

Salendine Nook High School (Academy)

Response Plan for Suicide of a Student (Non-Statutory)

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Context

Nobody likes to think about a death in school. Yet suicide is a leading cause of death for young people in the UK and ROI. Sadly, it is always a possibility that a student, parent or member of staff might take their own life. However upsetting this must be, schools and other educational institutions play an important role in reducing the likelihood of copycat behaviour and helping recovery by preparing and responding to the situation appropriately.

The key to coping with a crisis is to plan. It is particularly important that the school responds to a suspected suicide within 48 hours. This is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school routine, while facilitating the expression of grief, and reducing the risk of imitative behaviour. Schools with crisis plans in place are best equipped to deal with a suspected suicide when it happens. Good planning for the aftermath of a suspected suicide makes it easier for people to respond effectively at a time when resilience may be low.

Key contacts

Role	Name	Contact number	Email
Designated Safeguarding Lead	Sam Johnson	07508374066 01484657541	sj@snhs.kirklees.sch.uk
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead	Simone Wilson	01484 657541 07507 980086	slw@snhs.kirklees.sch.uk
Principal	Darren Christian	01484657541 07717822283	dc@snhs.kirklees.sch.uk
Pastoral Mentor	Rebecca Hunte	01484 657541	rkh@snhs.kirklees.sch.uk
Welfare Officer	Carolyn Walker	01484 657541	cw@snhs.kirklees.sch.uk

1. Breaking the News

- Establish the facts before acting on news of a suspected suicide.
- The Principal/DSL will contact the police or the family as soon as possible to confirm the death and whether or not it is being treated as suicide.
- The Principal/DSL will collect any siblings in school to break the news with parents/carers before informing the rest of the school community.
- Be aware that it is likely to be many months before an inquest is held, and that in many cases narrative verdicts may mean that the death is not officially recorded as suicide.
- It is important to note that there may be a great deal of speculation within the school community, and SNHS will have to act on the basis that the death is being treated as a suspected suicide.
- The Principal will notify the local authority incident management team.
- It is important to act quickly, while at the same time preparing the school leadership team and administration for continuous enquiries once the death is made known.
- Breaking the news to young people can be extremely difficult.
- The Principal will tell staff first and give them time to take in the news before addressing students.
- Make sure that staff know where and to whom they can turn for emotional support.
- Best practice suggests that, where possible, it is better to break the news to students in small groups or classes.
- When breaking the news, it is important to be factual but to avoid excessive detail about the suicidal act itself.
- Rumours may be circulating and people may ask directly, but try not to disclose details about the method used, whether there was a suicide note, or its contents.
- The Principal will prepare a statement for staff to use to ensure consistency across the school.
- Immediate counselling or emotional support for students and staff at the school will be available.
- Try to strike a balance between sensitivity to those who are grieving and in shock, on the one hand, and the need to maintain the school routine, on the other.
- It may be helpful to set aside a room where students can go if they are upset. This will be dependent on the number of students effected.

2. Handling the media

The Principal will be the appointed single media spokesperson for the school. Students and staff are discouraged from making public comments. The Principal will prepare a statement for the media, and will not deviate from it.

3. Contacting the School Community

3.1 Parents/carers, Governors and all staff need to know:

- In brief what has happened (see 'Breaking the news' on page 8).
- What support the school is putting in place.
- What actions the school will take with regards to supporting funerals and memorials.
- Where to find further information about suicide and grief.
- Where to access support for themselves.
- What to do if they are worried about someone else.

3.2 Information provided to the school community in the immediate aftermath of a suspected suicide should include and reinforce:

- facts (not rumours);
- an understanding that death is permanent;
- an exploration of normal and wide-ranging reactions to suicide (expressions of anger and guilt are entirely normal);
- an understanding that, with support, people can cope;
- an understanding that fleeting thoughts of suicide are not unusual;
- an awareness of suicidal warning signs and resources available to help;
- an understanding of funeral expectations.

3.3 When discussing any suspected suicide that has occurred, it is strongly recommended that the information given:

- is factually correct but does not include detail of the cause of death or method used; does not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death;
- does not include details of any suicide note;
- does not include speculation over the motive for suicide.

4. Identifying & Supporting Vulnerable Students

Those affected by suicide are themselves at increased risk of serious upset and may potentially be at greater risk of taking their own life.

The relevant Head of Year & school staff will be asked to identify any young people who are vulnerable, and efforts should be made to provide additional support or referral to specialist services.

Suicide is a complex issue, usually with no single cause, and it is therefore not possible to generalise. However, there is some evidence to suggest that people who have previously experienced bereavement or undergone a personal crisis, people with mental health problems, and people in marginal groups may be more vulnerable. Teachers who know the students best should be alert to any students who are excessively upset or disturbed by the death. These young people should be offered appropriate support without delay.

5. Starting difficult conversations

- 5.1 If staff are worried about a young person, it is important to try to get them to talk to you.

Often people want to talk, but won't speak until someone asks how they are.

Try asking open questions, like

- 'What happened about...'
- 'Tell me about...'
- 'How do you feel about...'

- 5.2 Repeat back what they say to show you understand and ask more questions. Focus on their feelings instead of trying to solve the problem - it can be of more help and shows you care. Respect what they tell you. Sometimes it's easy to want to try and fix a young person's problems or give them advice. Try and let them make their own decisions.

Find a good time and place.

- 5.3 Ask gentle questions and listen with care. Ask them how they feel.

If you're gentle and calm, it's ok to bring up the subject of self-harm or suicide. The more open the question the better. Questions that help someone talk through their problems instead of being able to say 'yes' or 'no' are the most useful.

Questions such as:

- When – 'When did you realise?'
- Where – 'Where did that happen?'
- What – 'What else happened?'
- How – 'How did that feel?'
- Why – be careful with this one as it can make someone defensive.
- 'What made you choose that?'
- 'What were you thinking about at the time?' are more effective.

- 5.4 Check that they know where to get help

Useful questions you might ask them include:

- 'Who else have you talked to about this?'
- 'What do you think about getting some help?'
- 'Would you like me to come with you?'

6. Memorials

This is a difficult issue that needs to be carefully managed, taking account of the wide range of feelings that are likely to be displayed.

It is natural to want to pay tribute to those who have died. However, it is important not to sensationalise or glamorise suicide as that may act as a trigger for anyone who is deeply affected.

The Principal will set a time limit for memorials (about two weeks) and may offer to forward cards and other tribute material to the family afterwards. Permanent memorials following a suspected suicide are generally to be discouraged.

Schools cannot control online memorials and other social networking activity following a suspected suicide. However, students should be warned about the risks of online memorials – their comments may become public/published without their permission, online memorials can attract negative and hurtful comment and anything that romanticises suicide can be harmful to those who are vulnerable.

SNHS may establish an online memorial on the school website, which we can moderate and remove after an agreed time.

7. Funerals

The Principal will determine which members of staff are to attend the funeral.

Where practical parents or guardians should accompany students who want to attend.

Parental permission must be sought for those children who wish to attend the funeral.

Those who do not attend should have normal classes to go to.

8. Responding to suspected suicide

It can take many months for an inquest to be held, and in many cases unexplained deaths are not given a verdict of suicide.

Schools and authorities often have to act on whether an unexplained death is being treated as suicide.

In some cases, where there is an ongoing investigation or where the family does not want the cause of death to be disclosed (or reported as suicide), it can be challenging for a school to decide how to proceed.

In this situation, SNHS will state that the nature and cause of death are still being determined and that additional information will be forthcoming.

Acknowledge that there are rumours (which are often inaccurate), and remind students that rumours can be deeply hurtful, distressing and unfair to the deceased person, their family and their friends.

If there is an ongoing investigation, schools should check with local police before speaking about the death with students who may need to be interviewed by the authorities.

9. Responding to attempted suicide

It is imperative that anyone who has attempted suicide is appropriately referred to and cared for by mental health professionals.

Mental health professionals will be able to work alongside the school in the following key areas:

- Planning support for a student who has attempted suicide.
- Helping meet the immediate counselling needs of affected students.
- Identifying other vulnerable young people.

If a school is informed of an attempted suicide that took place away from the school or the attempt occurred without the awareness of other students, there is a small possibility that the spread of information may be contained.

If complete containment of information is a real possibility, it should be discussed with the family as soon as possible. In such circumstances, any communication with staff, students and parents will be on a 'need to know basis' only, in consultation with the young person, their family and appropriate mental health professionals.

If the details of the attempted suicide are already known in the school population, schools may understandably be anxious about addressing this. Advice should be sought from the mental health professionals caring for the young person as they may be able to provide considerable assistance.

It is essential that a support plan is developed and approved by an identified staff member (the school counsellor if the school has one), the student, the family and the mental health professionals before the student returns to school.

When meeting with the young person's family, critical areas for sensitive discussion are:

- What information is provided to which sections of the school community.
- The support plan for their child's return to school.
- The support for any siblings in the school.
- Liaison with the mental health professional.

10. Other sources of support

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

Through the BACP you can find information about counsellors in your area. www.bacp.co.uk

ChildLine

Provides support services for children and young people. Phone the free, 24-hour helpline for children and young people in the UK about any problem. Tel: 0800 1111 www.childline.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care

Promotes the well-being of bereaved people and enables anyone bereaved by death to understand their grief and cope with their loss. The organisation provides support and offers information, advice, education and training services. www.cruse.org.uk

Facing the Future Support groups for people who have been bereaved by suicide developed by Samaritans and Cruse Bereavement Care. www.facingthefuturegroups.org

NAPEP UK: Local Authorities Educational Psychology Services Crisis Response Team Network

A support network for peers involved in Local Authority Educational Psychology Services that offer support to school communities following a traumatic incident. The network shares information, discusses best practice and provides the opportunity to respond to large scale cross border incidents in a co-ordinated way. www.napep.org

Samaritans

Can provide you with support any time of day or night by phone, email, or through face to-face visits at a local branch. What you talk about stays between you.

www.samaritans.org

Please note these are the main Samaritans contact details and not for the Step by Step or Schools service.

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)

Aims to provide a safe, confidential environment in which bereaved people can share their experiences and feelings, so giving and gaining support from each other. It is staffed by many who have been bereaved by suicide. www.uk-sobs.org.uk

Winston's Wish

Winston's Wish is the largest provider of services to bereaved children, young people and their families in the UK. They have lots of information and support available for children who are bereaved through suicide. www.winstonswish.org.uk

YoungMinds

YoungMinds YoungMinds is the UK's leading national charity committed to improving the mental health and emotional well-being of all children and young people.

www.youngminds.org.uk

11. 11. Flowchart of response in school



