RESPONDING IN THE EVENT OF A YOUNG PERSON SUSPECTED SUICIDE*

2024 - 2026

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Reviewed by:	Karen Hayward – Executive Principal	
Website:		
Yes/No	YES	

Introduction

Suicide is a leading cause of death for young people in the UK. Sadly, it is always a possibility that a student, parent or member of staff might take their own life. In young people especially, exposure to suicide may lead to increased risk of their own suicidal thoughts.

However, schools and colleges play an important role in reducing the likelihood of copycat behaviour and helping recovery by preparing and responding to the situation appropriately. National guidance recommends that schools and colleges should aim to respond to a suspected suicide within 48 hours[1]. This is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school/college routine, while facilitating the expression of grief.

This policy has been written in accordance with national guidance, best practice and professional advice[2].

Definitions

At risk: A student who is defined as high risk for suicide is one who has made a suicide attempt, has the intent to die by suicide, or has displayed a significant change in behaviour suggesting the onset or deterioration of a mental health condition. The student may have thought about suicide including potential means of death and may have a plan. In addition, the student may exhibit feelings of isolation, hopelessness, helplessness, and the inability to tolerate any more pain.

Suicide: Death caused by self-directed injurious behaviour with any intent to die as a result of the behaviour. Note: The coroner's or medical examiner's office must first confirm that the death was a suicide before any school official may state this as the cause of death

Aim

This policy aims to ensure that our school/college is prepared and can react within 48 hours with a planned response that helps rebuild the wellbeing of our community and reduces the risk of further suicides.

Statement of Purpose:

- We are aware that suicide is the leading cause of death in young people;
- We play a vital role in helping to prevent young suicide;
- We want to make sure that children and young people at our school are as suicide safe as possible and that our governors, parents and carers, teaching staff, support staff, pupils and other key stakeholders share our commitment to this policy.

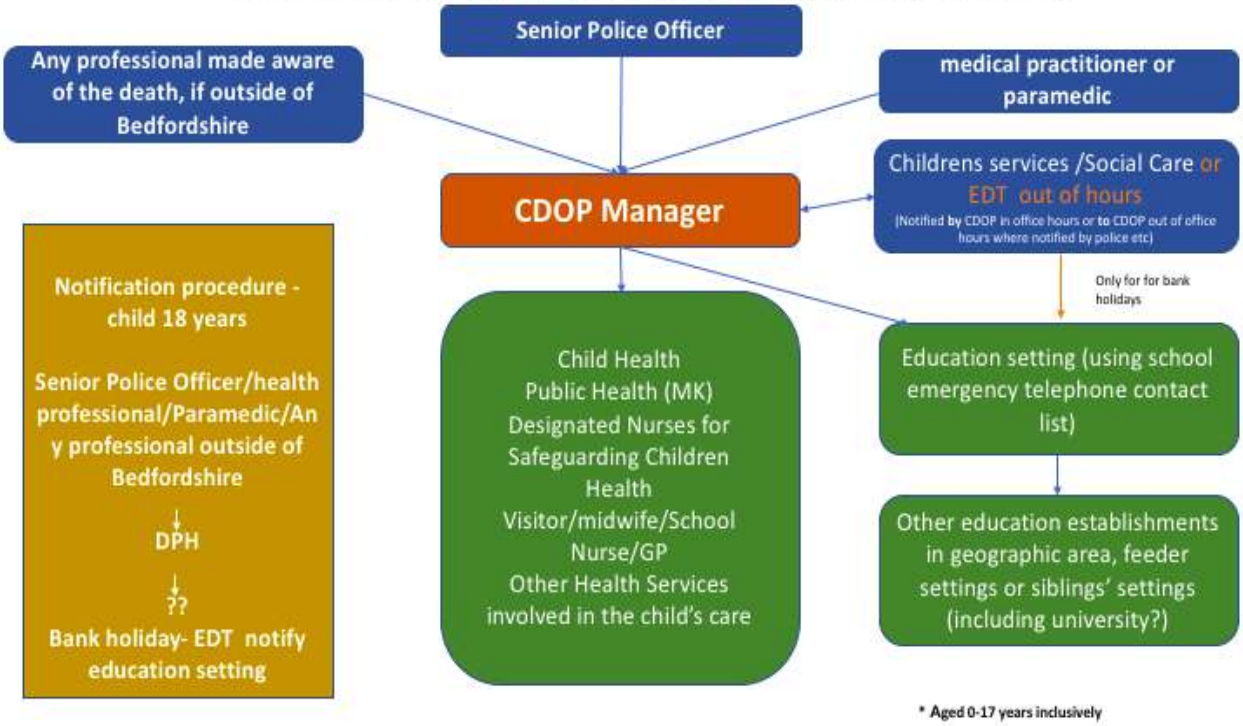
The external process in the event of a young person's suspected suicide

* Pupils and students aged 17 years and under

[1] How to prepare for and respond to a suspected suicide in schools and college. How to prepare for and respond to a suspected suicide in schools and colleges
https://www.samaritans.org/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/HWWNIM_Feb17_Final_web.pdf

[2] PHE (2015) Identifying and responding to suicide clusters and contagion A practice resource
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-identifying-and-responding-to-suicide-clusters

Notification procedure in the event of an unexpected child death*



* Aged 0-17 years inclusively

Our school/college procedure:

Initial notification received

Notification of a suspected suicide will be made to *Miss K Hayward, Executive Principal, Tel. No. 01767 680598* by the Police, Social Care or by the single point of contact for the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP).

If *Miss Hayward* is unavailable, (*Mr G Preston, Head of School, Tel. No.01767 680598* will be notified.

Close links will be maintained with the CDOP single point of contact who will arrange contact with the family and with child health services and the cross-agency response via a Rapid Response meeting, within 48 hours.
Information sharing will be with the prior agreement of the family.

School Co-ordination group notification

Miss K Hayward and Mr A Rutter will notify our school/college co-ordination group, consisting of the following school staff:

- *Mr A Rutter, Welfare Lead, Tel. No. 01767 680698*
- *Mrs Julie Devereux, Senior Safeguarding Lead, Tel No. 01767 680698*

Notification will follow guidance at Appendix A
Miss K Hayward and Mr A Rutter and members of the co-ordination group will liaise with the Public Health Suicide Response Lead at the Council who will co-ordinate a Suicide Response Team involving all relevant agencies to support our school/college.

School staff notification

Miss K Hayward and Mr A Rutter will notify other staff members and Governors using guidance at Appendix A. We understand that the details shared may be unsubstantiated and/or sensitive and may need to be kept confidential at this stage.
This will initially be made directly to those involved with the deceased, followed by other staff members.

We will notify our school/college administration team to ensure standard student/pupil correspondence to the family is stopped.

Student/pupil notification

Students/pupils close to the deceased will be informed by a familiar member of staff individually - ideally face to face.
Other students will be informed concurrently in (class groups/tutor groups/other).
We will follow the script guidance at Appendix A. Information will be restricted to the facts and in line with the family's wishes.

Identifying those students/ pupils most at risk of suicide

Mr A Rutter will liaise with CAMHS and other specialists to identify those most at risk of suicide for specific support. These may include:

- Those closely involved
- Students who identify with the deceased (same club, class, team or interests)
- Close friends, relative or partner
- Those affected by depression, substance misuse, who self-harm, who have already experienced suicide, who have had adverse childhood experiences or who lack family or social support.

Parent/guardian and community group communication

We will notify parents by letter (see Appendix B) or by alternative appropriate means for parent/carers who cannot read English, following agreement with the family of the deceased. The family will agree the content of the letter with an understanding that any information contained within it may be used by the press.
We will liaise with the Suicide Response Team to identify and inform relevant community groups such as local sports teams, scouts/guides using guidance at Appendix B.

Working with services and partners

Miss K Hayward and Mr A Rutter will engage with the CDOP Information Sharing Meeting held within 48 hours after the death. *Miss K Hayward and Mr A Rutter* will liaise with the Public Health Suicide Response Lead at the Council as part of the Suicide Response Team, and will plan appropriate action and support in partnership with:

- Our CAMHS school worker
- The CHUMS Suicide and Bereavement Service
- Our Educational Psychologist
- Our School Nurse
- Central Bedfordshire Social Care
- The LSCB Business Unit

Miss K Hayward and Mr A Rutter will notify the following school(s) in accordance with Appendix A, to enable increased vigilance and awareness:

- our feeder school(s)
- schools attended by deceased's siblings/relatives
- any other *(secondary)* school within the local community, whether in County or over the border.

Media notification and social media coverage

We will liaise with the Suicide Response Team and family of the deceased to consider the need to respond to the press.
We will direct all media enquiries to *Central Bedfordshire Council, Press Office* and we will inform all other staff and students not to respond to journalists.
If social media communication is considered appropriate, will respond in accordance with the guidance at Appendix C.

Supporting students/pupils and staff

We will:

- Support and respond in collaboration with the Suicide Response Team.
- Provide facilities for students/colleagues who require a quiet area and will be offered opportunities for further support.
- Ensure that relevant support resources are communicated to all staff and to our school community (see Appendix D).
- Reassure our students/pupils that grief is a normal response to death, and there is no wrong or right way to grieve. We will believe everyone's expression of grief and offer support.
- Recognise that it is natural for pupils/students and staff to discuss the event, but we will encourage all students/ pupils and staff to be mindful that any communication on social media must be respectful as it is in the public domain and that any messages they read may not be factual.
- Recognise that student/pupil distress might manifest in their behaviour and/or performance.
- Continue the conversation about suicide in a reassuring and safe way to reduce stigma and encourage openness. We will use helpful language when talking about suicide, following the guidance at Appendix E.
- Liaise with our support agencies including CAMHS, CHUMS and our School Nursing Service to develop a plan to support colleagues and students/pupils.
- Debrief colleagues and 'check in' with students/pupils and encourage an ethos of care and support throughout the school/college.
- Ensure that staff are familiar with this policy and receive relevant training on
- what to do if there is a concern about a colleague or student/pupil.
- Ensure that staff know what risk factors and signs to look out for in colleagues and students/pupils including self-harm.
- Remember our student/pupil who has died.
- Consult with the family about disseminating the funeral arrangements.
- Consult with the family about an assembly memorial or short-term memorial site but will avoid romanticising suicide with a prolonged memorial site.
- Be aware that longer term issues may arise, particularly for those at risk and at the anniversary of the young person's death, and we will facilitate appropriate discussion and support.

Sharing and updating the policy

This policy will be brought to the attention of all staff and Governors immediately, or at induction and annually thereafter by *Miss K Hayward, Executive Principal.*

The policy will be updated annually or when contact information changes, by our nominated Emotional Health and Wellbeing Lead in collaboration with:

- Our Safeguarding Lead
- Our Pastoral Care Lead(s)
- Our Vulnerable Learners Lead (Designated Teacher)
- Members of our senior leadership team
- House Achievement Leaders
- Our School Nurse
- Our CAMHS school/college worker
- Our students/pupils
- Our parents and carers.
- Governors

Links to our other policies

- Safeguarding
- Emotional wellbeing and mental health
- Supporting pupils with medical conditions
- SEND
- PSHE
- Behaviour and attendance (disruptive, withdrawn, anxious behaviour may be related to unmet emotional or mental health need)

Appendix A[3]

Script guidance for notifying staff and students

Aim to:

- Only include the pertinent facts about the death without the details of the method of death as agreed with the family.
- Normalise the emotions experienced in response to the death.
- Encourage caring for each other and letting staff know if anyone has concerns about other students/pupils.
- Encourage positive ways of managing distress.
- Let staff/students/pupils know that support is available and how to access – i.e., School Nurse 'Drop-In' days; the school's CAMHS worker contact days; school's counsellor contact details.
- Share useful resources with staff/students/pupils via printed cards, the school website or on notice boards (see Appendix D)

Appendix B[4]

Suggested content of letter for parents:

- Brief pertinent information about the death(s) including what year the student/pupil was in
- Confirmation of when and what the students were told
- Encouragement to the parents/carers to let their son/daughter know that the letter has been received and that they (parents/carers) will listen to concerns
- Acknowledge any parental concerns about son/daughter's reaction to the news, and normalise grief reactions
- Guidance on how to talk to the young person
- Encouragement to parents to discuss positive strategies to cope
- Advice to keep connected to the young person and support them in a general sense
- Advice to contact their GP if they or their child would like further support
- Information on how the school is responding and supporting students, including provision of 'Drop-In' support and specific counselling to those who need it
- Details of staff member to contact if there are any specific concerns/questions
- Acknowledgement that the school will be carrying on their normal routines as far as possible
- Add links to relevant websites – see below and Appendix D.

[3] PHE (2015) Identifying and responding to suicide clusters and contagion A practice resource https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-identifying-and-responding-to-suicide-clusters

[4] Papyrus Suicide Safer Schools https://www.papyrus-uk.org/shop/item/suicidesafer-schools-and-colleges-guide

Suggested school letter to parent/guardians informing them of the apparent death by suicide of a pupil/student (with family consent):

Dear Parent/Guardian

(*Name of school)* was sad to learn of the death of one of our students. The young person died (suddenly/by suspected suicide) (*when*). The school were notified by (*police, family*) (*when*).

All children at the school were informed by (*class teachers/ other*) (*when*). We would encourage you to let your children know that you have received this letter and that you are aware of the death.

Of course, the death of a young person evokes a considerable number of questions, worries and fears in everyone and we understand that the young person's death will come as a big shock to children, staff and parents and we want to reassure you that we are on hand to provide support and are following guidelines.

A dedicated group of our staff will be liaising with the family as well as external specialist support.

All staff will respond to children's questions and concerns and there will be a dedicated team coordinating emotional and practical support for the children. We would like you to direct any specific questions too (*named staff member*), either by phone or using their school emails found on our school web site.

All children have been made aware that student support is available at any time during the school day, we have been arranged for additional support as follows: (*School Nurse Drop-in days, School Counsellor days, CAMHS contact days, CHUMS contact days*)

We will continue to provide routine and continuity for all students throughout the coming weeks.
If parents and children wish to bring in flowers or tributes, please take them to Main Reception. We have also *placed* a book on the table in which students can write a memory or a message for (the young person and their family.

Professionals have given us the following advice and guidance when talking to your children and we hope this will be helpful.

- Children can react very differently to news of a death, some may appear to carry on almost without reacting, while others may cry and be completely overcome by their feelings. It is good to remember that there is no right or wrong way to grieve and no rule book to follow.
- Be honest when talking about the death and use sensitive but honest language such as "died by suicide" and "took their own life".
- Try not to overwhelm your child with information or give more information than asked for. Children may, when receiving news of a death, ask a few questions at a time in order to process the information. Like adults, children may need to hear the story more than once and ask the same questions again.
- It is ok to say that you do not know why the young person took his/her life, rather than to speculate on things that may have been said, especially on social media.
- Reassure your children that you are available to listen and talk about the death.
- If your child is concerned and upset by how they are feeling it can help to know that other people often feel shocked, numb, angry, sad and overwhelmed by the death.
- Encourage your child to ask for support in school if needed.
- If you are concerned about the emotional and mental health of a child or adult, contact a professional. If not school, contact your GP or take them to an A&E department.

- If they or you are worried about them harming themselves, ask them direct questions, such as "sometimes when people feel like you do, they think about suicide and harming themselves, is that what you are thinking about"?
- We have urged children to be especially sensitive when using social media and instant messaging and to respect the family's privacy at this very sad time.

Sources of support:

- The Bedfordshire School Nursing Service 01525 631100 ccs.beds.childrens.spa@nhs.net
- Samaritans 116 123.
- Papyrus www.papyrus-uk.org
- Hopeline Tel: 0800 068 41 41 text 07786 209 697 email pat@papyrus-uk.org
- Childline 08001111
- Young Minds www.youngminds.org.uk
- Parents helpline: 0808 802 5544
- CALM www.thecalmzone.net 0800 58 58 58
- Harmless www.harmless

Appendix C[5]

Suggested media response:

- A young person's suicide may attract attention from the media – this could be from either local or national news organisations.
- Social media platforms mean that news of such incidents can travel quickly, and you may find yourself being contacted by a journalist seeking a comment within a short period of time.

- Whether you are contacted by email, telephone or face-to-face, it is important that you do not feel under any obligation to make any statement without having a chance to properly consider your position.

- Two key issues need to be thought about before issuing any communications:

  a. Whether information about the death is in the public domain and whether the family would be content for you to make any statement that will essentially confirm the death
  b. Whether the death could be subject to any police investigation, in which you may be restricted in making any comment.

- Assuming that these key issues have been considered, it would be prudent to prepare a statement and to run this past the family as soon as possible.

- If you have not had an opportunity to do so when approached for a comment, it is entirely appropriate for you to say that you are not yet able to share a statement but will do as soon as possible, committing to get back to them directly.

- In drafting a statement, you may wish to consider:

✓ Acknowledging the tragic loss of the young person's life and explaining that the thoughts of the teaching staff and governing body are with their family at this very difficult time

[5] Samaritans Media Guidance: https://www.samaritans.org/media-centre/media-guidelines-reporting-suicide

- ✓ Reflecting on the unique qualities of the young person, perhaps referencing any particular characteristics or contributions they have made to school life
- ✓ Explaining the support that you will be giving to the pupils of the school (particularly relevant for direct communications with parents/carers)
- ✓ Avoid details of the method used or the location
- ✓ Avoid speculation about the 'trigger' for the suicide
- ✓ Avoid making the deceased appear heroic or brave or that suicide was a solution to a problem
- ✓ Avoid endorsement of myths around suicide
- ✓ Bear in mind the language used
- ✓ Do not over emphasise the school/college community's expressions of grief
- ✓ Be sensitive to the feelings of family and friends
- ✓ Encourage sharing helplines and support organisation details
- ✓ Bear in mind that interest is sometimes generated by campaigning groups/bereaved families, with the aim of raising awareness of the issues.

Social media statement

If you or someone you know is feeling desperate, help is always available. The best way to honour *(person's name*) is to seek help if you or someone you know is struggling. If you are feeling lost, desperate, or alone, please contact:

- Samaritans 116 123
- Papyrus www.papyrus-uk.org
- HopeLine Tel: 0800 068 41 41 text 07786 209 697 email pat@papyrus-uk.org
- Childline 08001111
- Young Minds www.youngminds.org.uk
- Parents helpline: 0808 802 5544
- CALM www.thecalmzone.net 0800 58 58 58
- Harmless www.harmless

Appendix D

List of resources for staff, students and parents

- CAMH https://www.elft.nhs.uk/service/189/Central-Beds-CAMHS-North
- CHUMS http://chums.uk.com/
- Samaritans https://www.samaritans.org/your-community
- Papyrus www.papyrus-uk.org
- Childline https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/school-college-and-work/
- Young Minds www.youngminds.org.uk
- CALM www.thecalmzone.net 0800 58 58 58
- Calm-harm self-help app to prevent self-harm http://www.stem4.org.uk/calmharm/
- Self-harm resources https://youngminds.org.uk/what-we-do/our-projects/no-harm-done/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIt7jm56OC2QIV7b_tCh00PQwKEAAYAiAAEgJ33_D_BwE

- PSHE Association How to teach about mental health and wellbeing https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/search-for-resources?combine=mental%20health&&&field_externally_created_key_gui_value=2&field_pshe_created_resource_value=1

- Child Bereavement UK https://childbereavementuk.org/for-schools/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIq9WghsCC2QIVz7vtCh10-AU3EAAYASAAEgJeZ_D_BwE

- The Bedfordshire School Nursing Service: http://www.cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk/what-we-do/bedfordshire-services/school-nursing-service

Appendix E[6]

Helpful language around suicide or attempted suicide	Unhelpful language around suicide or attempted suicide
Whist the right language is helpful, the most important response is one which is non-judgemental, caring and calm.	
Ended their life	Successful suicide
Died by suicide/ attempted suicide	Committed suicide (it isn't a crime)
Took/attempted to take their own life	Attention seeking/ A cry for help (belittles the pain they are in)
Killed themselves	Doing something silly (suggests the persons thoughts are stupid)

[6] Papyrus Suicide Safer Schools https://www.papyrus-uk.org/shop/item/suicidesafer-schools-and-colleges-guide