.uk/childrensmentalhealth](http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/childrensmentalhealth)

### **For a young person at low risk but where you still have concerns about their wellbeing:**

- Encourage and support the young person to speak to their parents, GP or social worker
- Encourage the young person to register with Kooth ([www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)).
- Make sure the young person has details of where they can access support (see page 12)
- CAMHS have Primary Practitioners in schools who can support young people with their emotional health and wellbeing as part of the investment through Future In Mind for early intervention. A Future In Mind Request for Support form can be requested from the school or CAHMS. For further advice, contact CAHMS to speak to the Primary Practitioner service. Primary Practitioners can also arrange for Kooth face to face counselling for young people
- If the young person is not accessing education contact CAHMS on 01977 735865.

### **Remember to look after yourself too:**

- Supporting young people with suicidal thoughts can be distressing for you too. We would encourage you to keep a colleague informed so that you can get some support yourself. Take care not to take on other people's problems to the detriment of your own emotional health. If you feel affected by the support you are providing or don't feel you can confide in a colleague, you can contact Samaritans for confidential support.

## Support for children and young people in Wakefield

**Samaritans:** [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

Free, any time, from any phone on 116 123

email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

Samaritans have a drop in at the local Wakefield branch (see website)

**Kooth:** [www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)

Free, safe and anonymous online support for 11-19 year olds

**The Mix:** [www.themix.org.uk](http://www.themix.org.uk)

Free, safe online and telephone counselling support for under-25s.

Includes a 24/7 crisis text messaging service

**Childline:** [www.childline.org](http://www.childline.org)

Phone anytime on 0800 1111

**Papyrus Hopeline:** [www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)

Call 0800 068 4141 or text 07786 209 697 or email [pat@papyrus-uk.org](mailto:pat@papyrus-uk.org)

Offer online text or phone support to young people

**Young Minds:** [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

Website has resources for children and young people, parents and professionals

**CALM: Campaign Against Living Miserably** [www.thecalmzone.net](http://www.thecalmzone.net)

Offers help via the website and a helpline for men aged 15 - 35

**Connecting With People:** [www.connectingwithpeople.org/ucancope](http://www.connectingwithpeople.org/ucancope)

'U Can Cope' film is to help develop ways for young people to cope with difficulties

**Heads Above the Waves:** [www.hatw.co.uk](http://www.hatw.co.uk)

Online advice, support and coping strategies for young people suffering from depression and self-harm

**Big White Wall** [www.bigwhitewall.com](http://www.bigwhitewall.com)

An online service for people over the age of 16

**Doc Ready** [www.docready.org](http://www.docready.org)

Helps to prepare people to talk about mental health to the GP

Wakefield Council has produced leaflets for young people and those who support them, which are available in hard copy and online and contain references to these resources. Please contact the public health team if you would like copies or need more supplies.

The leaflets are also available online here:

[www.wakefield.gov.uk/childrensmentalhealth](http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/childrensmentalhealth)

## Early intervention and social care

Children First Hubs offer a range of services for families in Wakefield District and can provide coordinated support to families experiencing at least two of the following issues:

- School attendance problems
- Have a child who needs help
- Domestic abuse
- Employment and debt problems
- Health problems
- Crime and Anti-social behaviour problems

Children First Hubs can offer short term coordinated packages of support (outcome focused interventions) where a need has been identified by the lead professional, for example, parenting support. The hubs can also provide support to practitioners to develop their skills around being the lead professional.

Further information on Children First Hubs, and the referral form, can be found here: [www.wakefield.gov.uk/schools-and-children/early-help/children-first-hubs](http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/schools-and-children/early-help/children-first-hubs)



## Further learning, tips and resources

### Zero Suicide Alliance/ Relias

Free online training on:

- How to identify when someone may be having suicidal thoughts or behaviours
- How to talk openly and confidently to a suicidal person about their thoughts and feelings
- The best process for signposting individuals to services or support networks that can help them

[www.relias.co.uk/zero-suicide-alliance/form](http://www.relias.co.uk/zero-suicide-alliance/form)

### Wakefield Council

Leaflets related to this guidance are available for the young person themselves 'Managing difficult feelings' and for parents and carers 'Are you worried about a young person?'. Please contact the Public Health Team if you would like copies or need more supplies.

The leaflets are also available online here:

[www.wakefield.gov.uk/childrensmentalhealth](http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/childrensmentalhealth)

### Samaritans

Information on a range of support services provided by Samaritans, guidance on what to do if you are worried about someone and listening tips for some advice on how to support friends, family and colleagues.

[www.wakefield.gov.uk/worried](http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/worried)

