Sheffield is committed to achieving a target of zero suicides. Around three quarters of people who kill themselves are not in contact with specialist mental health services at the time of their death and so interventions from frontline staff can be critical.

This is a practical guide for frontline staff who encounter distressed students indicating suicidal thoughts. It provides information, questions to ask the student and appropriate responses for staff.

**Suicide risk factors**

There are a number of factors which make individuals more vulnerable to the risk of suicide. These are:

* Mental disorders including schizophrenia, mood disorders, anxiety disorders and certain personality disorders
* Alcohol or substance misuse
* Impulsive tendencies
* Hopelessness
* History of trauma or abuse
* Previous suicide attempts
* Family history of suicide
* Loss of relationship/job
* Major physical illness
* Access to lethal means

Men are more likely to die by suicide but women are more likely to attempt suicide.

**Purpose of the pathway**

* Facilitate the identification of suicide risk
* Enable the student to access appropriate support and help promptly
* Standardise the response of staff to students who exhibit suicidal thoughts and behaviours
* Equip staff with guidance and tools to help them deal with situations where there is a risk of suicide

A student may choose to speak to any member of staff about suicidal thoughts and/or plans. This guidance aims to help staff to feel more confident in dealing with these situations.

Helpers sometimes have concerns that asking people about suicidal thoughts or plans will put these thoughts into their minds. There is no evidence to support this, in fact people are more likely to feel relieved to be able to speak about it.

**Opening questions to use when encountering a suicidal student**

* Is something troubling you? Can you tell me what it is?
* Sometimes when individuals feel depressed or anxious, they have thoughts of wanting to end their life. Is this something that has ever crossed your mind?

**Suggested assessment questions**

If the person admits to suicidal thoughts, the following questions should be asked:

* How often do you think of suicide? How long do the thoughts last?
* On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being most intense), how intense are these thoughts?
* Have you ever attempted to take your own life? How long ago?
* Have you thought about how you would kill yourself / Do you have a plan?
* Do you have access to means of killing yourself (tablets, rope etc.)
* Have you ever tried to hurt yourself? (cutting, burning etc.)
* Are you using drugs or alcohol regularly? Is this making your behaviour more risky?
* Is there anything particularly stressful that has happened to you recently?
* Do you intend to end your life or are you trying to block out difficult feelings?
* Have you spoken to anyone else about this (family, friends, professionals?)
* What do you think needs to happen to help you to feel better?

**Low risk**

Suicidal thoughts are fleeting and easily dismissed, there is no plan. There are few symptoms of a mental health difficulty and no self-harming behaviours.

Actions:

* Ask about any concerns that you have
* Make a note of any risks
* Ask the person if they have someone to turn to for support
* Give contact numbers for Samaritans, Rethink Sheffield Helpline and details for Big White Wall

**High risk**

Previous suicide attempts or frequent suicidal thoughts that are not easily dismissed. There is intent to end life, a specific plan and access to lethal means. Significant mental health difficulties, use of drugs or alcohol, current self-harm are present. The situation is unbearable or extremely distressing.

Action:

* Contact security and ask them to request an ambulance
* Ask the person if they would like family or friends to be contacted
* Stay with the person until emergency services arrive
* Document the conversation and any actions taken
* Discuss the situation with your manager
* Complete case review/cause for concern referral form

**Helpline details**

Samaritans  **Tel: 116 123**

Sheffield Re-think helpline **Tel: 0808 801 0440**

Big White Wall **Website:** **bigwhitewall.com**

**Raised risk**

Frequent suicidal thoughts but these are not persistent and there is no specific plan. There are symptoms of a mental health difficulty and/or drug or alcohol use. Previous suicide attempt and/or current self-harm.

Actions:

* Ask assessment questions above
* Refer the student directly to their GP or Student Wellbeing
* Do not promise confidentiality
* Document the conversation and any actions taken
* Share you concerns with your manager