

Community & Workplace Response After a Suicide

This guide helps leaders, colleagues, teachers, and community organisers respond after a suicide loss. Use it to lower harm, offer real support, and avoid common mistakes. Keep messages simple, kind, and factual. Share only what the family is comfortable sharing. Avoid speculation.

Immediate response (first 24-72 hours)

- Confirm facts with the family or the police liaison before any message.
- Name a small postvention team (2-5 people) to coordinate support and communication.
- Identify who is most affected and check on them first. Offer quiet space and some support with them.
- Signpost confidential support. In the UK: Samaritans 116 123 (24/7). For under-35s: HOPELINE247 0800 068 4141.
- Do not share the method or graphic details. Do not speculate about causes.
- Agree a single point of contact for media and external enquiries.

Internal communication (template)

Keep it brief, compassionate, and practical. Example: “We are deeply saddened to share that [Name], our colleague, died this week. The police have informed us the death is suspected by suicide. We know this news may be very hard. Support is available: Samaritans 116 123 (24/7). We will share details about remembrance in consultation with the family. Please avoid speculation and respect privacy. If you need space or to speak with someone, contact [HR/Lead].”

Language to use / avoid

- Use: “died by suicide” (not “committed suicide”).
- Use: “a person who died” (avoid labels like “victim”).
- Avoid sharing the method, location, or notes.
- Avoid blame, causes, or simple explanations.

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Supporting individuals

- Offer choices: sit quietly, talk, or take a short walk. Follow their lead.
- Check basics: water, food, company for the journey home. People may be shocked or disoriented.
- Normalise varied reactions: tears, anger, numbness, guilt, relief, confusion.
- Encourage contact with support services and the person's GP. Share helplines visibly.

Managing rumours & social media

- Share one short, factual message. Repeat it. Rumours fade when facts are steady and clear.
- Ask people not to post speculation or graphic details. Model this in your own posts.
- If needed, ask platform admins to remove harmful content and signpost to support services.

Memorials & tributes (safe practice)

- Consult the family before any public tribute. Follow their wishes.
- Keep memorials simple and time-limited. Focus on the person's life, not the manner of death.
- Avoid large permanent memorials on site. Provide a quiet space and a memory book.
- Signpost support at all events. Have trained listeners available if possible.

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Workplace specifics

- Offer flexible time and tasks for those most affected. Agree a short, written plan for the first two weeks.
- For the bereaved family member on staff: appoint one named contact; offer paid leave; discuss return-to-work only when they are ready.
- Brief line managers about common grief reactions: poor sleep, brain fog, irritability, reduced performance. Reduce pressure where possible.
- Provide information about Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) or local counselling services and how to access them confidentially.

Schools, colleges, and youth settings

- Tell students simply and in small groups if possible. Use clear, age-appropriate language.
- Signpost to support: pastoral teams, school counsellors, trusted adults, and charities (Childline 0800 1111; PAPYRUS).
- Watch for vulnerable students and peers who were very close to the person. Offer support across several weeks.
- Plan exam or assignment adjustments where needed. Keep communication with families open and compassionate.

Community groups & faith settings

- Name the loss with care during gatherings. Allow silence. Offer a safe space after the gathering for conversation.
- Train volunteers to listen without fixing. Provide a short signposting sheet with local and national supports.
- Coordinate with other local organisations to avoid mixed messages and to share resources.

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Set up a small postvention team

- Who: a senior lead, HR/ safeguarding, communications, and a wellbeing/mental health professional
- Tasks: confirm facts; plan messages; map those most affected; liaise with family; arrange support spaces, signposting, and memorials; review risks.
- Timeline: meet daily for the first week, then weekly for a month. Keep notes short and confidential.

After the first month

- Review what helped and what did not. Adjust supports.
- Mark key dates privately (one month, birthdays, anniversaries). Offer an optional closure ceremony.
- Provide training on suicide awareness and safe language for managers and team members.

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UK & Scotland support (share widely)

- Samaritans — 116 123 (free, 24/7).
- PAPYRUS HOPELINE247 — 0800 068 4141 (under 35s, 24/7 text 07860 039967).
- Support After Suicide Partnership — resources for families and communities.
- Cruse Bereavement Support — helpline and local services.
- NHS Inform (Scotland) — local bereavement and mental health support.
- Police, Fire & Ambulance workplaces: speak to wellbeing/occupational health; many helplines and peer support.

Important note

This guide offers general support. It does not replace professional advice. If there is immediate risk to yourself or someone else, call 999 (UK).