

Guidance for frontline workers and volunteers: Supporting young people with their mental health

Starting difficult conversations

Firstly, ask open questions to encourage young people to talk.

1. Have you had thoughts about suicide or harming yourself? Other useful questions you might ask them include:
 - What happened about...?
 - Tell me about...
 - How do you feel about...?
2. Repeat back what they say to show you understand and ask more questions.
3. Has something happened to make you feel this way?
4. Focus on their feelings instead of trying to solve the problem – it can be of more help. Distinguish between suicidal thoughts and how the person feels. Suggested questions include:
 - How did that feel?
 - How are you feeling today?
 - How did that make you feel at the time?
5. It is normal to want to try and fix a young person's problems or give them advice. Try and let them make their own decisions but reassure them and show support.
6. Are there things around the young person that make them feel unsafe? Do you need to speak to someone for some help?

Secondly, check that they know where to get help.

1. Useful questions you might ask them include:
 - What has helped you in the past? What didn't help or made things worse?
 - Do you think about getting some help?
 - Would you like me to come with you?
2. If the young person feels they cannot stay safe, who can they tell? Questions at this point might be:
 - Who do you trust?
 - Is there anyone who has helped or supported you in a positive way in the past in relation to a similar challenge you have faced?
3. If you say something that appears to cause more upset, don't panic.
4. If the young person needs help, who can they ring? Useful questions you might ask them include:
 - Can you ring a friend?
 - Can you ring a family member?
 - You mentioned you could trust 'X' earlier, could you call them?
 - Could you ring a helpline?

First point of contact

The first point of contact for any child aged between the ages of 0 and 19 years old should be via the **Thriving Kirklees** number **0300 304 5555**, which is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Here, there is access to the Health Visiting and School Nursing Team, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Children's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service, Assessment and Diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Conditions, Home Start Kirklees, Healthy Start Vitamins, Safety in the Home, and Safety Rangers.

There is also:

- **ChatHealth** – Thriving Kirklees' text messaging service for children and young people (11-19) 07520 618866 and parents/carers 07520 618867
- **Kooth** – anonymous, online counselling and support service for children and young people www.kooth.com

How can you help?

Step 1: Ask them directly about thoughts of suicide

- Break the silence around suicide, make it feel ok for young people to talk about suicide by using the word 'suicide'
- Make yourself approachable so the young person feels they can talk to you
- Use the advice above as a guide to talking about suicide

If the person you are speaking with is verbalising intent to use a known lethal means to take their own life and has possession of such means, staff may have the opportunity to remove items from the person's possession. However they may be apprehensive about doing so due to a lack of clarity in respect of what they can do legally in such situations.

In order to help you navigate these difficult decisions and feel confident in defending your actions afterwards. **The Statement of Principle** states:

It is lawful:

1. To remove, with the individual's agreement, items the person may use to self-injure or risk death at some point.
2. To remove (without the individual's agreement) items staff reasonably believe the individual may use to self-injure or risk death; where staff believe there is an immediate risk of serious self-injury, death or risk to others and it is necessary and proportionate to remove the items to avoid potential catastrophic outcome.

Step 2: Listen! Show you are listening by repeating back what the person has said to you

- Be patient – it can be difficult for young people to express what's going on for them.
- Don't rush them, give them the time and space to tell you how they are feeling.
- Listen to what they have to say and allow them to speak freely.

Step 3: Reassure and show your support

- Tell them you are there for them. For many people, experiencing thoughts of suicide can be a really lonely and isolating experience.
- Connecting with people who care can be a protective factor – so it's really important to show your support.
- Thank them for being honest and open about their thoughts
- You may never fully understand why the person is experiencing thoughts of suicide but it's important to reflect back to them that you recognise they are hurting so that they don't feel alone.

Step 4: Getting the person help – don't panic!

- Thoughts of suicide don't have to end in suicide
- You need to ask yourself: is the young person willing and able to engage with support? What kind of help do you think would be most useful for them?
- Can you support the young person to make an appointment with their GP?
- The most important thing to remember: if you ever feel that someone is at immediate risk of suicide, you can contact the emergency services on 999.

Key Tip

DON'T

- Assume you know
- Try to make their problems seem smaller
- Tell them it's just a phase
- Panic
- Tell them they have so much to live for