



A GUIDE TO SUICIDE RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT FOR HOMELESS HOSTEL STAFF

'While people from all sections of the population experience suicidal thoughts and feelings and die by suicide, people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are at particular risk'

Suicide prevention Guidance for homelessness services, 2017

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Enabling Assessment
Service London



A route out of homelessness

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Introduction

Suicide is a major public health issue. It can in many cases be prevented. Suicide needs to be tackled strategically by local areas in the form of suicide prevention action plans, which should inform how local organisations understand, address and mitigate the risk of suicide.

It is important that staff working for organisations that support homeless people who are at higher risk of suicide understand when and how a person is at risk of suicide, and can tap into organisational awareness and protocols to respond appropriately.

- **Policy document/guidance** – does your organisation have a policy and/ or protocols to reduce the risk of suicide?
- **Knowledge and training** – are you aware of what these are? Is this an area you need to discuss with your team? Might there be a need for training?

Reducing the risk of suicide

Suicidal thoughts do not inevitably lead to suicide. Suicide is best understood as an interplay between a range of risk factors across psychological, social, and biological domains. The risk factors can include though are not limited to:

- Past psychiatric history
 - Depressive and other psychiatric symptoms
 - History of alcohol and illicit drug use
 - Previous self-harm or suicide attempts
 - Age, gender, social situation
 - Relationship which pose a threat (abuse or neglect)
 - Recent changes to relationships or social situation
 - Access to lethal methods
- *Can you think of other risk factors?*

Warning signs	Protective factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressing suicidal feelings • Putting affairs in order • Depression or other psychiatric disorders • Unemployment/ poverty/ social circumstances • Past suicide attempt and/ or self harm. • History of suicide in family • Increased alcohol/ drug use • Life events: relationship breakdown/ bereavement/ anniversaries <p>➤ <i>What other warning signs can you think of?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressing hope that things may get better in the future • Not wanting to cause pain and distress for friends and family • Religious beliefs • Having a supportive network <p>➤ Does the person have strengths/ resources? (which they may find hard to identify)</p>

Red flags

- Feelings of hopelessness, 'who would care if I wasn't here?'
 - Thought through suicide plan showing intent
 - Giving away valuable possessions
 - Social isolation/ lack of support
 - Chronic medical illness/ pain
- *Can you think of any other red flags?*

Assessment

What to do if a hostel guest comes across as being suicidal

Have a listen to this short video :

[Ask, Tell - Have a Healthy Conversation on Vimeo](#) (4 min 24 seconds)

- Listen
 - Show interest and support (ask open questions)
 - Give them space to talk and encourage them to say more about how they feel, 'could you say a little more about that?'
 - Resist the urge to fill any silences which may unintentionally shut them down
 - Ask them if they are feeling suicidal (as a lead up question you could ask them about their thoughts for the future).
 - Name the suicidal feelings
 - Be non-judgemental and try not to minimise their feelings
 - Offer empathy
 - Identify with them protective factors & reasons not to end their lives (they may have lost sight of these)
 - Consider together their strengths and assets (they may not recognise these)
 - Offer hope that alternatives are available (even if they can't see them at the moment)
 - Express concern about their safety
 - Do not make decisions for them, but rather include them in decision making and making a safety plan
- How could you offer empathy?

Co-creating a Safety Plan

The aim here is to enable the person to come up with their own reasons for living.

- Actions or strategies to help resist suicidal thoughts
- Help them to explore protective factors
- Names of supportive family and friends
- Find out about professional support
- Explore voluntary support organisations they may have used before or would consider using now
- Identify out of hours crisis support that is available if required (are they known to a community mental health team or if not is there a Single Point of Access ?)
- Agreed actions to take when suicidal thoughts become stronger and/ or more persistent
- Reduce/ stop (in accordance with a clinical plan if they have one) alcohol and illicit substances.

[SafetyPlan.pdf \(getselfhelp.co.uk\)](#)

Formulating a risk management plan:

Assessing risk with the person informs your risk management plan

- Working with the person, identify the suicide risk and try to establish the triggers; if they've made a plan to kill themselves, if they have means to act on suicidal thoughts & any other risk factors.
- Explore with them what level of risk is acceptable for the person to take? (be alert to any impulse you may have to take responsibility for everything, remember you want to foster a collaborative approach which recognises the person's agency, strengths etc)

- Agree who is responsible for what.
- Agree who will the plan be shared with? (see confidentiality below)
- Consider how you will leave the person and who they will next have contact with.
- Agree what happens next and when the plan will be reviewed (all plans are time limited so be specific about this in your recording).

Who can I share risk information with?

It is important to remind the person that you work for **Glass Door**, and that you will need to let shift colleagues and your manager know about how the person is feeling and their suicidal risk. Be specific about who you will share the information with ie you are not going to share it with the cleaning staff for example, and the reasons you need to do this.

'Effective information-sharing is built on the recognition that the law allows information to be requested and shared, proportionately, when necessary to safeguard the wellbeing of an adult at risk (Data Protection Act 2018).'

'Adult Safeguarding and Homelessness, a briefing on positive practice' (2020)

[Confidentiality-factsheet.pdf](#)

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Aftermath & Self-care

Supporting someone who feels suicidal can be an intense and overwhelming experience, speak to a senior/ manager in the organisation after you have offered support to the guest who is feeling suicidal. Remember even if you were alone with the person at the time they disclosed how they were feeling, you are responding to the crisis not as a lone worker but as someone who works for an organisation that has a duty of care to the person (and also to you as an employee).

It is important that you raise what happened in supervision and acknowledge how you were left feeling after the event. In addition, consider bringing it up in a team reflective space, remember this is also a way of modelling good practice as you demonstrate to colleagues that being open about the emotional toll of the work is an important part of looking after yourself and the wellbeing of others in the team.

You may also want to consider further support for yourself through staff wellbeing channels, which you could discuss with your manager.

- *Can you think of other ways you can support yourself emotionally – short term and long term - after you come away from talking to a person who is feeling suicidal?*

Resources & support organisations

Suicide prevention Guidance for homelessness services, 2017
[Suicide prevention in homelessness services DRAFT](#)

Samaritans (24/7) Tel: 116 123 or www.samaritans.org

PAPYRUS - www.papyrus-uk.org (support for young people)

HOPELine UK Tel: 0800 068 41 41 is a confidential support and advice service for young people, under the age of 35.

Safety Plan. Available from: [SafetyPlan.pdf \(getselfhelp.co.uk\)](#)

Stay Alive Tool to Stay Safe from Suicide. An online suicide prevention resource, which is freely available to access at #StayAlive or via the website below
[Stay Alive App - Grassroots Suicide Prevention \(prevent-suicide.org.uk\)](#)

[Suicidal thoughts - How to support someone \(rethink.org\)](#)

- *Do you know of other resources that you can add here and share with colleagues?*

References

Adult Safeguarding and Homelessness, a briefing on positive practice, 2020.
Available from: [Adult safeguarding and homelessness: a briefing on positive practice | Local Government Association](#)

A Guide to Suicide Risk Assessment and Management in Primary Care.
Available from: <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/1517753/suicide-risk-assessment-in-primary-care.pdf>

'Ask, Tell, Have a Healthy Conversation' (NHS Education for Scotland)
[Ask, Tell - Have a Healthy Conversation on Vimeo.](#)

Confidentiality, factsheet. Rethink. Available from: [confidentiality-factsheet.pdf](#)

Supporting Someone with Suicidal Thoughts. 2020.
Available from: [Supporting someone with suicidal thoughts - Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust \(tevw.nhs.uk\)](#)



Understanding and Preventing Suicide: a psychological perspective, 2017. The British Psychological Society. Available from: [Understanding and preventing suicide - a psychological perspective.pdf \(bps.org.uk\)](https://www.bps.org.uk/understanding-and-preventing-suicide-a-psychological-perspective.pdf)