Building Suicide-Safer Schools and Colleges

A guide for teachers and staff

OVER 200 SCHOOLCHILDREN ARE LOST TO SUICIDE EVERY YEAR IN THE UK.

Help save the #ClassOf2018

PAPYRUS
prevention of young suicide

Registered Charity Number 1070896.

Inside this Guide:

Developing a Suicide Prevention Policy
Asking About Suicide
Responding to a Suicide
Working with Community Support

Developing a school-wide approach to suicide prevention.

HOPELineUK
0800 068 41 41

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Introduction

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A Letter to Schools and Colleges

Dear Colleagues,

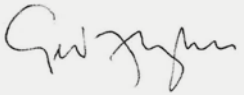
Suicide is a difficult topic and one that hopefully never crosses your mind in your school. The reality, however, is that it does cross the minds of many young people, including schoolchildren. In fact, suicide is the leading cause of death among young people and in children the numbers are alarmingly high. Over 200 schoolchildren are lost to suicide every year in the UK.[1]

PAPYRUS is the national charity dedicated to preventing suicide among children and young people. Founded by parents who had lost a child to suicide, our work has always been rooted in the personal experience of the families changed forever by this unimaginable loss. We strongly believe that many young suicides are preventable. As a national charity we want to reach out to you to help ensure that your school or college can be as ready as possible to prevent a suicide in your community. We want to help you and your colleagues to be suicide-aware; ready, willing and able to help children who may be at risk.

Education and awareness are key to this prevention activity. Good, evidenced-based information is important for schools and colleges when it comes to finding support in this difficult area. I draw your attention to the findings from recent research amongst teaching professionals, commissioned by PAPYRUS, which identified the need within the sector for guidance, support and training (see 'Your Needs' on page 6). We have prepared **Building Suicide-Safer Schools and Colleges: A guide for teachers and staff** for your use. We would welcome your feedback on how you've used this guide – tell us by joining the conversation online using the hashtag **#ClassOf2018.**

We would like to thank you for being part of our campaign to raise awareness of suicide in schoolchildren and equip teachers and staff with the skills to build suicide-safer schools. Please do what you can to engage in this important work. Sadly, many schools and colleges come to us only when it is too late. Please do what you can to encourage your leadership team, colleagues and others to engage with our campaign. You may well save a young life.

Best Wishes,



Ged Flynn, Chief Executive,
PAPYRUS Prevention of Young Suicide

[1] Office for National Statistics Statistical Bulletin Suicides in England and Wales: 2015 Registrations; Nicva: Quarterly and Annual Suicide Statistics for Northern Ireland: 2015 Registrations; ScotPho: Suicide data introduction: 2015 Registrations.

The Context

1,659

Suicide is the leading cause of death in young people under the age of 35 in the UK. In 2015, 1,659 young people were lost to suicide.[2]

PAPYRUS believes that these figures are the tip of the iceberg. In the UK suicide has not been a crime since 1961, yet the law demands that coroners use the criminal standard of proof (rather than the civil standard) to conclude that a death was a suicide. This means that the total number of lives lost to suicide is likely to be much higher.

Suicidal thoughts are common among young people, with as many as one in four reporting that they had thought about taking their own life and an estimated one in ten having made a suicide attempt.[3] Over 200 children of school age are lost to suicide every year in the UK. Despite this, there is a lack of awareness of the number of children who are desperate for help. **We don't talk about suicide among children** – for many of us, it is too painful to comprehend. Statistics were only released for the 10-14 age group for the first time in 2015 in England and Wales only, and suicides by children under 10 remain unrecognised in official statistics.

It is encouraging to see moves to prioritise emotional health and mental wellbeing in schools. While we welcome this, **far fewer people are talking about suicide prevention**. The stigma, silence and misconceptions around suicide mean that it is often not part of the conversation, and there is insufficient action in relation to suicide prevention training.

Schoolchildren spend the majority of their waking hours at school. Therefore, teachers and school staff are well placed to recognise the signs that a child might be at risk of suicide and best placed to respond effectively. Despite this, **many are unsure of what to do or to say**, and are frightened that they may make things worse by talking to their pupils about suicide. From calls to our helpline HOPELineUK, and from our work in the community, we know that teachers and school staff do not always feel equipped to support schoolchildren at risk. This can be exacerbated by a lack of resources and stretched mental health services for children and young people.

[2] Office for National Statistics Statistical Bulletin Suicides in England and Wales: 2015 Registrations; Nicva: Quarterly and Annual Suicide Statistics for Northern Ireland: 2015 Registrations; ScotPho: Suicide data introduction: 2015 Registrations. [3] Findings reported in survey of 16-34 year olds from the Adult Morbidity Survey: Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, England, 2014.

Your Needs

In 2017 PAPYRUS commissioned research amongst teaching professionals.[1] We found:

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One in ten (11%) said, on average, a student shares suicidal thoughts with them once a term or more

Only half (53%) said they would feel confident they could support a student who had shared suicidal thoughts with them

Classroom teachers less confident compared to Heads/Deputies
(48% of classroom teachers said that they would feel confident, compared to 75% of Heads or Deputies)

Classroom teachers also more likely to experience barriers to offering support
(45% of Heads/Deputies said that nothing would prevent them from supporting the student themselves, vs. 21% of classroom teachers)

Teaching professionals noted a number of barriers which would prevent them from supporting a student with thoughts of suicide:

Almost half (47%) said they weren't trained in suicide prevention

A third (34%) said they would be worried about making the situation worse

22% felt that they wouldn't know the right things to say

15% said they would not know what steps to follow, as their school did not have a suicide prevention policy or procedure

13% said that they would not have permission to support the student, according to school/college guidelines

Very few teaching staff felt that it wasn't their role to provide support
(just 2% felt that it was a matter for parents/guardians and not the school, and 7% felt it wasn't their role)

[1]All figures are taken from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 804 teaching professionals. Fieldwork was undertaken between 7/3/2017 - 7/15/2017. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of the teaching population.

Some of the concerns shared:

"I would feel responsible under safeguarding and possibly left to carry the can"

"I'm not sure if it's attention seeking rather than genuine thoughts"

"School discourages personal interactions"

"There are problems getting senior teachers to take notice"

"We don't have the time to spend with the student"

"I'd be worried about getting the correct support from the management team and concerned about fulfilling my other roles and responsibilities to other children in my class"

"I would want to help but don't consider myself qualified for this"

These findings highlight that whilst many teaching staff see it as their role to support students, many have concerns about offering this support – and do not feel equipped to provide it.

Over 200 schoolchildren are lost to suicide every year in the UK. Help us save the #ClassOf2018.

*Office for National Statistics Statistical Bulletin Suicides in England and Wales: 2015 Registrations; Nivca: Quarterly and Annual Suicide Statistics for Northern Ireland: 2015 Registrations; ScotPho: Suicide data introduction: 2015 Registrations.

How Can We HELP?

PAPYRUS offers a range of services to prevent young suicide

PAPYRUS is the national charity dedicated to preventing young suicide in the UK. We provide help and advice through our helpline HOPELineUK; offer awareness and prevention training; campaign and influence national policy; raise awareness and challenge suicide stigma; and engage with volunteers and communities in our mission to save young lives.

- We run **HOPELineUK** – a national helpline staffed by Suicide Prevention Advisors.
- We provide a range of **suicide awareness and prevention training**. We aim to train as many varied professionals and members of the community as possible (including emergency service workers, counsellors, ministers, mental health staff, teachers, and parents).

We have launched our campaign to save the #ClassOf2018 to raise awareness of the issue of suicide in schoolchildren and build suicide-safer schools. We have put together this schools guide for your use. It includes advice on how secondary schools and colleges can develop a school-wide approach to suicide prevention.

We aim to:

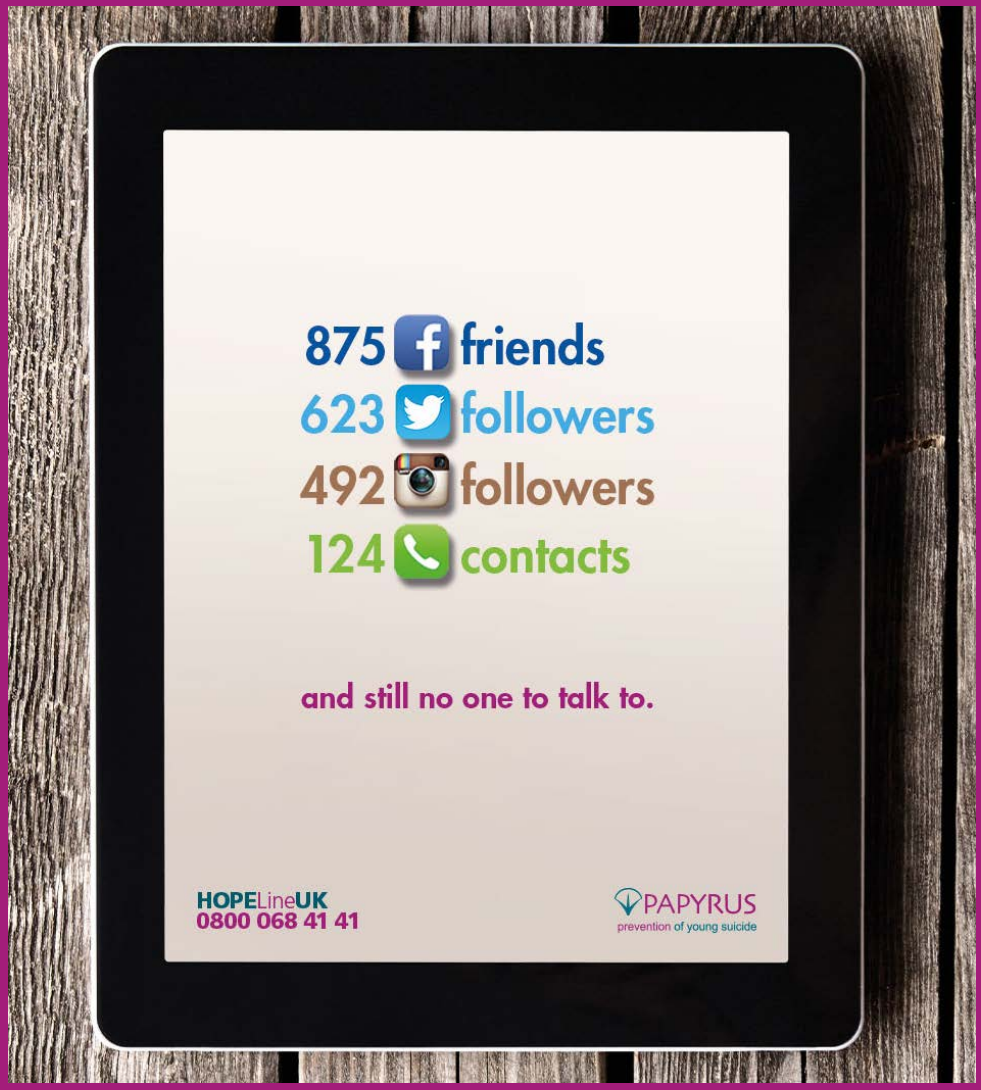
- Highlight the role that those in contact with children can play in preventing young suicide;
- Equip secondary school teachers and staff with suicide prevention skills to better support children at risk;
- Raise awareness of the support available through our helpline, PAPYRUS HOPELineUK.

About this Guide

This guide has been developed to support teachers and school staff to build a suicide-safer school. It aims to provide school staff with an understanding of the most effective strategies to implement to create a suicide-safer environment. The material in this guide is designed for secondary school and college teachers and staff, but can be adapted for younger children too.

It includes:

- Guidance on how to develop a school-wide approach to suicide prevention through developing a suicide-safety policy;
- Information on organisations, including PAPYRUS HOPELineUK, that can offer support and advice;
- Advice and support on how to support a child or young person who may be at risk of suicide;
- Advice and support on what to do following a schoolchild's suicide or suicide attempt.



About this Guide

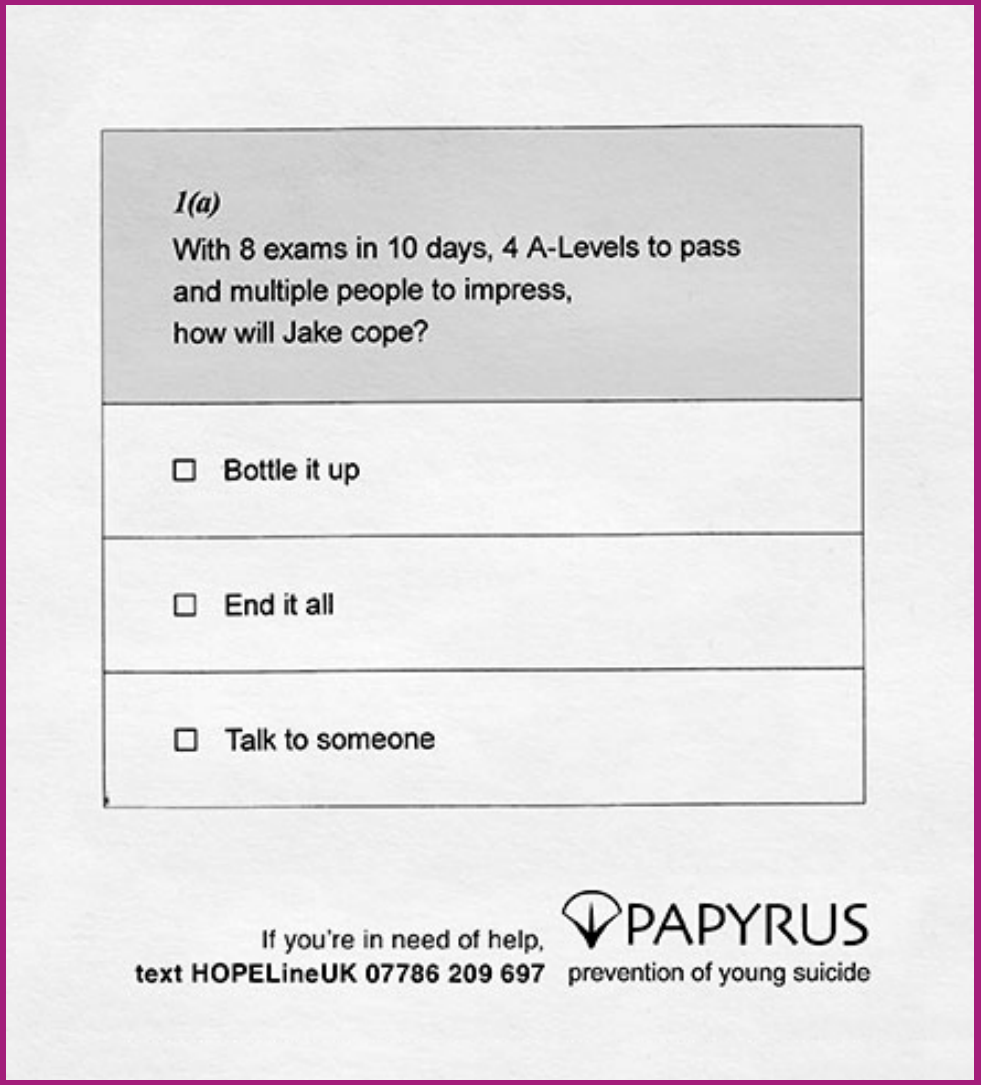
Safeguarding is everyone's business and is not just the responsibility of Directors of Children's Services, Local Children's Safeguarding Boards, Head Teachers, Governors and Safeguarding Leads.

In the same way, PAPYRUS believes that **suicide prevention is everybody's business** and that all can play a role in preventing young suicide. In school/college settings, this includes:

- Governors
- Senior Leadership Team
- Parents and Carers
- Counsellors
- Pastoral and Wellbeing Officers
- All teaching staff
- Administrators
- Caretakers/Janitors
- Catering staff
- Young people as peer supporters/mentors

Each of these groups **can make a unique contribution to suicide prevention.**

Who else would you add to this list in your school/college?



Prevention

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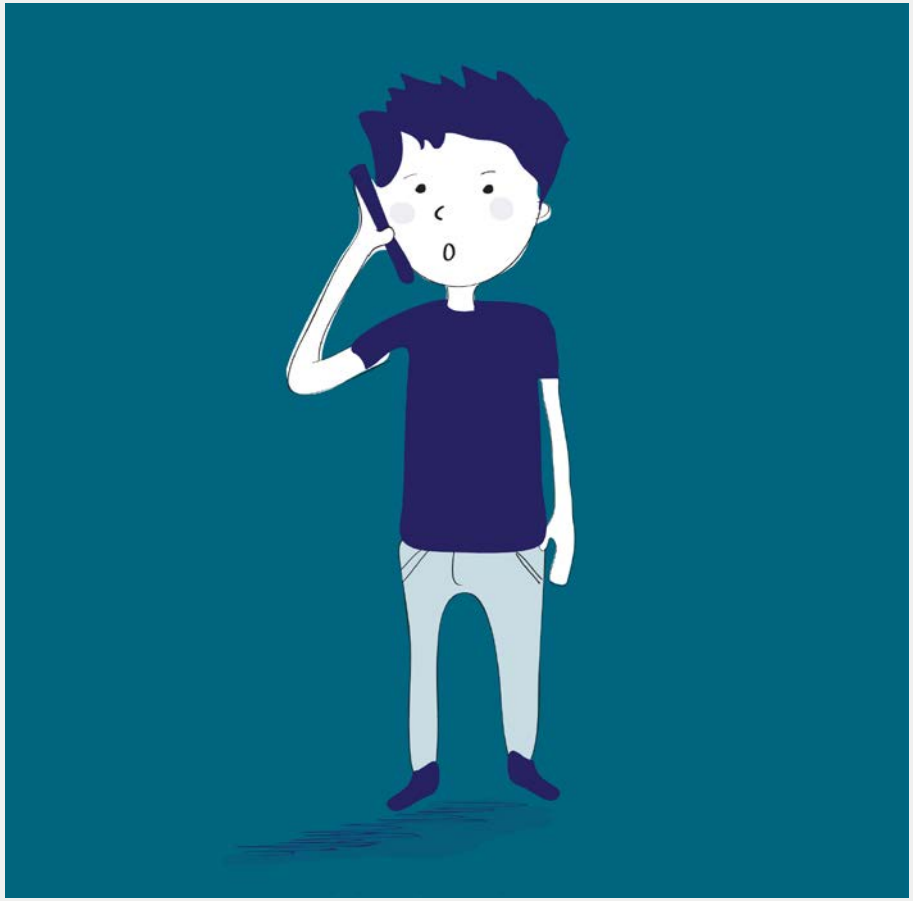
Creating a Suicide-Safer Community in your School or College

Whilst it is important to learn from a tragedy, it is much better to be prepared for it and to prevent it from happening.

PAPYRUS strongly believes that many young suicides are preventable. Suicide is the biggest killer of young people in the UK – yet suicide is a taboo subject. Stigma promotes silence, which is killing children and young people. Research commissioned by PAPYRUS in 2016 revealed that 78% of adults did not know that suicide is the leading killer of young people.[5]

The more we talk openly about suicide, the sooner we reduce the fear and stigma that surrounds it. PAPYRUS believes that everyone has a role to play in preventing young suicide, and we need to enable more people to be comfortable with the idea that they too can help to prevent suicide. If suicide prevention is seen as a whole school endeavour, it is more likely that we can work together and play our respective roles in that common mission to help save young lives.



[5] All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2015 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 30th-31st August 2016. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

Creating a Suicide-Safer Community in your School or College

Key principles to guide suicide prevention policy

There are a number of policy drivers to support this Guide (see page 15). However, there is currently little guidance for schools and colleges on how to prevent suicide and support those affected by it.

There are two broad concepts which underpin all good suicide prevention strategies. Evidence shows that suicide risk is reduced when we improve connectedness and reduce access to means:

1) IMPROVE CONNECTEDNESS

A child or young person who is contemplating suicide may not feel able to access the support of those around them. This may be because of fear, perceived rejection, a sense of shame or embarrassment, or because they fear that they may need to share whatever is causing their thoughts of suicide. They may find this difficult to open up about. It is important to **provide safe spaces and alternative opportunities for schoolchildren to share their story**. It's important to use language that protects and provides safety and to cultivate an environment where 'nothing is so secret that it can't be shared'.

2) REDUCE ACCESS TO MEANS

It is important to ensure that the physical environment of your school or college is as safe as possible. The removal of potential ligature points, restricting access to places which facilitate jumping, and removal of harmful substances from public areas, are all examples of how to reduce access to potential means of suicide. A risk assessment and management strategy may be of value here for your school or college.

Developing a Suicide Prevention Policy

Draft Suicide Safety Policy

PAPYRUS recommends that schools and colleges have a policy statement which is known by the whole community and which enshrines a strong commitment to suicide prevention.

This should include the items in the table below. Some example 'starters' *(italicised)* are suggested here to help you create your statement and make it fit for purpose in your community.

1) Statement of Purpose

a) *This school/college community is aware that:*

i) suicide is the leading cause of death in young people;

ii) we play a vital role in helping to prevent young suicide.

b) *We want to make sure that children and young people at our school are as suicide-safe as possible and that our governors, parents and carers, teaching staff, support staff, pupils themselves and other key stakeholders are aware of our commitment to be a suicide-safer school/college*

2) Our Beliefs about Suicide and its Antecedents

a) *This school/college acknowledges that:*

i) SUICIDAL THOUGHTS ARE COMMON

We acknowledge that thoughts of suicide are common among young people.

ii) SUICIDE IS COMPLEX

We believe that every suicide is a tragedy. There are a number of contributory factors surrounding a suicide and the reasons are often complex and individual to that person. However, we believe that there are lessons that may be learned from each death that may help prevent future deaths.

iii) STIGMA INHIBITS LEARNING – STIGMA CAN KILL

We recognise that the stigma surrounding suicide and mental illness can be both a barrier to help seeking and a barrier to offering help. This school/college is committed to tackling suicide stigma. In our language and in our working relationships, we will promote open, sensitive talk that does not stigmatise and perpetuate taboos. This will include avoiding the use of language which perpetuates unhelpful notions that suicide is criminal, sinful or selfish.[6] We know that unhelpful myths and misconceptions surrounding suicide can inhibit young people in seeking and finding appropriate help when it is most needed.

[6] See page on language

Developing a Suicide Prevention Policy

iv) SUICIDE IS OUR BUSINESS, TOO

As a school/college community, we recognise that pupils may seek out someone whom they trust with their concerns and worries. We want to play our part in supporting any pupil who may have thoughts of suicide.

v) SAFETY IS VERY IMPORTANT

We know that pupils who are having thoughts of suicide may or may not also be behaving in a way that puts their life in danger (suicide behaviours). Schoolchildren experiencing suicidal thoughts are potentially at risk of acting on these thoughts. Those who are already engaging in suicide behaviours are also clearly at risk of death or harm. This school/college wants to work with our pupils who may be thinking about suicide, or acting on their thoughts of suicide. We want to support them, sometimes working in partnership with family, caregivers and other professionals where this may enhance suicide safety.

vi) SUICIDE IS A DIFFICULT THING TO TALK ABOUT

We know that a child or young person who is suicidal may find it very difficult to make their feelings known and speak openly about suicide. We will equip adults with the skills to identify when a pupil may be struggling with thoughts of suicide. These adults will be trained to keep our young people suicide-safe.

vii) TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE DOES NOT CREATE OR WORSEN RISK

We will provide our pupils with opportunities to speak openly about their worries with people who are ready, willing and able to support them. We want to make it possible for schoolchildren and young people, and those who support them at this school/college, to do so safely. This will be in a way that leads to support and help where this is needed. We will do all we can to refrain from acting in a way that stops a pupil seeking the help they need when they are struggling with thoughts of suicide.

3) Our Team and its Responsibilities

a) Our governors and leadership team will be clear about how we will respond in the event of a suicide. Each member of our named response team will have a defined responsibility within our plan including leadership, family liaison and any communications with external agencies, including the media.

b) We will have a clear picture of who has received general suicide awareness education and commit to this being refreshed periodically (at least every three years). We will identify a team of people who are trained in Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST). This team will be drawn from across the whole school community, not just from one department.

c) We will have a clear policy about how staff should work together where thoughts of suicide or suicide behaviours are known among our young people. We will manage the sharing of information in a way that enhances safety.

4) Ongoing Support and Development of our Policy and Practice

a) Our Governors and Leadership Team will keep our practice up to date by maintaining contact with best practice and on-going training.

Policy Drivers

England

GUIDANCE

- ***Suicide prevention: developing a local action plan***
  https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-developing-a-local-action-plan
  25 October 2016 Guidance
- ***Preventing suicide: lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans young people***
  https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-suicide-lesbian-gay-and-bisexual-young-people
  13 March 2015 Guidance
- ***Suicide prevention: identifying and responding to suicide clusters***
  https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-identifying-and-responding-to-suicide-clusters
  10 September 2015 Guidance
- ***Suicide prevention: suicides in public places***
  https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-suicides-in-public-places
  1 December 2015 Guidance
- ***Support after a suicide: a guide to providing local services***
  https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-after-a-suicide-a-guide-to-providing-local-services
  9 January 2017 Guidance

POLICY

- ***Suicide prevention strategy for England***
  https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-strategy-for-england
  10 September 2012 Policy paper
- ***Suicide prevention: third annual report***
  https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-third-annual-report
  9 January 2017 Policy paper

Policy Drivers

Scotland

POLICY

- ***Scottish Government Suicide Prevention Strategy 2013-16***
  (http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2013/12/7616)
  In 2017 the Scottish Government will engage with stakeholders to inform the development of a new Suicide Prevention Strategy or Action Plan, for publication in late 2017 or early 2018.

Northern Ireland

POLICY

- ***Protect Life 2 (draft) suicide prevention strategy for Northern Ireland***
  (https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/health/protect-life-2-consultation.pdf)

Wales

POLICY

- ***Talk to me 2 – Suicide and self-harm prevention strategy for Wales 2015-2020***
  (http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/150716strategyen.pdf)
- ***Talk to me 2 – Annexes – Suicide and self-harm prevention strategy and action plan for Wales 2015-2020***
  (http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/150716annexesen.pdf)
- ***Talk to me 2 – Objectives – Suicide and self-harm prevention action plan for Wales 2015-2020***
  (http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/150716talken.pdf)

Related information

- ***Help is at Hand Cymru***
  (http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/150716talken.pdf)

The Language Around Suicide

Helpful and unhelpful language when talking about suicide with schoolchildren

PAPYRUS recognises that language helps as well as harms. Using sensitive and appropriate language can help build awareness and understanding to increase empathy and support.

Resources available to download from our website include conversation starters (advice and guidance on how to start a conversation about suicide) and our media guidelines (information on facts, the impact of young suicide and talking about it sensitively and responsibly).

Helpful Language when talking about suicide:

PAPYRUS encourages more helpful language. You could say:

- Ended their life
- Took their own life
- Died by suicide
- Killed themselves

Unhelpful Language when talking about suicide:

Successful suicide

Talking about suicide in terms of success is not helpful. If a schoolchild dies by suicide it cannot ever be a success. We don't talk about any other death in terms of success: we would never talk about a 'successful heart attack'.

Commit suicide

Suicide hasn't been a crime since 1961. Using the word 'commit' suggests that it is still a crime (we 'commit' crimes), which perpetuates stigma or the sense that it is a 'sin'. Stigma shuts people up – schoolchildren will be less likely to talk about their suicidal feelings if they feel judged.

The Language around Suicide

Helpful language when talking about attempted suicide:

Instead, PAPYRUS encourages more helpful language. You could say:

- Attempted to take their life
- Attempted suicide
- Engaged in suicide behaviours

Helpful language when asking about suicide:

For a detailed look at more helpful language when asking about suicide, see page 25.

Unhelpful language when asking about suicide:

You're not thinking of doing something stupid /silly are you?

This judgemental language suggests that the person's thoughts of suicide are stupid or silly, and furthermore, that the schoolchild is stupid or silly. When faced with this question, most schoolchildren will deny their thoughts of suicide, for fear of being viewed negatively. This is dangerous. You become someone it is not safe to talk to about suicide.

Unhelpful language when talking about attempted suicide:

Unsuccessful or failed suicide

Schoolchildren who have attempted suicide often tell us, "I couldn't even do that right… I was unsuccessful, I failed". In part this comes from unhelpful language around their suicide behaviour. Any attempt at suicide is serious. Schoolchildren should not be further burdened by whether their attempt was a failure, which in turn suggests they are a failure.

It's not that serious

Every suicide attempt is serious. By definition: they wanted to take their own life. All suicide attempts must be taken seriously as there is a risk to life. An attempt tells us that the schoolchild is in so much pain they no longer want to live. This is serious.

Attention seeking

This phrase assumes that the schoolchild's behaviour is not serious, and that they are being dramatic to gain attention from others. However suicide behaviour *is* serious. Schoolchildren who attempt suicide need attention, support, understanding and help.

It was just a cry for help

This dismissive phrase belittles the schoolchild's need for help. They do indeed need you to help: they are in pain and their life is in danger. They may feel they are not being taken seriously, which can be dangerous.

Seeking Professional Advice and Support

When a child or young person is thinking about suicide, there may be one or several concerns that are contributing to their thinking. You or they may need advice or support from organisations which specialise in specific issues. PAPYRUS recommends that schools prepare a directory of such services and organisations. Our Helpers in the Community template (see following page) is a good starter. Your leadership team may want to populate this and share it across the school community.

PAPYRUS HOPELineUK

HOPELineUK is a service run by PAPYRUS. Our professional advisors are trained in suicide intervention skills. **HOPELineUK** offers support and advice:

- to children and young people under the age of 35 having thoughts of suicide;
- to anyone who is concerned about a child or young person.

Call: **0800 068 41 41** *(this does not show up on the telephone bill)*
Text: **07786 209 697**
Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

Opening hours:	Monday-Friday	10am – 10pm
	Weekends	2pm – 10pm
	Bank Holidays	2pm – 5pm

All texts and emails are automatically anonymised so that our advisors do not have your details unless you share these with us.

We will intervene and send emergency services in cases where life is at risk. Details of our confidentiality policy are available on our website here: *https://papyrus-uk.org/confidentiality-policy*

NB If you are working with a young person and creating a Suicide-Safety Plan with them, you should advise that they **make contact with a medical practitioner** and offer them the details of a helpline such as **HOPELineUK**.

PAPYRUS has a number of resources, including a Suicide-Safety Plan, distraction techniques and coping strategies, on the resources page of our website: *https://www.papyrus-uk.org/help-advice/resources*

National Suicide Prevention Alliance

PAPYRUS is a member of the National Suicide Prevention Alliance (NSPA). The NSPA is an alliance of public, private, voluntary and community organisations in England who care about suicide prevention and are willing to take action to reduce suicide and support those affected by suicide. See http://www.nspa.org.uk for more organisations which can help in relation to suicide and its prevention.

Support After Suicide Partnership

The Support After Suicide Partnership is a network of organsiations, including PAPYRUS, that support people who have been bereaved or affected by suicide. http://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/

Helpers in Your Community

You may want to populate this page with useful contact phone numbers in your area so that you have them when you most need them.

Crisis (Distress) Centre/Mental Health Crisis: .....

Suicide prevention:
PAPYRUS HOPELineUK: 0800 068 41 41
Text: 07786 209 697.
Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

24 hour listening support: .....

Rape/sexual assault centre: .....

Domestic violence hotline: .....

Child abuse hotline: .....

Police/ambulance/fire services: .....

Hospital emergency services: .....

24 hour medical advice: .....

Homelessness/emergency: .....

Accommodation: .....

Mental health outreach clinic: .....

Child and adolescent mental health service: .....

Sexual health and screening: .....

Sexuality support: .....

Children's services: .....

Family support services: .....

NHS counselling support: .....

Alcohol and substance missue: .....

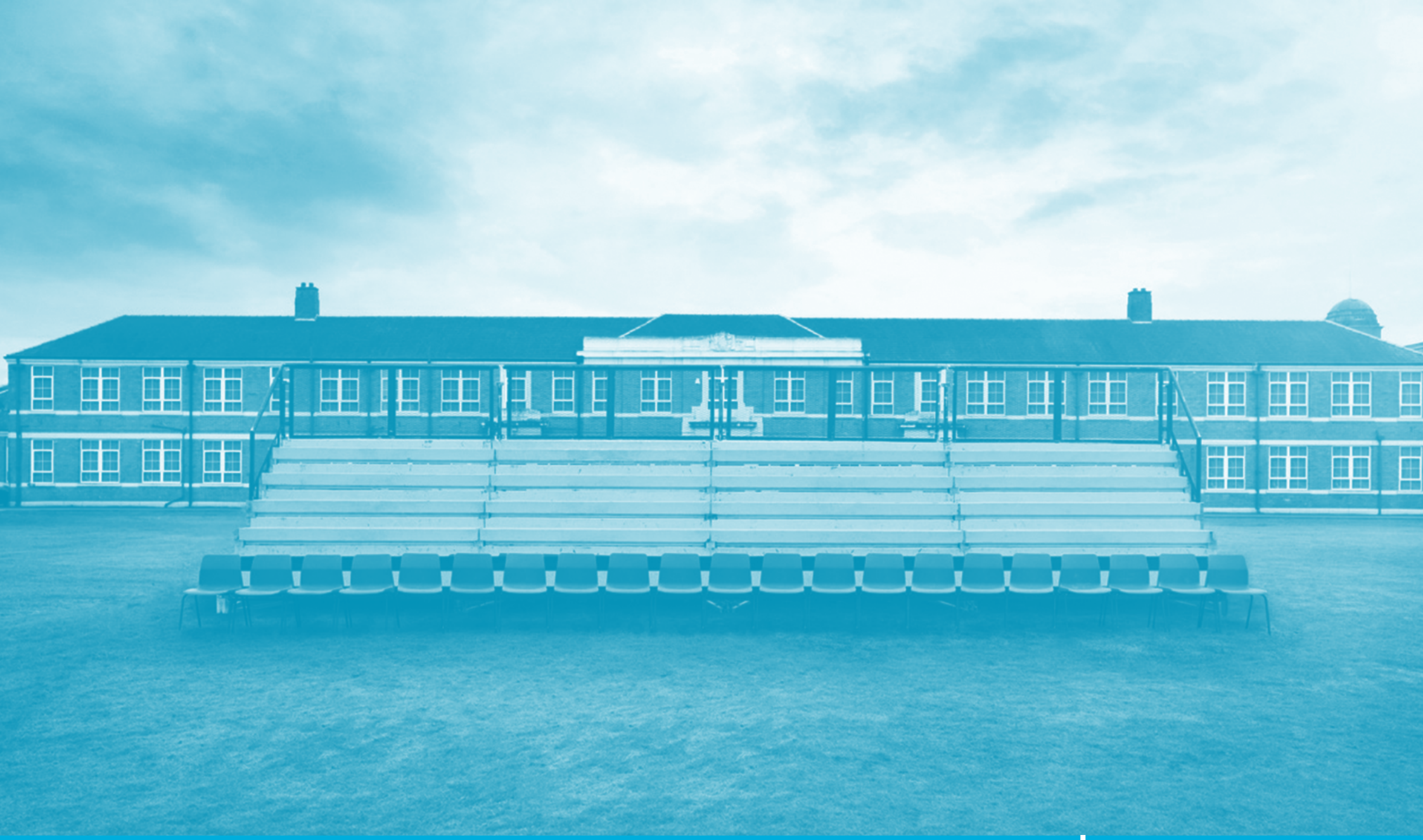
Carer support services: .....

Religious/spiritual support: .....

Legal assistance/victim-witness assistance: .....

Probation officers: .....

Debt advice: .....



Intervention

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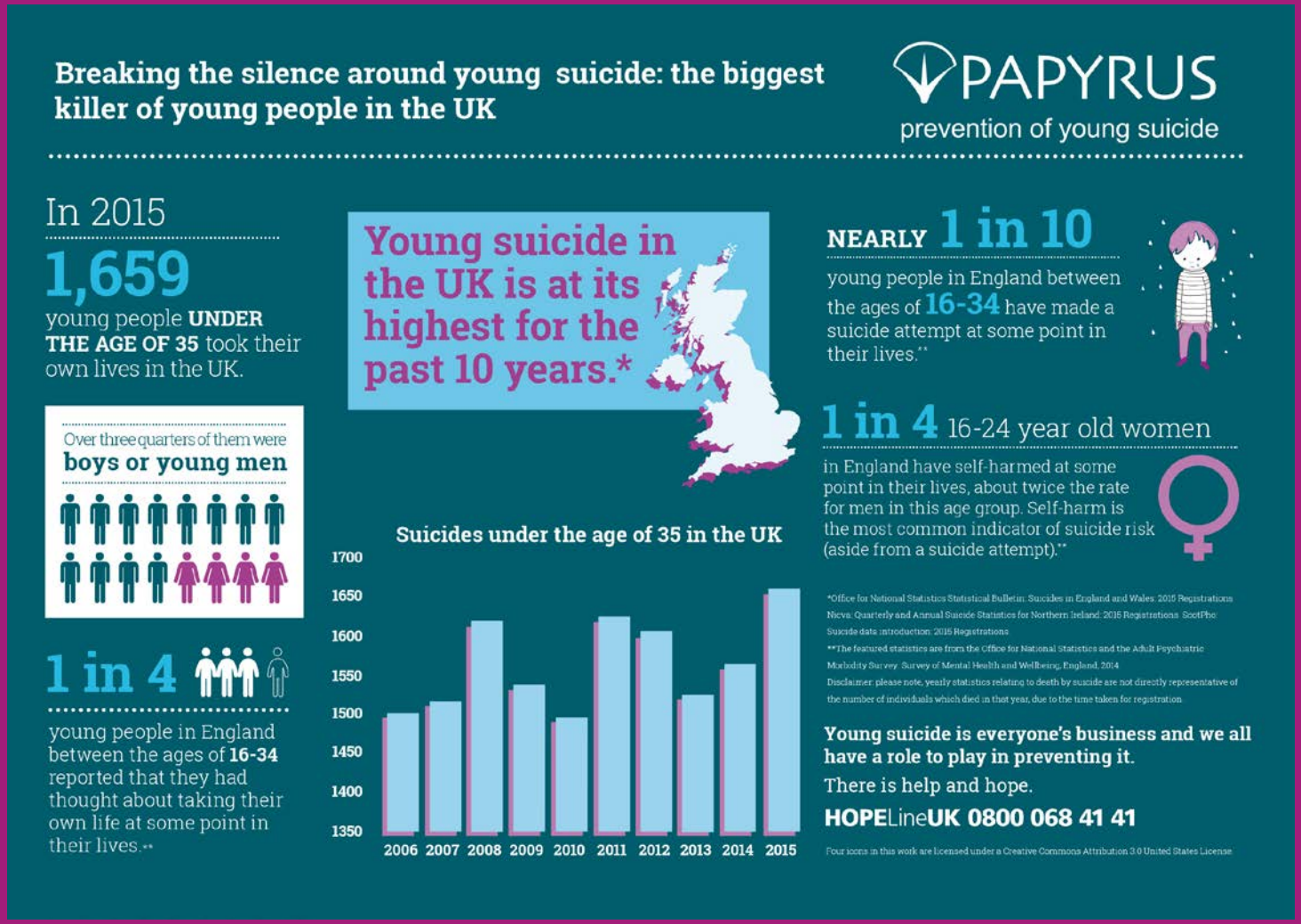
Intervention

Supporting children and young people with thoughts of suicide

Often the term Intervention is used to refer to the effort to prevent a person from attempting to take their own life.

Providing children and young people with the opportunity to talk about suicide saves lives. Sometimes it can feel hard to know how to talk to schoolchildren about suicide – but we need to. **Suicidal feelings don't have to end in suicide**.

Many young people feel isolated with their thoughts of suicide and do not feel that they are able to tell anyone. We need the help of schools in our mission to create a community where suicide is no longer taboo and children feel able to tell someone if they feel suicidal and ask for help.



What do I do when I have a concern about a schoolchild?

The following statements may help you identify your own situation and what you might do in response.

"Q: What do I do when I have a concern about a child/young person?"

A: A concern is just that. It is not a judgement or an outcome; it's a concern. Whatever it is that makes you worried or questioning about the child, may well be worth exploring. This may include a conversation with others (e.g. colleagues, parents and carers) but it is very important that the child is your central focus.

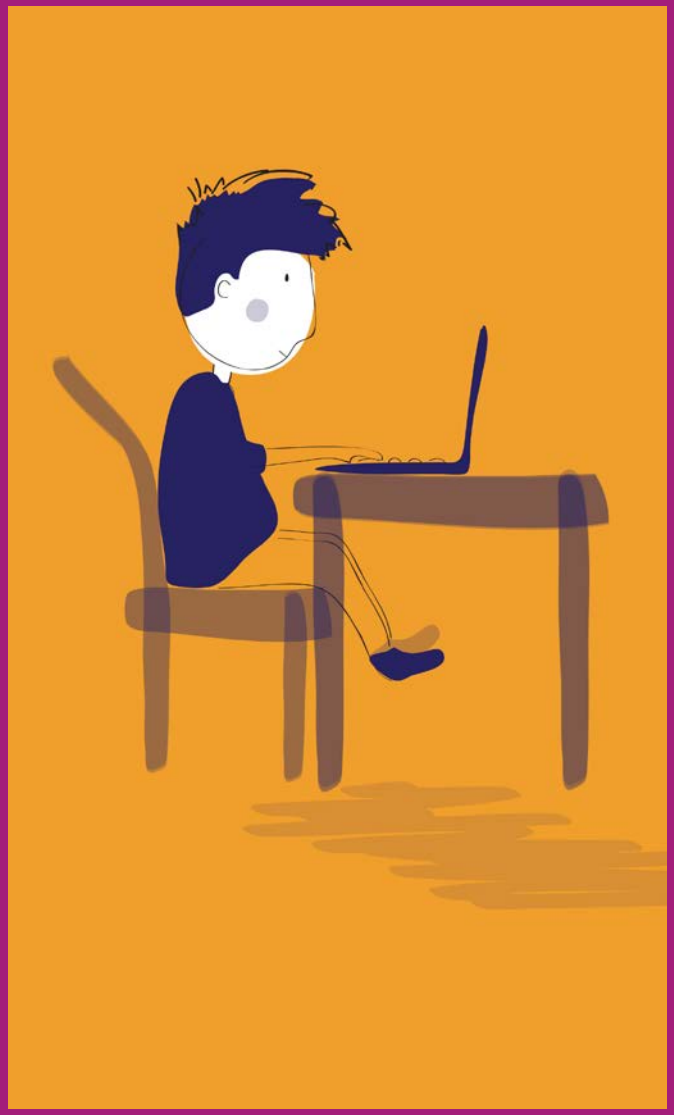
Check out how the child is by communicating directly with the child. Let the child know what you are concerned about. What have you seen (do they seem sad or not their usual self?) What have you heard them say that makes you concerned? Is your instinct telling you that something is concerning?

"Q: How will I know if a child/ young person is suicidal?"

A: If children are having thoughts of suicide, they will usually communicate this. However, this is unlikely to be an explicit verbal communication about suicide. Few young people feel that they can be open about suicidal thinking or tell someone when they are struggling with their emotional health and wellbeing. When suicide is part of children's thinking, they usually show this in their behaviour, in how they interact and in how they communicate. We cannot provide you with a definitive checklist of things to look out for to help you to identify a child who is thinking about suicide. That is impossible. Every child is different. However, when you notice changes in the way a child is behaving or communicating, and it is causing you concern, you must explore your concern with the child.

If your concern is because the child says or does something to indicate that suicide is an option, your concern is now about suicide. The only way to check whether your intuition is correct is to ask the child directly and clearly about suicide. The child who is thinking about suicide may be longing for someone to ask them about this. They don't need you to interrogate them. They don't need you to 'fix it' for them. They just need you to ask. Just do it.

What things can I look out for?



The first step in talking about suicide is recognising that a child or young person may be at risk. There is no definitive guide on how to know if somebody is thinking about suicide because anybody can be at risk – however there are some things you can look out for.

Often schoolchildren thinking about suicide will have experienced a stressful event associated with a feeling of loss. This might be something others might consider to be small but hold great meaning for them, for example the loss of a family pet, or they might have experienced a life event such as changing courses at college, bullying or violent assault.

People who are experiencing thoughts of suicide give out 'invitations' to ask for help. These may manifest themselves as changes in behaviour (self-harm, giving away possessions), the words they use ("I wish I wasn't here", "It doesn't matter anymore"), physical indicators (sleep disturbance, weight loss), or they may display overwhelming feelings of anger, hopelessness, loneliness, or a sense of being 'worthless'.

Almost anything could be an indicator and often the key is that if something feels not quite right it is worth trusting your intuition and exploring what might be happening for the child or young person.

It doesn't matter anymore

I wish I wasn't here

I am worthless

How do I ask about suicide?

Ask them directly, "Are you thinking about suicide?" By using the word suicide, you are telling them that it's OK to talk openly about their thoughts of suicide with you.

You could also say:

- It sounds like you're thinking about suicide, is that right?
- Are you telling me you want to kill yourself/end your life/die/die by suicide?
- Sometimes, when people are feeling the way you are they think about suicide. Is that what you're thinking about?
- It sounds like life feels too hard for you right now and you want to kill yourself, is that right?

Some children may not be familiar with the word suicide, but this does not mean that they don't understand what it means. Tragically, we know that many children who may not have known the word suicide have taken their lives, and many more think about not being here anymore.

You could say:

- When you say you don't want to be here anymore, do you mean that you want to be dead forever?
- Suicide means hurting ourselves on purpose so we die and are dead forever, is that what you are thinking about?

If they are not having thoughts of suicide, that's OK. They will tell you so. If you are still concerned, then keep exploring why your concerns remain until you are clear that suicide is not part of their thinking. If they are not having thoughts of suicide, nothing is lost by having the conversation; you will have developed suicide-safety for and with that child now and for the future. You may have other actions to follow up on which help the child with other issues arising from the conversation.

If a child indicates that they have been thinking about suicide, listen and allow them to express their feelings. They will likely feel a huge sense of relief that someone is willing to hear their darkest thoughts without judgement. Reassure them that they are not alone and you can look for support together. Let the young person know that there is help and hope.

How do I talk about suicide safely?

Here are some ways you can continue a conversation about suicide in a reassuring, safe way:

It's hard and scary to talk about suicide but take your time and I will listen.

It's not uncommon to have thoughts of suicide. With help and support many people can work through these thoughts and stay safe.

It sounds as though things are really hard at the moment... Can you tell me a bit more?

Can you tell me more about why you want to die?

There are organisations that offer support like PAPYRUS HOPELineUK. I can give you their contact details.

Take your time and tell me what's happening for you at the moment.

You've shown a lot of strength in telling me this. I want to help you find support.

Things must be so painful for you to feel like there is no way out. I want to listen and help.

There is hope. There is help available and we can find it together.

I am so sorry you're feeling this way. Can you tell me more about how you are feeling?

How are self-harm and suicide related?

Q: I know that a child/ young person has self-harmed but how do I know whether it is suicide-related?

A: Self-harm is often a precursor to suicide but not always. Those who engage in self-harm do not all go on to take their own life. Those who die by suicide do not always have a history of self-harm. If you have a concern about a child because of self-harm, you should treat it like any other concern. You may need to explore with the child what is happening for them and if you think that suicide may be part of their thinking, ask them directly about suicide.

Q: I know that a child/young person is having thoughts of suicide – what do I do?

A: So, the person has told you they are thinking about suicide. You may have asked them or they may have told you. This can be a challenging space for you and you may feel ill-equipped here. Be assured that you cannot make things worse by asking the suicide question.

Sometimes schoolchildren will tell you or others that they are thinking about suicide during a class. If this happens you should respond in a calm and sensitive way. Don't dismiss what they are saying. The child is asking for help, and you need to respond. You might be feeling unprepared for the disclosure, but your calm and sensitive response will let the child and other children in the class know that they can talk about suicide openly and non-judgementally with you. As soon as possible encourage the child to move to a more private place, where you can have an open conversation about their disclosure. You should also check in with the class and let them know where they can find sources of support.

You may need to speak to a colleague, a senior manager or a safeguarding lead depending on your school or college's policies. However, don't underestimate the importance of what has been established by your asking the question or receiving the information that a child has been thinking about suicide. That they have shared this with you means there is an increased level of trust. You need to tell the child that you need to share information with others. Familiarise yourself with your safeguarding protocols. You are likely to have to share with others that a child is at risk of suicide. You may not have to share why the child is having suicidal thoughts with others.

What do I do if there is imminent risk of death or harm?

"Q: I know that a child/young person has engaged in suicide behaviour – what do I do?"

A: If you determine that a child has acted in a way that puts their life in danger, act quickly to keep the child safe and ensure that there is no imminent risk. If there is, you may need to get immediate professional help to protect the child: you may need to contact the emergency services. You will also need to inform the child's parents or guardians, and your safeguarding lead. You may need to accompany the child to A&E and wait there with them until their parent or guardian arrives.

If the child has taken steps to end their life it is important that the child does not feel judged or shamed for their suicide behaviour. Try to remain calm, even though you might be feeling scared, confused, upset or frustrated. It is helpful to ask the child whether they are having thoughts of suicide. It may seem obvious in light of their behaviour, but asking clearly about suicide allows you to have an open and non-judgemental conversation about suicide.

Ensure that you are able to have a conversation confidentially and that other children are not around. You may have called for professional help, but in the meantime you might be best placed to stay with the child and to talk about how they are feeling. Once you have determined that suicide is their focus – just listen. Ask them to tell you about how they are feeling. They might not want to talk, but you can let them know that you will remain with them in supportive silence, and if they do want to talk you are there to listen. Your reassurance will help the child to feel understood and supported.

If you determine that the child's behaviour has not put their life in danger, but there has been an injury, you should seek support from the school nurse who will offer care and advice. You may also need to speak to your safeguarding lead about this.

If the behaviour in question is historical behaviour, then the focus will be on what the child has learned from this behaviour and using that learning to keep the child safe. You may also need to speak to your safeguarding lead about this.

How do I support a child with their return to school?

Q: How do I support a child/young person back to school after they have engaged in suicide behaviour?

A: Before the child who attempted to take their own life returns to school, meet with him or her and their parents or guardians. When you meet you should explore what support is in place, and also what further support the school can provide – ask the child what they need.

The child who attempted to take their life may not currently be suicidal, however suicide may still be an option for them, or become an option again in the future.

It is important that the child has a Suicide-Safety Plan: a plan that they have created with support that details how they want to stay safe from suicide. It is essential that the plan is created together with the child – with them at its centre. Create the plan with them, not for them. The plan must be something that they feel they are able to agree to.

A good Suicide-Safety Plan always includes the following:

- Helpline numbers that are available and appropriate - including 24-hour helplines.
- Safety Contacts: people and organisations that the child can contact when they feel they can't keep themselves safe, including a safety contact for when they are at school.

See here for information on Suicide-Safety Plans (link to our website).

Arrange for regular 'check-ins' with the child once they have returned to school to see how they are doing and to check the plan is ok for them. Be prepared to amend the Suicide-Safety Plan based on their needs. It is a live document and may change over time.

The Suicide-Safety Plan might also include professional support from a counsellor or therapist during school time and you should accommodate this within their timetable.

Can I share information with others?

Q: What should I do next to keep me and the child/young person suicide-safe?

A: The focus here is on hearing the child and ensuring that you do what you can to reassure and support the child. If you can, give the child space to tell their own story. Avoid questioning them or interrupting their story. They will feel a sense of relief having been able to say that suicide is part of their thinking. They may still need some further reassurance throughout. Be supportive as they share their story.

Part of them will be uncertain about suicide. Some of that uncertainty will be clear to you; some of it will be less clear. Be patient in hearing them and when they are ready to receive your support to keep them safe, work with them to work on a plan to keep them safe. This may include slowly building up their ability to see who else they can have in their support network and what else they can do or not do to keep suicide-safe. The PAPYRUS website contains useful information on safety plans. A good Suicide-Safety Plan will always include a medical practitioner and another resource such as a helpline. You can find details of helplines in this guide.

Q: Do I have to share everything the child/young person told me? Do I need to share the reasons why they are thinking about suicide?

A: Confidentiality is not boundless. Make no promises to keep what they say as secret or 'just between us'. Be clear from the outset that you may need to get some help in keeping them suicide-safe. Make sure you keep informing the child you are supporting that you may need to share some information with other people in order to keep them suicide-safe. PAPYRUS would recommend that the child's parents and primary carers are informed of any concerns relating to the child's thoughts of suicide or suicidal behaviour.

Postvention

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prevention of young suicide

What do I do after a schoolchild's suicide?

Responding to a young suicide

Often the term **Postvention** is used to refer to care and support given after a suicide. The following statements may help you identify your own situation and what you might do in response:

"Q: I know that a child/young person from our school has taken their own life, what do I do now?"

A: Your school or college community should have a Suicide-Safety Policy that gives clear guidance about how to respond in the event of a suicide. Ideally, you and your colleagues will have been allocated a defined responsibility in the event of a suicide at your school. The roles include: leadership, family liaison and communication with external agencies, including the media. PAPYRUS hopes that you have been appropriately trained and supported to undertake your postvention role, and that you feel ready, willing and able to help. Hearing the tragic news that one of your schoolchildren has taken their life will bring up many different emotions for you, and this is likely to be a difficult time for you, and the entire school or college community, and beyond. You might be feeling upset, shocked, angry, guilty or numb – all of these responses are normal reactions to a traumatic event such as suicide. Ensure that you and your colleagues are looked after. It can be helpful to get support from professionals such as counsellors and therapists to talk about how you are feeling.

After liaising with the child's family, you should meet with your colleagues as soon as possible. Ensure all of the adults working in your school or college community are invited: the death of a schoolchild can affect everyone in the school or college community.

The leadership team should inform all colleagues of the child's apparent suicide. (It is only at an inquest that the coroner can conclude whether or not the death is a suicide. Before then, it might be helpful to say that the person appears to have died by suicide). If the facts are unclear, state that the cause of death is still being determined and will be shared at a later date.

As soon as possible, ensure that the school or college's administrators stop any standard communications with the family, such as sending school trip information home, to reduce unnecessary additional stress to the family of the child who has died.

How do I inform other students?

"Q: I know that a child/young person from our school has taken their own life, how do I tell the other schoolchildren?"

A: When you meet as a team, agreement should be reached on the words to be used to tell students about the death. Remember, it is only at an inquest that the coroner can conclude whether or not the death is a suicide. Before then, it might be helpful to say that the child appears to have died by suicide. If the facts are unclear, state that the cause of death is still being determined and will be shared at a later date.

It is essential that you and your colleagues communicate the same information to all students. Try to tell all your students at the same time to prevent some students receiving the news before others and then passing on the news to other children without support. You may decide to do this as small groups, year groups or classes.

It is essential that you do not talk about the method the child used to end their life. This can be unhelpful, unnecessary and dangerous. Talking about method can be speculative, it can intrude into grief and it can lead other vulnerable people to imitate the behaviour. You can be open with the children about why you won't engage in conversations about the method the child used to end their life; letting them know that it is unhelpful and that you want to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

You may decide to give children and staff time off to be with their families and guardians.

Schools should provide opportunities for children to express their emotions and identify strategies for managing them. You and your colleagues might not be the most appropriate people to facilitate this and you should engage professionals such as counsellors and therapists to further support students through their responses to the suicide. They will be able to provide more specialist support.

PAPYRUS can help you if you need support here. You can also access support from the organisations listed as members of the **Support After Suicide Partnership**: http://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/

It is important to debrief at the end of the day with your colleagues. Talk about how the day has gone, what went well, and what may have been difficult. You may want to raise concerns about some of the children and their responses so the whole team are aware. Checking in with your colleagues and talking about your experience of the day before you go home may help you to manage how you're feeling. You may want to begin looking at next steps together.

How can I support students at our school?

Q: How can I support my students after a suicide at our school?

A: Reassure your students that grief is a normal response to death, and there is no wrong or right way to grieve. It is important not to panic, but to acknowledge how your students are feeling – their pain and distress is a normal response to what has happened.

They might be feeling lots of different emotions, such as sadness, fear, anxiety, shock, guilt, and anger. Their distress might also manifest in their behaviour; they might be tearful, distressed, 'act out', be withdrawn or hyperactive. They may become very aware, perhaps for the first time, of their mortality and be scared of death.

You might also notice a decline in their performance at school, or they may demonstrate regressive behaviour (e.g. in eating/sleeping/personal hygiene).

It might seem strange to you that children who didn't know the child who suicided are distressed – this distress is sometimes referred to as 'disenfranchised grief' – a grief we feel we don't have a right too. Regardless of whether they had a relationship with the child who has died, their response is still real and painful for them. It is important to believe everyone's expression of grief and offer support.

If a schoolchild wants to talk, find a quiet place and listen whilst they talk or cry.

How are you feeling?

Would you like to go for a walk together?

This is so sad and awful. It is ok to be so upset/ confused/angry.

Is there anything I can do to help you?

We are all so sad and shocked. Would you like to tell me about how you're feeling?

I'm not sure what to say, but I'm here to listen.

I can't imagine what you are going through, but I wanted to let you know that I'm here if you'd like to talk.

It is hard to know what to say, isn't it? I am here if you want to talk.

I miss (name of the child who died)... how are you feeling?

How can I support students at our school?

> **Q: How can I support my students after a suicide at our school?**

Here are some examples of what not to say:

Avoid clichés such as:

- Life goes on
- Time heals everything
- They are at peace now

Avoid assuming the faith and beliefs of the child and their family:

- It was God's will
- They are in a better place
- They are looking down on you

Avoid assuming you understand how they are feeling, they may not understand how they feel:

- I know how you feel...

Avoid using judgemental statements, such as:

- they were selfish to do that
- they took the easy way out

As soon as possible you should seek support and guidance from professional organisations such as:

PAPYRUS Prevention of Young Suicide: **https://papyrus-uk.org/ 01925 572444**

Or member organisations within: **Support After Suicide Partnership: http://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/**

How should I communicate with the media?

When it feels appropriate, try to maintain a routine as much as possible – routines can provide a sense of stability during such a confusing and unstable time – whilst being mindful of individual children's specific needs. You and your colleagues will also need support and guidance during this time. Time and resources should be made available.
Be aware of your own grief and feelings. It is important to acknowledge that suicide can affect everyone throughout the school or college community and beyond. Ensure that there is support available for school staff as well as children at your school, and that they know how to access it.
You may need to organise some support from outside professionals who can provide counselling and therapy.

"Q: How should I communicate with the press and media after a suicide at our school?"

A: Whether we like it or not, suicide is news. Often the press and broadcast media will want to report on the suicide of a school child and they may contact the school directly or indirectly for comment, story and photographs of the child. The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO)'s Editors' Code of Practice and the Ofcom Broadcasting Code offer guidelines for the press and media to follow, which promote appropriate reporting of suicide.
However, you may find dealing with the press and media challenging and confusing at such a devastating time. Journalists are trained to get news, which can be intrusive. All media enquiries should be referred to the school press office or a nominated spokesperson.
It is important that other staff and students know they should not respond to journalists. It is important to have an approved prepared statement in order to control the way any response on behalf of the school is reported. It is also good practice to liaise with the deceased student's family.

How can our school appropriately remember a schoolchild?

Q: How can the school appropriately remember the child/young person who has apparently died by suicide?

A: It is important to remember someone who has died. It is also important not to pretend that something different has happened. However, there are some particular sensitivities here.

In the first instance, you should consult with the family regarding the child's funeral. If the family so wishes, you can then disseminate details of the funeral as appropriate. You may wish to arrange for flowers to be sent to the funeral, if this meets with the wishes of the child's family.

The child's family may help you determine what they are comfortable with in terms of remembering their son or daughter. However, you may need to give some guidance about the appropriateness of memorials.

They can often become more than they were intended to be: they can attract undue attention, some of which may be unwelcome and difficult to handle, especially online memorial sites.

Whilst it is important for the community to remember the child who has died, evidence suggests that such memorials can romanticise suicide, which can be dangerous for others who might be thinking about suicide. The more attention the site receives, the greater the risk of simulative acts on the part of other young people who may be particularly vulnerable. Our advice is to remember the young person at some form of assembly and discourage prolonged use of memorial sites.

How can I manage social media coverage?

Social media is an extremely popular way in which children and adults communicate and express themselves. Although the school cannot control what is said on social media, it can be helpful to release some guidelines after a suicide.

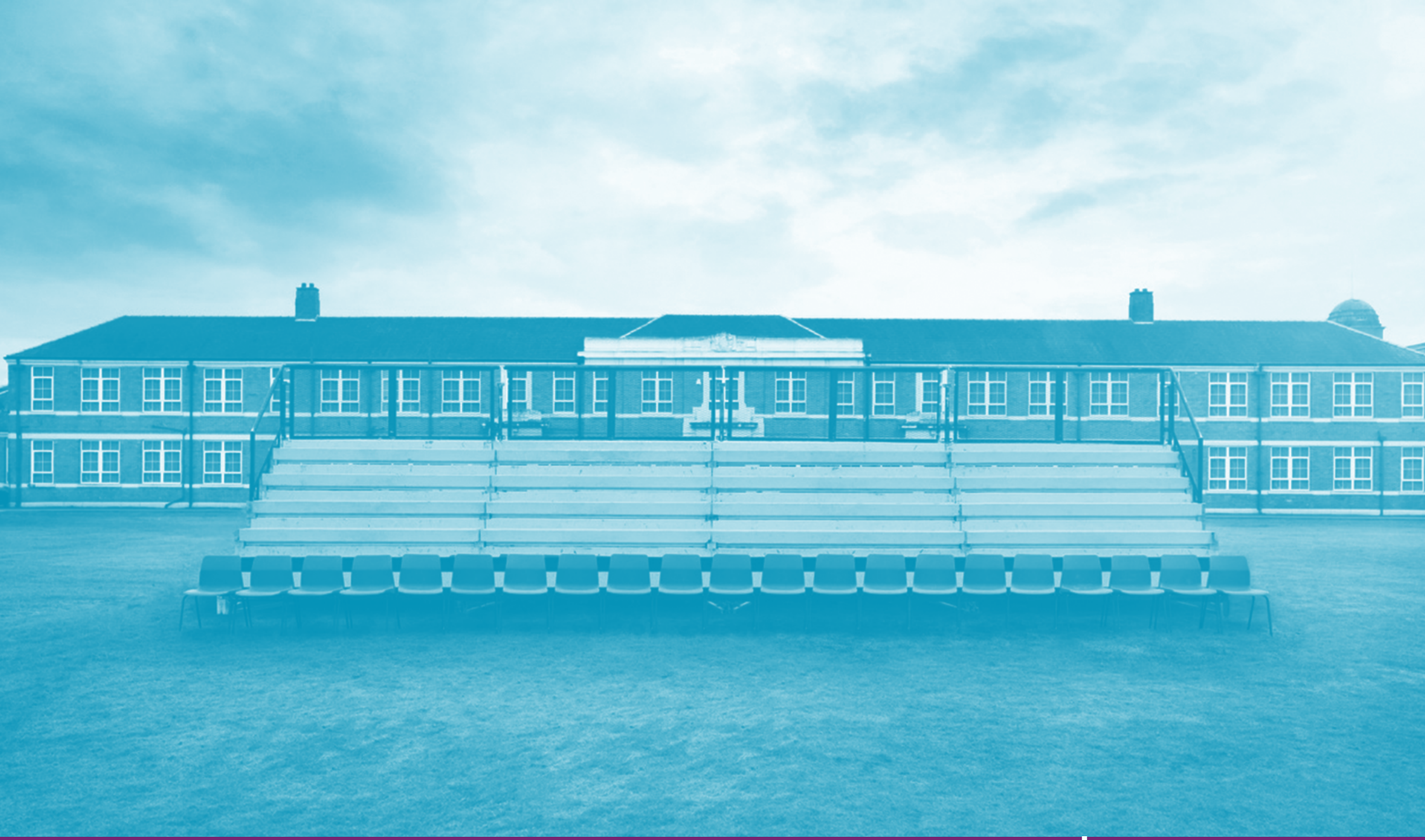
Try to discourage:

- Detail of suicide method used.
- Speculation about the location of the apparent suicide.
- Speculation about the reason for the suicide; there is never only one reason why a young person ends their life.
- Making the deceased appear heroic or brave or that the suicide was a solution to a problem.
- Endorsement of myths around suicide.

Try to encourage:

- Sharing of helpline services and support organisations.
- Sensitivity to the grief and feelings of families and friends who have been touched personally by a suicide death. These people are often at higher risk of suicide themselves.

You can also access our media guidelines via the PAPYRUS website.



Appendix

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Stay Connected

Thank you for reading this guide and being part of our campaign to save the **#ClassOf2018**. We would love to hear how your school or college has used this guide and how it has made a difference, as well as your feedback on what additional resources you may need to help build a suicide-safer community. PAPYRUS exists to give young people hope and to prevent young suicide. Here are some of the ways you can stay connected with PAPYRUS and join in our mission to save young lives.

15 ways to stay connected with PAPYRUS

1. **Become a member -** sign up on our website
2. **Support our campaigns -** find out more: **papyrus-uk.org/about/our-campaigns**
3. **Share our posts** on Facebook (@PAPYRUSUK) and Instagram (@papyrus_uk)
4. **Tweet us!** @PAPYRUS_tweets
5. **Help us** #saveyounglives by making a monthly donation
6. **Share your story -** contact our Press Office to explore
7. **Get involved** with suicide prevention in your community – download the 'Local suicide prevention planning' resource from our website
8. **Take part in #HOPEWalk2017** get in touch with our fundraising team!
9. **Check out our latest volunteering opportunities:** papyrus-uk.org/about/volunteer-for-papyrus
10. **Sign up** to receive our e-news and newsletter
11. **Use our online forum** to share and learn what others are doing in suicide prevention
12. **Buy literature and merchandise** from our online shop
13. **Get trained** in suicide first-aid by attending Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) with PAPYRUS
14. **Organise** a local fundraising event
15. **Promote** our helpline **HOPELineUK** in your community

Suicide is the biggest killer of young people – male and female – aged under 35 in the UK. Young suicide is everyone's business and we all have a role to play in preventing it.
There is help and hope. **HOPELineUK 0800 068 41 41**

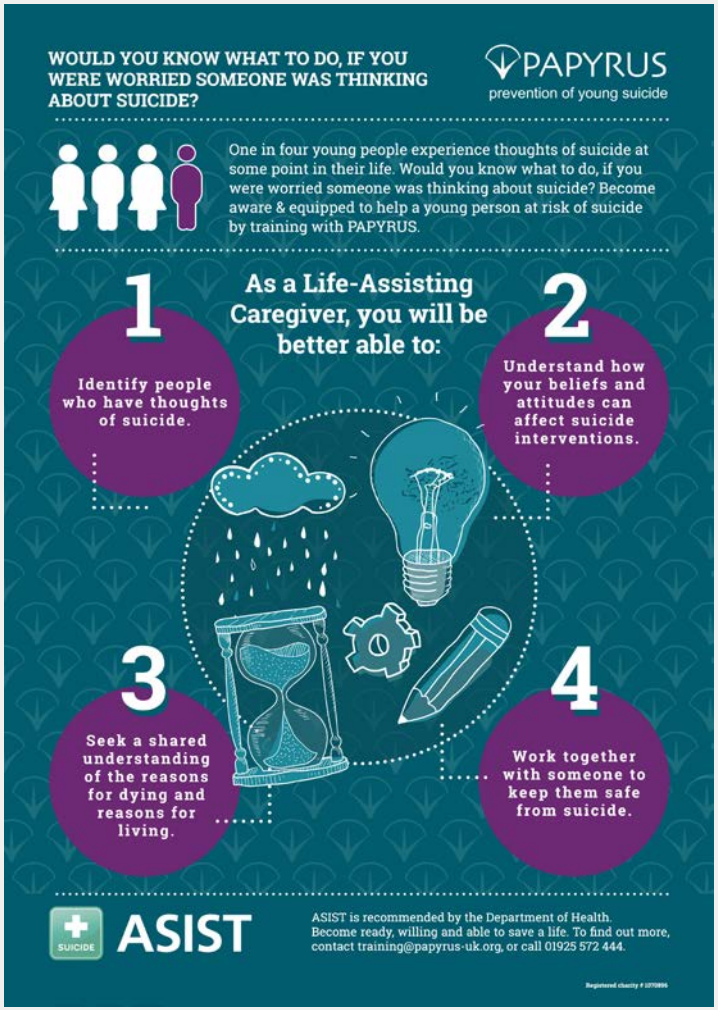
PAPYRUS Training: Learn suicide awareness, alertness, and intervention skills

Many people, regardless of experience, look for reassurance about how to help a child or young person who may be having suicidal thoughts. This help can range from identifying a person may be at risk, to having the confidence to ask about suicide, to responding appropriately and supporting someone effectively in order to keep them safe from suicide.

PAPYRUS works with a wide range of organisations and offers a number of training options to support you and your organisation:

- **Suicide Awareness Sessions:** A community-based talk to break down the stigma associated with suicide
- **ASIST:** Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training is an in-depth, two day course designed to build the skills to enable suicide first aid interventions
- **Bespoke training:** Tailor made for both individuals and groups, our bespoke training ranges from hour-long workshops to full day training packages based on your organisation's needs.

For more information, dates of upcoming training and to book, visit: www.papyrus-uk.org/training.



Design credit: Exposure Ninja

What people say about our training

> "I was brought up with suicide being a dirty word even after losing three siblings to it but now I feel stronger and confident about approaching the subject with family. Thank you"

> "It seems to me that this is a model which can be used by anyone. I now feel more confident about intervening in a suicide situation"

> "I hope that and wish that this training is provided to everyone working with young people and young people themselves"

> "This was an excellent course that has clarified for me how to react in situations where a young person is experiencing suicidal thoughts. It has given me far more confidence and reassured me that my approach is a positive one and not a damaging one"

Design credit: Exposure Ninja

How to Contact PAPYRUS Prevention of Young Suicide

Head Office
Lineva House, 28-32 Milner Street,
Warrington, Cheshire, WA5 1AD
Telephone: 01925 572 444
General Enquiries: admin@papyrus-uk.org

Training Enquiries
training@papyrus-uk.org

Fundraising Enquiries
fundraising@papyrus-uk.org

Press Office
For media enquiries, telephone:
020 8943 5343 or 07799 863 321
pressoffice@papyrus-uk.org

West Midlands Office
516-517 The Green House,
The Custard Factory, Gibb Street,
Birmingham, B9 4DP
Telephone: 0121 437 0411
westmidlands@papyrus-uk.org

London Office
30 Binney Street, London, W1K 5BW
london@papyrus-uk.org

National Helpline – PAPYRUS HOPELineUK
If you are a child or young person at risk of suicide or are worried about a child or young person at risk of suicide.
Call: 0800 068 41 41
Text: 07786 209 697
Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

Opening hours are 10am-10pm weekdays, 2pm-10pm weekends, and 2pm-5pm Bank Holidays.

Save The #ClassOf2018

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