



**POLICE  
SCOTLAND**  
Keeping people safe



Community Planning  
Aberdeen

### **SUICIDE RISK INDICATOR AWARENESS**

Suicide and suicidal behaviours, although more prevalent in areas of deprivation, affect all parts of our communities. Being such a complex matter, suicide is notoriously difficult to predict. However, there are some key indicators that show a person may be at a greater risk of attempting suicide. These are listed below. If you encounter or work with someone who is displaying any number of these indicators, please record and report them as soon as possible. You should follow your workplace procedures where appropriate or you can contact the **Police Scotland non-emergency line on 101**. You can also encourage the person to speak to the Mental Health Hub at **NHS24 on 111**; you can call together if they would find this supportive.

If you believe that someone is at **IMMEDIATE RISK** of making an attempt to end their life you **MUST CALL 999**. You can request an Ambulance to attend if the person would prefer.

It is important to note that: **TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE WITH SOMEONE EXPERIENCING THOSE TYPES OF THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS WILL MAKE IT LESS LIKELY THEY WILL GO ON TO ATTEMPT SUICIDE.**

#### **Indicators That Point Towards an Increased Risk of Suicide**

1. Depression and low mood. There is a strong association between depression or low mood and suicide. However, not everyone with depression will attempt suicide and less than 30% of people who complete suicide were in contact with mental health services.\* Nevertheless, if you feel depression or low mood is present you should take this into account.
2. If a person's mood suddenly and dramatically changes (either up or down) in a way that seems out of character, this can be an indicator that someone is moving from having ideation to a higher risk of acting on their thoughts. If this is the case, all efforts should be made to ensure their safety.
3. A common and more usually male manifestation of depression is an increase in aggression or agitation. Be aware that when working with a person exhibiting these behaviours depression may be the cause, particularly in a domestic setting. There is no harm in exploring the feelings or motives behind someone's behaviour.
4. Generally 1 in 20 people who have suicidal thoughts go on to attempt suicide. However, if a person is **visualising their death** rather than just having suicidal thoughts they are more likely to attempt suicide.\* This is why we suggest asking more about what their thoughts of suicide involve.
5. People who have previously attempted suicide are more likely to make further attempts to end their lives.\* Take note if someone mentions previous attempts and this information may

\*R. O'Connor, 2021

## OFFICIAL

also need passed on to other relevant agencies or organisations supporting the person in a time of crisis.

6. Listen out for any comments about someone feeling trapped, having no way out or being stuck in a hole they can't get out of. Feelings of entrapment are a significant motivational factor for suicide.\*In fact, suicidal thoughts can often be much more about escaping mental pain and overwhelming emotions, than ending one's life.
7. Loneliness and social isolation are also strong motivational factors for suicide. A person can have a loving family and many friends but still feel isolated. A key part of safe planning is to identify someone, whether a professional or from their personal network, they can talk to about their feelings and/or suicidal thoughts as needed.
8. People who have had traumatic or chaotic childhoods are more likely to attempt suicide, particularly if they experienced emotional abuse or neglect.\* This may be relevant to consider as part of risk assessment.
9. Studies have shown that those who completed or attempted suicide have experienced a disproportionately high number of significant negative life events. These can include, but are not limited to; being in debt, bereavement, chronic/terminal illness or injury, emotional/physical abuse, addictions or substance abuse, childhood trauma, a chaotic childhood, loss of employment or income, relationship breakdown, social isolation or loneliness, exposure to violence. Please take note that those who have been bereaved by suicide are more likely to attempt suicide themselves.
10. Always check whether a person requires more support if they talk about making a plan to end their life or putting their affairs in order (examples can include making wills, closing bank accounts and arranging for pets or property to be cared for).
11. Someone may be more at risk of an unplanned suicide attempt if they are engaged in risky and impulsive behaviours or self-neglect. Additional factors that may increase the risk are if someone is **HURT (emotionally), ANGRY, LONELY or EXHAUSTED**
12. Be aware of those who have previously gone missing as this could indicate a desire to escape their circumstances which may also lead to suicidal thoughts.

Further information relating to suicidal behaviour and concerns, living with suicidal thoughts, caring for or living with those who are experiencing suicidal thoughts, safety planning and when to seek further help can all be found at [www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/samh-publications](http://www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/samh-publications) .

Research into suicide is a relatively new field and much is still to be learned about the causes and how to prevent it. As such the above is intended to be seen as a **GUIDE ONLY**.

**If you feel that someone is at risk of suicide despite having little or none of the above indicators present, you still have a duty of care to report your concerns and do what you can to help them stay safe.**

\*R. O'Connor, 2021

OFFICIAL