

Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Suicide Prevention Steering Group

Suicide Prevention Guidance

August 2020

Introduction

This guidance has been produced by the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Suicide Prevention Steering Group¹. It is to help anyone supporting people during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nottingham City or Nottinghamshire County to feel more confident to talk to someone about suicide and details of key sources of support.

The guidance also provides information that can help you and others to support your own mental wellbeing, see the sections on 'looking after yourself' including the [Five Ways to Wellbeing](#) and 'signposting to support and services'.

Suicide prevention is everybody's business

Everyone has a role in preventing suicide.

If you are a **member of the public** this guidance has tips on how to talk to someone who you are worried may be feeling suicidal and details of services and support that you can signpost them to or help them to contact.

If you are supporting someone in your **professional role**, please use the guidance in this leaflet alongside your professional and organisational guidelines and procedures. Different staff groups will have different levels of responsibility in understanding and responding to risk. Always seek advice from a manager or safeguarding lead if in doubt.

If you are a **volunteer** and you are unsure about your role in supporting someone who is talking about suicide, it is important to check with your volunteer co-ordinator or support worker from the organisation or group you are working with.

Supporting someone who is suicidal

Recognising the signs

It's important we don't make assumptions about someone we suspect may (or may not be) having suicidal thoughts. Anyone can experience suicidal thoughts, but some things to be aware of when thinking about whether we should ask if someone is suicidal include:

- Recent "defeats" or loss of valued things in their life, for example the loss of a job or a relationship (**defeat**)
- The person is talking about feeling very hopeless, or that the future is dark (**hopelessness**)
- They've spoken about how they can't see a way that their situation will improve or change, or may feel like there's no point in trying (**feeling trapped/arrested flight**)

- They've mentioned that they think people, society, or the world would be better off if they weren't around (**burdensomeness**)
- They've said how they have nobody to turn to, how attempts to reach out for help have gone really badly, or there's nowhere they belong anymore (**thwarted belongingness**)
- They appear to be withdrawing from daily life (e.g. school, work, or social life), or seem to have a "mask" that they wear to hide their internal pain (**isolation**)
- They've spoken before about thinking/attempting suicide in the past under similar circumstances, or that they self-harm (**history/risk factor**)

Someone who's suicidal may show none of these things, and someone who is not suicidal may show several. So, as mentioned, we can't assume anything – the best thing to do is **ask**. There's not always one pivotal moment in someone's life that suddenly causes suicidal thoughts (although there can be); sometimes, it's "the straw that broke the camel's back", and a build-up of months or even years of distress that can cause someone to go into crisis.

Self-harm

It's important that we recognise that self-harm and suicide are often **not** the same thing. If someone says they are not having thoughts of suicide, this doesn't mean they are not self-harming; we should ask these questions separately and clearly. Self-harm **can** be a risk factor for suicide, however – so if we're in a position where we are finding ourselves thinking we should ask someone about suicide, we should also ask about self-harm even if the response to suicidal thoughts is a "no".

Self-harm is a behaviour – we should not equate the appearance of self-harm to a proportional emotional distress. For example, it can be dangerous if we think "oh, it's only a small amount of a self-harm" – we should always ask about reasons for self-harm, and what is happening for that person.

A "small" amount of self-harm does not automatically mean a "small" amount of distress.

Talking about suicide

Questions to ask

The following leaflets on the Notts Help Yourself website contain useful tips on talking to someone about suicide and self-harm: [It's safe to talk about suicide leaflet](#) and [It's okay to talk about self-harm leaflet](#)

Exploring causes and things that could help

If someone is struggling to convey how they're feeling, it's sometimes helpful to give them some guidance throughout the conversation. For example, exploring how they're feeling by:

- Having the confidence to ask directly, “Are you self-harming/thinking of suicide?”. This can help the person by allowing them to simply say “Yes”, rather than having the pressure on them to say it themselves the first time.
- Being as much of a “person” as you can be within your comfort, confidence and competency – you can often find out a lot if you simply have a conversation with the person rather than becoming very rigid and reading off a list of questions. While there are of course some things we need to ask to make sure the person is safe, the way we ask these questions is important.
- Consistent messages that they can get through this, with the right support. You may not always be the person who will provide that ongoing support, but you may be the person who gets them on the right path. This can involve their GP, third sector specialist services like Harmless/The Tomorrow Project, friends, family, or other people who can be there with the person longer-term. You can find out about support and services on page 5.
- Not reinforcing or insisting on support strategies that the person knows by experience don’t work for them or would be risky. For example, never encourage the person to do something by themselves if they know being alone is risky for them; try and see if there’s any scope to include a friend, family member, or someone else within the activity.
- Having some knowledge and understanding of what other services exist. A list of resources and services with some really experienced staff can be accessed here [ASKLION²](#) / [Notts Help Yourself³](#) to help with different things, like housing, finances or debts. Being able to provide and talk about alternatives that may address someone’s underlying distress may help. Suicidal thoughts aren’t always purely due to a mental health condition – sometimes, the prospect of there being someone able to help with e.g. mounting debts can help, if the stress of this is a key part of someone’s suicide crisis.
- Collaboratively coming up with appropriate things that could help once you understand why someone is thinking of suicide. If we signpost someone who’s about to lose their accommodation to a therapy service with a long waitlist, this may miss the crux of their immediate crisis; however, if we consider making a referral to a swift-response practical support service that can help with accommodation **and** a therapy service for separate mental health or emotional support, this may be a more appropriate avenue of support.

Listening

Sometimes, when someone *does* tell us they’re having suicidal thoughts, we feel we must give them all the answers, or we feel uncomfortable and try to divert the conversation and encourage them to “speak to a professional”. While this is important and it’s good to encourage people to speak to someone who can help them longer-term, remember that there’s a reason they chose to tell **you, now**.

Sometimes, it’s okay to sit and listen to someone’s struggles without having all the answers in that exact moment. For some, it may be the first time they’ve spoken about suicide out loud, and it’s vital that we give them the space to talk about this without being cut-off, interrupted, or told to go elsewhere (at least not immediately). It’s okay (and very important) to make a support plan to help someone, but an important step may be simply listening to their difficulties if they want

to share them. This is especially true if you've observed some of the things mentioned in "Recognising the Signs" above, like burdensomeness.

We can't give the right support if we don't know that person's perspective on their difficulties, and the only way to get this is by asking and listening to them. It's okay to ask someone to clarify what they mean if you are unsure – this will help you stay on the same page together. Depending on your role, your part may begin and end with listening to the person.

Language

Suicide is a very difficult thing to talk about, for many people. It's really key that we're not compounding any shame, guilt, or stigma when we talk about suicide. While this may come down to some of the explicit language we use (e.g. not using "commit" suicide, "self-harmer"), we should be mindful of the implicit messages we're sending if talking to someone who's suicidal. This means not belittling someone's situation (e.g. "You're only young, you have your life ahead of you"; "Just don't worry too much about it, you're overthinking it too much"; "What have you got to worry about?"). A "compassionately curious" approach may help, where you try and sit with the person and understand their perspective. Just as an example, as an adult, we may easily forget how stressful life can sometimes be for young people and allow that to colour our responses (e.g. "They're only exams, they don't mean anything in the grand scheme of things, don't worry about it").

What this may do, even if our intentions are good, is let the person know that others may think their reasons for thinking about suicide is "silly", "not enough", or that their worries won't be taken seriously. Over time if this happens a lot, this can contribute to the person not seeking support any more, because it may be pointless in their mind, and make them feel worse.

So, a compassionately curious approach would mean, instead, responding with empathy and interest in helping, for example "It really sounds like you've got a lot happening right now. Thank you for telling me how worried you are about your exams/home situation/etc. Maybe we can talk about what parts of the situation are really getting on top of you?"

Messages of hope are important, while also not overpromising on what you feel able to do. For example, don't flat-out promise to keep everything between you both – if the person, for example, says they feel they may do something to act on their suicidal thoughts (or if you have any doubts or reservations), this is not something you should keep between you.

Sometimes, it's a balance of hopeful messaging while not undercutting what the person has said and its importance. For example, "You mentioned earlier that one of the biggest reasons you've been thinking about suicide is that you feel worthless because you're struggling to find a job right now, and that you're struggling financially because of that. It sounds like finding a job would be really valuable for you right now, both for your wellbeing and your finances? I'm wondering if there's something we can do to help; there's a service I know of that helps with employment – if you like, we could give them a call together now just to get some more information about their service and how they work, then talk about it and see if it sounds right to you? You don't have to do anything today if you don't want to – you can take your own time to look them up afterwards, if that helps". This shows willingness to be on the person's side to help them where you can, while also recognising that there are a variety of options that can support the person holistically.

It gives the person the option to do something now without the pressure of feeling obligated, if they don't feel ready or able to get that support immediately.

It's important not to be frustrated if they decide to not immediately take this option, as the person may have their own reasons for feeling apprehensive to get that support (e.g. a negative previous experience) – this, again, opens up an avenue for understanding why the person is thinking about suicide, and collaboratively thinking of ways to get through any barriers they are facing in a way that's not too jarring or uncomfortable for them.

Sometimes, it helps to tackle a problem with that person right then and there – this can be as relatively simple as helping them to call their GP to make an appointment that they've been apprehensive to make.

Safeguarding

It is the responsibility of each organisation to have its own internal safeguarding procedures. These should reflect the **Adults and Children's** Nottingham and Nottinghamshire multi-agency safeguarding procedures. Internal procedures should detail nominated staff who are trained to take on the role of making safeguarding referrals. All staff are responsible for raising a concern and in some instances the person raising the concern will also be the person responsible for making a safeguarding referral⁴.

For guidance and safeguarding referral routes, for professionals and members of the public, access the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire safeguarding procedures via one of the links below.

Adults Safeguarding

Nottinghamshire County: [Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub \(MASH\)](#)

Nottingham City: [Adult Safeguarding Procedures and Guidance](#)

Children and Young People Safeguarding

Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County [Interagency Safeguarding Children Procedures](#)

Signposting to support and services

Sources of support

During the COVID-19 pandemic services are still operating and available to anyone who needs help.

There are many sources of support that you could suggest a person who is experiencing suicidal thoughts or feelings could contact. These include:

Help from NHS services...

- The person could **talk to their GP**. GP practices are still open and can offer appointments by 'phone or video call.
- Anyone who needs emotional support or information about what help is available locally for people struggling with their mental health can call the **Nottinghamshire Mental Health Helpline** on 0300 555 0730 9am-11pm 7 days a week, <https://www.turning-point.co.uk/services/nottingham-helpline>.
- If the person is in need of urgent care but their situation is not life-threatening they can ring **NHS 111** (open 24 hours every day)
- Local people who need immediate help can now receive support 24/7 by calling the new Nottingham and **Nottinghamshire Mental Health Crisis Helpline 0808 196 3779**, 24 hours a day, seven days a

week. The line is open to people of all ages who live in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. The crisis line is operated by local health workers, who will help callers to get the right support.

- If the person has injured themselves seriously or has tried to end their life (for example by taking an overdose) encourage them to **call 999** for an ambulance or call on their behalf.

Other services and support...

- **Harmless – support for self-harm.** Practical and emotional support, or long/short-term therapy. Based in Nottinghamshire - Referral line 0115 880 0280, or info@harmless.org.uk
- **The Tomorrow Project – support for suicidal thoughts/crisis.** Short-term practical and emotional support, based in Nottinghamshire - Referral line 0115 880 0280, or crisis@tomorrowproject.org.uk
- **The Tomorrow Project – support for people who've been exposed to suicide** (friends, family members, colleagues, professionals, members of the public – anyone). Referral line 0115 880 0280, or bereavement@tomorrowproject.org.uk
- **Text SHOUT** to 85258 (available 24/7). Shout is a 24/7 UK crisis text service available for times when people feel they need immediate support.

By texting 'SHOUT' to '85258' a Texter will be put in touch with a trained Crisis Volunteer (CV) who will chat to them using trained techniques via text. The service is designed to help individuals to think more clearly and to take their next steps to feeling better.

- **Samaritans, 24/7** – Whatever you're going through, a Samaritan will face it with you, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Call 116 123
- **CALM** – Campaign Against Living Miserably run a free and confidential helpline and webchat <https://www.thecalmzone.net/help/get-help/> – 7 hours a day, 7 days a week for anyone who needs to talk. CALM challenges stereotypes and stigma, particularly for men and LGBTQ+ who may be struggling with life.
- **The Mix** support service for **children and young people.** at <https://www.themix.org.uk/get-support> (Phone, webchat, or email service for those aged 25 or under). Coronavirus: Tips & Information for young people <https://www.themix.org.uk/coronavirus-support>
- **HopelineUK for children and young people** - <https://papyrus-uk.org/hopelineuk/> If you are having thoughts of suicide or are concerned for a young person who might be you can contact HOPELINEUK for confidential support and practical advice.

Call: 0800 068 4141

Text: 07860039967

Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

9am – 10pm weekdays, 2pm – 10pm weekends, 2pm – 10pm bank holidays

- The **Grief Line** – A dedicated service for those who need immediate support following bereavement CALL 0800 111 4451, lines open 8am to 8pm every day and answerphone out of hours.
- **RABI, Supporting Farming Families.** The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution offer financial support, practical care and guidance to farming people of all ages, including farmers, farmworkers and dependants <https://rabi.org.uk/need-help/>. RABI can also offer support for farming people to ease stress or anxiety via a free helpline 0808 281 9490.

If it is an emergency and immediate help is required, contact the emergency services on 999.

Stay Alive App⁵. The free Stay Alive app is a suicide prevention resource for the UK, packed full of useful information and tools to help you stay safe in crisis. You can use it if you are having thoughts of suicide or if you are concerned about someone else who may be considering suicide.

The app also includes a safety plan, customisable reasons for living, and a LifeBox where you can store photos and memories that are important to you. There are strategies for staying safe and tips on how to stay grounded when you're feeling overwhelmed. There are guided-breathing exercises and you can create your own interactive Wellness Plan.

To find out more and to download the app visit: [Stay alive app](#)

Comprehensive lists of sources of Mental Health Support in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire for adults and children and young people are available on ASKLiON⁶: [COVID19 Mental Health Support](#)

Training

There are a range of Zoom and online training opportunities available including training for anyone volunteering in the community. These include:

- **Harmless Mental Health and Suicide Prevention awareness half and full day CPD accredited training modules**, commissioned by Nottinghamshire County Council and available free to community, voluntary and third sector workers in Nottinghamshire County. Book via [Harmless Let's Talk Training](#). For more information or advice on the courses being delivered please speak to a member of the Let's Talk Training team: training@harmless.org.uk

- **Health Education England 60 minutes online training *We need to talk about suicide***.

This online course takes 60-90 minutes to complete and is for anyone who regularly comes into contact with members of the public, to help them to become more confident about having a conversation with someone who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts or feelings.

- **The Zero Suicide Alliance** offers a range of [online awareness training](#) options, which provide a better understanding of the signs to look out for and the skills required to approach someone who is struggling, whether that be through social isolation or suicidal thoughts.
- **SHARP** - SHARP offer suicide prevention and self harm training to front-line professionals who work with children and young people who reside in Nottingham City. They are offering free 80 minute webinar workshops. For more information e-mail camhs.sharp@nottinghamcity.gov.uk.

Looking after yourself

Five ways to wellbeing

The Five Ways to Wellbeing are widely known and recognised in the UK. They are evidence based and aim to improve the mental health and wellbeing of anyone who practices them⁷

The Five Ways to Wellbeing are:



Suggestions on how to implement the Five Ways to Wellbeing during physical distancing can be found here [Five Ways to Wellbeing during Coronavirus restrictions](#)

The Children’s Society Five Ways to Wellbeing for Children and Young People⁸ – The lives of children and young people have been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This can affect their physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. This booklet from the Children’s Society is based on interviews with thousands of children about what makes them happy with their lives. It is not COVID specific, but the ideas can be adapted to keep safe during physical distancing. [How to support your child's wellbeing](#)

Every Mind Matters Having good mental health helps us relax more, achieve more and enjoy our lives more. For advice and practical tips to help you look after your mental health and wellbeing visit [Every Mind Matters](#)

Looking after yourself at work

Don’t leave work at the end of the day with any doubts or fears. If you’ve spoken to someone who may be suicidal that day, it’s important you have that constant open line of communication with colleagues/supervisors/managers/safeguarding leads not only to hand-over and ensure the person is safe, but also to get support for yourself. When leaving work, you want to leave knowing you’ve done everything you can, not doubting yourself and being restless all evening until you come into work again.

Don’t bottle up, ignore or avoid any difficult feelings you might have for too long. It’s okay to feel upset, tearful, stressed, or anything else after you’ve supported someone with suicidal thoughts. Burn-out and stress are very real concerns in any field of mental health or suicide prevention, and reliance on your own coping skills and colleagues is essential to maintain a work-life balance in this area.

It’s very easy to think to yourself “what if...?” and “did I do this right...?” or otherwise find yourself doubting your skills or abilities. Practice reflection and self-questioning techniques throughout your role with the support of your supervisor – this is a valuable skill to build your confidence and competence in suicide prevention.

Treat yourself with the kindness and compassion. If you’re being harsh to yourself in your mind, think to yourself – how would you respond to yourself in this situation, if you were a service user? Hopefully, you would be kind and compassionate and realise you may be being too hard on yourself.

For the most up to date copy of this guidance please visit:

www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/suicide



**Nottinghamshire
County Council**



**Nottingham
City Council**

References and acknowledgements

- ¹ **Acknowledgement:** The Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Suicide Prevention Steering Group have based the format and some content of this leaflet on the [‘Suicide prevention: Guidance for frontline workers and volunteers’](#) leaflet produced by Leeds City Council.
- ² ASKLION <https://www.asklion.co.uk/kb5/nottingham/directory/home.page>
- ³ Notts Help Yourself <https://www.nottshelpyourself.org.uk/kb5/nottinghamshire/directory/home.page>
- ⁴ Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Procedures <https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/media/1502/safeguarding-vulnerable-adults-procedure-for-raising-a-concern-and-referring.pdf> p13
- ⁵ Grassroots, prevention suicide together <https://www.prevent-suicide.org.uk/find-help-now/stay-alive-app/>
- ⁶ COVID-19 Mental Health Support https://www.asklion.co.uk/kb5/nottingham/directory/advice.page?id=fvGQCJXp_WY
- ⁷ Diverse Minds UK <https://diverse minds.co.uk/five-ways-to-wellbeing-during-coronavirus/>
- ⁸ The Children’s Society, How to look after your child’s wellbeing https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/TCS_FIVE_WAYS_TO_WELLBEING_CHILDREN.pdf

Additional resources not referenced in this guidance

Five Ways to Wellbeing at Work Toolkit

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/5-ways-toolkit/Five-Ways-to-Wellbeing-at-Worknew.pdf#:~:text=The%20Five%20Ways%20to%20Wellbeing%20%28Connect%20Be%20Active%2C,can%20also%20support%20workplaces%20to%20meet%20their%20health>