

Grief and Loss



Suicide –
How prepared
is your school?

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Nobody likes to think about a death in school, let alone suicide. Yet suicide is a leading cause of death for young people in the UK and Republic Of Ireland. Sadly it is always a possibility that a student, parent or member of staff might choose to take their own life.

However upsetting this must be, schools play an important role in reducing the likelihood of copycat behaviour and helping recovery by preparing and responding to the situation properly. This leaflet is designed to help you think through the process of preparing for and responding to suicide appropriately and constructively, in order to help rebuild the well-being of the school community and reduce the risk of further deaths.

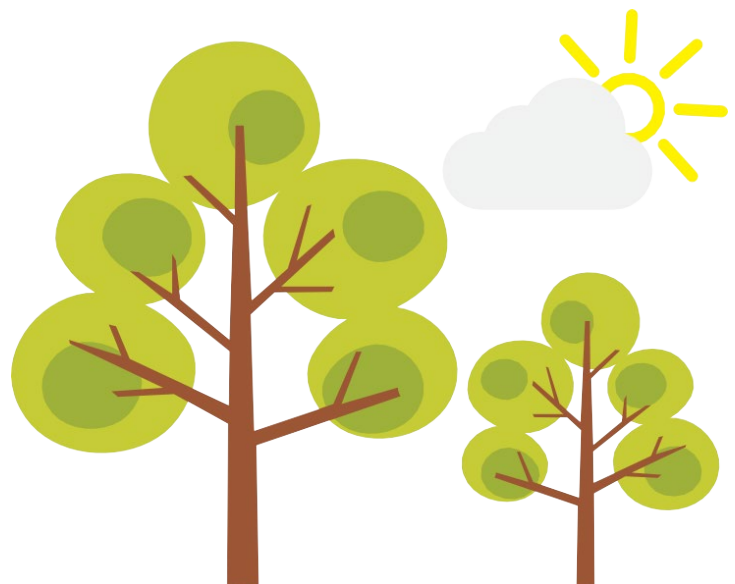
Being Prepared

When a suicide occurs in a school community it is important to have a co-ordinated and planned response. Good planning for the aftermath of suicide makes it easier for people to respond effectively at a time when resilience may be low.

Good planning can help to minimise the effects of this difficult and traumatic event. This will enable students, staff and the school community to return to normal routine as soon as possible.

A plan in response to a suicide is often called a 'postvention plan'. As a minimum this plan should:

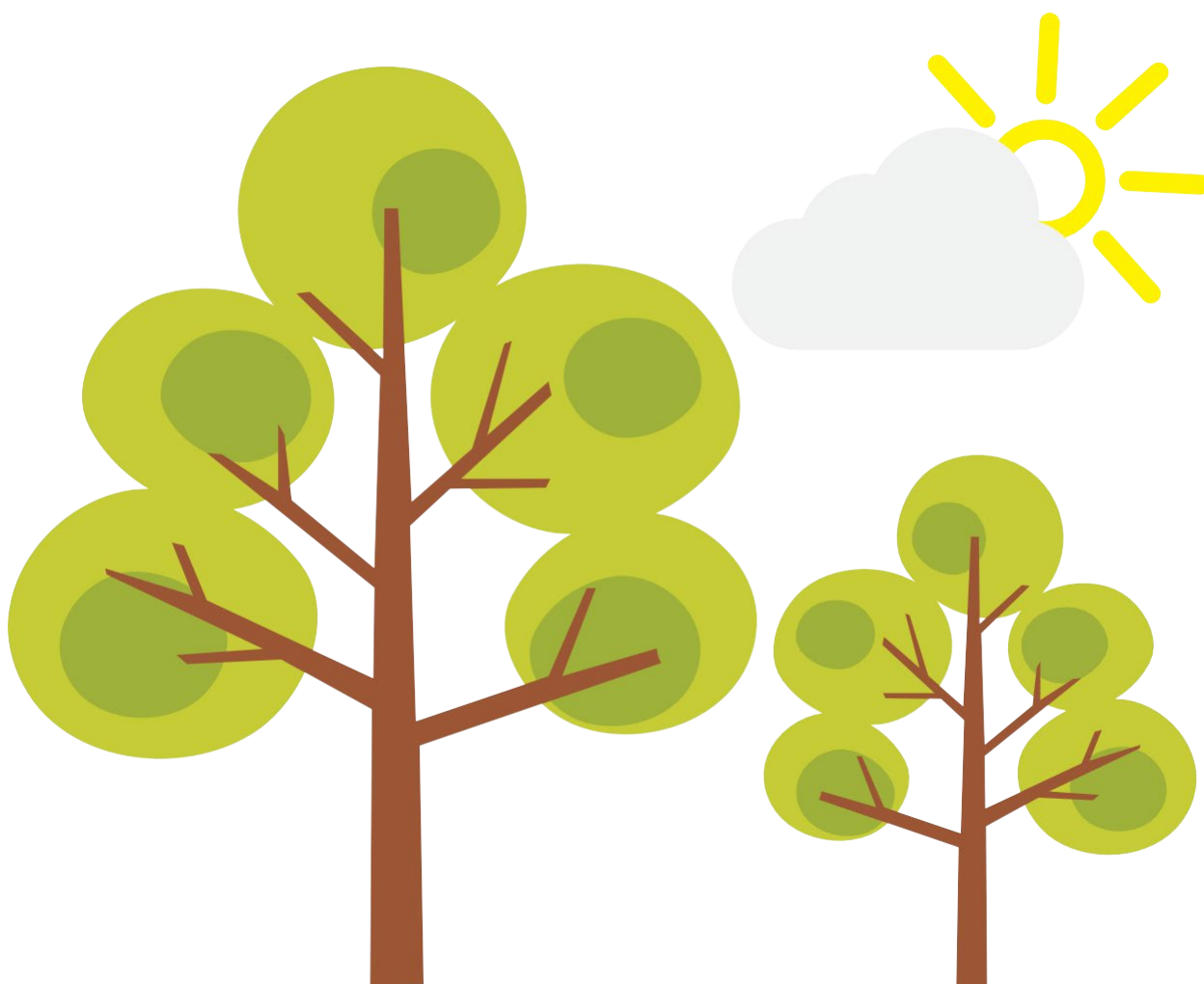
- Be a written protocol, developed in advance of a suicide;
- Involve the formation and training of a postvention team – be clear about who will do what (see next page);
- Include procedures for notifying staff, parents and young people about a suicide;
- Include guidelines on how to inform the school community and handle the media;
- Identify appropriate postvention services and facilities – this could include identifying an appropriate quiet space within the school to help those students who may need extra support;
- Include procedures for recognising 'at risk' individuals (including staff) and identifying where people would be referred;
- Include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the postvention and any follow-up protocol.



Postvention Team

Part of the 'plan' should be a clearly identified 'Postvention Team'. This usually comprises of around 5-6 staff. Your school may already have established an 'Emergency Response Team' and it may be that the Postvention Team is an extension of this, however it may be worth assessing whether the most appropriate staff members to manage a suicide are part of this team. Some examples of appropriate staff may include the school principal and other senior staff, school SEN co-ordinator, pastoral staff, and year level co-ordinators. It may also be important to consider back up staff if the selected staff are unable to be involved for any reason.

It is good practice that the whole school community would be aware of essential information included in such planning, including who to tell, what to say and what not to say, and who is vulnerable.



Roles within a Postvention Team

Team members should be selected based on their appropriate experience and ability to carry out the particular responsibilities of the role. Below are suggestions for allocating roles and responsibilities.

- **Emergency response team leader:**

This role is typically suited to the school Principal or a senior staff member. They oversee the direct management of the response including informing staff of the suicide, chairing staff meetings and ensuring the critical incident review occurs. The team leader should be made aware of all activities occurring in relation to the response to ensure co-ordination and efficiency.

- **Liaison with family, police and management of social media:**

Ideally the person assigned to this role should have an already existing relationship with the family, while also being confident in the area of social media. It may not be possible to assign this role prior to the event occurring. Following a suicide, the family may be involved with social media and could need support from the school in managing this.

- **Liaison with mental health services and identification of vulnerable staff and students:** This role may be best suited to a pastoral staff member or SEN co-ordinator given their area of expertise and training.

- **Liaison with Department of Education/relevant school authorities and mainstream media contact:** This role may be suited to a senior staff member who already has a connection to the relevant education authority and should be limited to one person.

- **Preparation of written information for students, staff, parents and/ or community:** This person may also be the contact point for parents and community members who have questions or concerns following the suicide.

Developed by
Kent Educational Psychology Service
Email:
educationalpsychology@kent.gov.uk

