Preparing for and Responding to a Student Death by Suicide

A Buckinghamshire Suicide Prevention and Postvention Protocol for Schools and Colleges

Buckinghamshire County Council
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INTRODUCTION

“The legacy of suicide remains with family, friends, colleagues and many others long after the individual has gone. The impact of suicide is far-reaching - the trauma does not only affect those who were directly connected” Anj Handa (bereaved friend)

Suicide is one of the leading causes of mortality in young people\(^1\) in the UK and for those affected by suicide, its impact is especially traumatic,\(^2\) leaving parents, partners and families devastated and broken. Suicide is a very complex issue and often there isn’t one main reason why someone decides to take their own life. Often it’s a result of problems building up to the point where they can see no other way to cope with what they’re experiencing. Suicidal feelings are common among young people and those actually contemplating suicide frequently give warning signs of their distress. Parents, teachers, and friends are therefore in a key position to pick up on these signs and get help. Schools have an important role in preventing youth suicide, and a school’s commitment to the prevention of suicide will go a long way towards supporting young people before they engage in behaviour with irreversible consequences.

A suicide in a school community is devastating and often a time of great sadness and confusion for staff, students and families. For schools, it can be especially difficult, as school personnel need to balance the present grief and shock within the school community, with rumours, feelings of anger, and guilt, as well as the fear of additional students attempting suicide that may lead to a cluster.\(^3\)

The role of schools and colleges in the aftermath of a suicide is therefore critical to addressing suicide risk and improving the mental wellbeing of people who have been bereaved by suicide. In addition, postvention\(^4\) interventions can promote community mental health awareness and resilience, and support wider initiatives to tackle health inequalities and social exclusion. Effective partnership working enables local teams to act quickly following a possible suicide and provide timely support to families and communities.\(^5\)

This protocol has been developed to assist schools and colleges in Buckinghamshire to reduce deaths by suicide and respond effectively to any death by suicide within the school or college community. This protocol and local guide has been developed based on the framework of the Papyrus Guide\(^6\) (Appendix 1) for building suicide-safer schools and colleges to prevent young suicides, and includes Buckinghamshire local information and support agencies available to support schools and colleges in preparing for and responding to a student death by suicide.

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\(^2\) Suicide by children and young people in England. National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness (NCISH). Manchester: University of Manchester, 2016

\(^3\) A cluster happens when multiple young people complete the act of suicide in the same geographical area and around the same time frame.

\(^4\) Postvention refers to activities and programmes provided to support those who have been bereaved by suicide. Suicide prevention and postvention are closely related in that postvention can also prevent further deaths.” – taken from Help when we Needed it Most (Samaritans, 2017)


\(^6\) PAPYRUS: Building Suicide-Safer Schools and Colleges – A guide for teachers and staff
ABOUT THIS PROTOCOL

The Buckinghamshire Multi-Agency Suicide Prevention Group is a partnership of agencies, organisations and key stakeholders working together to reduce death by suicides across the county. Part of the work of this group is to develop, implement and monitor a county-wide suicide prevention plan and the development of this protocol forms part of the delivery of the Suicide Prevention plan for Buckinghamshire.

The protocol has been developed with the support of key agencies including Public Health England, Samaritans, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Bucks County Council colleagues including Educational Psychology, Thames Valley Police, Bucks Healthcare Trust, Oxfordshire Health NHS Trust, Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS). The help of these partners in developing this protocol is acknowledged and appreciated.

This protocol is also linked to current work in Buckinghamshire to promote the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people. For further information about children and young people’s mental health and emotional wellbeing work in Buckinghamshire please email publichealth@buckscc.gov.uk.

This Protocol aims to;

 Contribute towards the action in the Suicide Prevention Action Plan on providing an effective local response to support those in a school/college community bereaved or affected by suicide.
 Provide guidance to schools and colleges on the development of a school-wide approach to prevention of suicide
 Provide guidance to schools and colleges to support children at risk of suicide
 Provide advice and information to schools and colleges to enable an effective response in the aftermath of a suicide within the school community
 Re-establish a healthy school climate in the aftermath of a suicide; provide support to students, administrative staff, teachers and counsellors and to prevent imitative suicides.
1. PREVENTION – CREATING A SUICIDE-SAFER COMMUNITY

It is always more important to be better prepared and prevent any young deaths by suicide. Having a suicide prevention policy in place (example - Appendix 2) is the right step towards creating a suicide safer community. The key concepts of creating a suicide safer community include:

- Improving connectedness
- Reducing access to means
- Developing a suicide prevention policy
- Knowing helpful and unhelpful language around suicide
- Seeking professional advice and support through knowing your useful contacts or support agencies (helpers) in your community (Appendix 3)

• For further details, please refer to the Papyrus Guide; pages 11-20 (Appendix 1)

2. IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION

It is also crucial to identify and support children and young people who have thoughts of suicide. Intervening by providing them with the opportunity to talk about feelings of suicide can save lives. For advice regarding the following actions of intervention:

- What to do if you have concerns about a pupil or student
- Things to look out for such as warning signs
- Asking and talking about suicide safely
- What to do if there is imminent risk of death or harm
- Supporting a pupil or student to return to school
- Sharing information with other professionals

• For further details, please refer to the Papyrus Guide; pages 22-30 (Appendix 1)
• Local agencies can provide training to schools to identify and intervene with students that are vulnerable and/or in crisis (Appendix 3). They can also provide interventions to support students

3. PUTTING A POSTVENTION PLAN IN PLACE AT YOUR SCHOOL/ COLLEGE

Suicide in a school community is often unexpected, and can leave a school with many uncertainties about what to do next. The role of the school in responding to young suicide will include the following actions coordinated by the Response Team (see Table 1):

- Informing members of the school community
- Identifying and supporting members in the school community especially those that are at risk
- Communicating with and managing media coverage (Samaritans media guidelines - appendix 1)

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7 Intervening refers to any effort used to prevent a person from taking their own life
Remembering the student appropriately

Ideally any school or college setting should have a postvention plan in place that outlines actions and steps to be taken immediately following notification of a young suicide. For further guidance to develop a postvention plan please refer to the Papyrus Guide (Appendix 1); pages 32-38 and the Samaritans’ Help When we Needed it Most (2017) booklet.² (Appendix 1)

² [Link](http://www.samaritans.org/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/HAWNIM_Feb17_Final_web.pdf)
APPENDIX 1
Resources to support this protocol

1. PAPYRUS Guide for Teachers and Staff – Building Suicide-Safer Schools and Colleges

Available at: https://www.papyrus-uk.org/repository/documents/editorfiles/toolkitfinal.pdf

2. SAMARITANS – Help When We Needed it Most

Available at: https://www.samaritans.org/sites/default/files/kfinder/files/Help%20When%20We%20Needed%20It%20Most%283%29.pdf

3. HELP IS AT HAND – Support after someone may have died by suicide

Available at: https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Suicide/Documents/Help%20is%20at%20Hand.pdf

4. Samaritans media guideline for reporting suspected suicide

Available at https://www.samaritans.org/media-centre/media-guidelines-reporting-suicide
APPENDIX 2

DRAFTING SUICIDE SAFETY/PREVENTION POLICY
This should be a policy statement (a series of statements) for the whole school community that evidences a strong commitment to prevention of suicide and it should include the following headers/sub-headers followed by statements (Papyrus Guide, pages 13-14)

1. **Statement of Purpose** :
   - Statement to acknowledge what suicide is, supporting data, it’s consequences and the role the school intends to play in preventing young suicide
   - Statement to reassure the whole school, parents, other stakeholders of the school’s commitment to being a suicide-safer school

2. **Our Beliefs about suicide and its Antecedents**
   Statements to acknowledge the following:
   - Suicidal thoughts are common
   - Suicide is complex
   - Stigma inhibits learning – it can kill
   - Suicide is our business too
   - Safety is very important
   - It is difficult to talk about suicide
   - Talking about suicide does to create or increase the risk

3. **Our Team and its Responsibilities**
   Statements on the following:
   - How the governors and leadership team will respond in the event of a suicide
   - Clear roles and responsibilities for each member of a suicide response team (Table 1)
   - Statement indicating commitment to ensuring the appropriate level of suicide awareness skills is available within the school community
   - Clear policy statement about how staff will work together to identify and support students who have thoughts of suicide or exhibiting suicidal behaviour(s)

4. **Ongoing Support and Development of Policy and Practice**
   Statement indicating:
   - That the Governors and Leadership team will maintain best practice and keep up-to-date with on-going training
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team member</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| x           | Team lead | - Regular communication with school leadership team  
|             |       | - Oversight for all actions of the response team  
|             |       | - Assign all roles and responsibilities |
| x           | Safety | - Keeping to regular school hours and procedures |
| x           | Operations (postvention support - links with Ed Psych, ESAS, Samaritans, CAMHS etc.) | - Identify vulnerable students  
|             |       | - Coordinate crisis counselling  
|             |       | - Coordinate other external support |
| x           | School liaison | - Notifying students and  
|             |       | - Staff |
| x           | Family/community liaison | - Liaison with family  
|             |       | - Police/coroner |
| x           | Funeral | - Responsible for coordinating school representation |
| x           | External Communications | - Parents  
|             |       | - Media  
|             |       | - Social media |
APPENDIX 3
Useful Contacts – National organisations providing professional advice and support

SUICIDE PREVENTION

PAPYRUS HOPELineUK

HOPELineUK is a service run by PAPYRUS with professional advisors trained in suicide intervention skills. HOPELineUK offers support and advice to:

Children and young people under the age of 35 having thoughts of suicide;

Anyone who is concerned about a child or young person.

Telephone: 0800 068 41 41 *(this does not show up on the telephone bill)*

Text: 07786 209 697

Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

National Suicide Prevention Alliance

PAPYRUS is a member of the National Suicide Prevention Alliance (NSPA). The NSPA is an alliance of public, private, voluntary and community organisations in England who care about suicide prevention and are willing to take action to reduce suicide and support those affected by suicide. Search the NSPA directory of support services in your area or more organisations which can help in relation to suicide and its prevention via [http://www.nspa.org.uk/directories/](http://www.nspa.org.uk/directories/)

POSTVENTION SUPPORT

Support after Suicide Partnership

The Support after Suicide Partnership is a network of organisations, including PAPYRUS, that support people who have been bereaved or affected by suicide. For any information on support and guidance please follow the link: [http://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/](http://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/)

Samaritans (UK)

A confidential listening ear is available via phone, text, email or face to face, for all ages. The service is available, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Contact via telephone for an immediate response. You don't have to be suicidal to call

Telephone: 116 123 (UK, free to call)

Email: jo@samaritans.org
For further details and support visit www.samaritans.org.uk

**Cruse Bereavement Care**

Telephone: 0844 477 9400 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm)

Website for further details: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

**Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SoBS)**

This is a network of national peer support groups for adults over 18 years

Telephone:

Website: https://uksobs.org/
APPENDIX 3 (CONTINUED)

Useful Contacts – Support agencies local to Buckinghamshire

**SUICIDE PREVENTION - TRAINING/IDENTIFICATION/INTERVENTION**

**TRAINING AND IDENTIFICATION**

**Buckinghamshire Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (Bucks CAMHS)**
FREE training available through Bucks CAMHS on Psychological Perspectives in Education and Primary (PPEP) Care sessions have been designed to help staff in primary care and education to recognise and understand mental health difficulties in children and young people and offer appropriate support and guidance to children, young people and their families. To book or for further details please email: trainingatbucksCAMHS@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk

**Y-MHFA training for School Staff**
Youth Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is the help given to a young person experiencing a mental health issue before professional help is obtained.

**Education Safeguarding Advisory Service (ESAS)**
This is a service for school and colleges to assist with effective delivery on all aspects of their safeguarding responsibilities. The service provides practical support and guidance and a range of training packages to enable staff in schools to feel confident to exercise their safeguarding responsibilities, in accordance with local and national guidance.
Contact Name: Therese McAlorum (Education Safeguarding Adviser)
Telephone: 01296 382912 and 01296 382732
E-mail: tmcalorum@buckscc.gov.uk

**INTERVENTION – Prevention (SEE TRAINING ALSO)**

**Penn Resilience programme for secondary schools**
Telephone: 01296 387589
Contact: Anita Hazel
Email: ahazel@buckscc.gov.uk

**Buckinghamshire Mind Peer-mentoring Programme**
Buckinghamshire Minds Peer Support in Schools Service is implemented to help young people start the conversation about mental health, raise awareness reduce stigma and normalise talking about mental health.
Telephone: 01494 463364
Email: Sharron.harrison@bucksmind.org.uk and Zoe.sole@bucksmind.org.uk
Website: https://www.bucksmind.org.uk/

**Bucks CAMHS - Referral for Support/Intervention**
Bucks CAMHS are specialist mental health services for children and young people provided by the NHS. Schools can contact CAMHS directly via their ‘single point of access’ telephone number. Other professionals working with young people can also contact the Buckinghamshire CAMHS ‘single point of access’ to find out what help is available.
Single point of access: 01865 901951
Buckinghamshire Educational Psychology Service (BEPS)
The service works with schools to promote inclusion, psychological well-being and raise standards for children and young people aged 0 to 19 years, across the full range of abilities. They also offer a consultation service to Buckinghamshire Maintained schools, academies and specialist settings, for example, where learning and/or development is giving significant cause for concern despite early intervention.
Telephone: 01296 383219 (Aylesbury office)
Telephone: 01494 732187 (Wycombe office)
Useful links/resources: https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/education/educational-psychology/

Time to Talk counselling
Provision of free confidential counselling services for children and young people aged 11 to 19 or up to 25 if they have a statement of special needs
Telephone(s): 01296 329903 / 07764 210398
Website: https://timetotalk.adviza.org.uk/

POSTVENTION SUPPORT
Samaritans
Amersham
- Telephone: 01494 432000 (local call charges apply)
- Address: 149 Station Road, Amersham, Buckinghamshire, HP6 5DJ
Milton Keynes
- Telephone: 01908 66 77 77 (local call charges apply)
- Address: 161 Fishermead Boulevard, Fishermead, Milton Keynes, MK6 2AB

Cruse Bereavement Care
Bereavement support/support groups
Amersham
- Telephone: 01494 766 455
- Address: C/o 62 Whielden Street, Amersham, HP7 0JB.
Aylesbury
- Telephone: 01296 425 757
- Address: C/o The Methodist Church, Buckingham Street, Aylesbury, HP20 2NQ.
High Wycombe
- Telephone: 01494 511 117
- Address: Oakley Hall, 8 Castle Street, High Wycombe HP13 6RF.
Email: support@crusebucks.org.uk

Buckinghamshire MIND
Counselling and support groups
Telephone: 01494 463364 (Aylesbury/Chesham/High Wycombe)
Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SoBS)
Telephone: 07562 336 649 (Aylesbury)
Telephone: 0795 843 4082 (Henley-on-Thames)
Email: sob.s.ylesbury@gmail.com / henleyonthamesbeaconsfield.obs@gmail.com
Website: https://uksobs.org/

Hectors House
A charity that helps to prevent suicide, by making it easier to recognise the symptoms which may lead to suicide, and help people find the appropriate resources to improve their mental wellbeing.
Telephone: 07397 155562
Email: hihector@hectorshouse.org.uk
Website: http://ww.hectorshouse.org.uk/

Bucks Educational Psychology Service (BEPS) (See local suicide prevention contacts)
Bucks Education Safeguarding Advisory Service (ESAS) (see local suicide prevention contacts)

OTHER USEFUL LOCAL INFORMATION
Buckinghamshire MIND
Signposting and information - The Buckinghamshire Mind information line can provide you with more information about the services we offer or will be able to signpost you to an appropriate service. Our line is open Mondays to Fridays, 9.00am to 4.30pm (not open Bank Holidays):
Telephone: 01296 437328
Email: info@bucksmind.org.uk

The Buckinghamshire Well-being Services Guide
The Bucks well-being services guide has information on services and support in Buckinghamshire.
Website: http://www.bucksservices.co.uk/

Buckinghamshire Children’s Safeguarding Board

Buckinghamshire Sexual Health and Wellbeing Service (B-SHAW)

Buckinghamshire Women’s Aid
Aylesbury
- Telephone: 01296 436827
- Outreach: 01296 437777 (independent domestic violence adviser - IDVA)

Wycombe
- Telephone: 01494 461367 (Wycombe)
- Outreach: 07890 456907
- IDVA: 07483 159153
24 hour medical advice
Hospital emergency services
Child abuse hotline
Rape/sexual assault centre
Sexual health support/screening
Young People’s substance misuse