

Responding in the event of a young person's* suspected suicide

R This policy is not intended for use by non-maintained schools. If extracts are used they should be attributed.

A Foundation and Voluntary Aided Schools can adapt and adopt this policy or use an alternative.

G This policy is for use by Community and Voluntary Controlled schools. Governing Bodies are asked to adopt this policy. Should a Governing Body wish to adopt an alternative policy please ensure that a copy is supplied providing assurance that it is legally compliant.

School name: White Spire School

Date of policy: Sept 2023

Updated by: Sept 2024

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. Guidance recommends that schools and colleges should aim to respond to a suspected suicide within 48 hours¹. 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 and best practice.

Aim

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

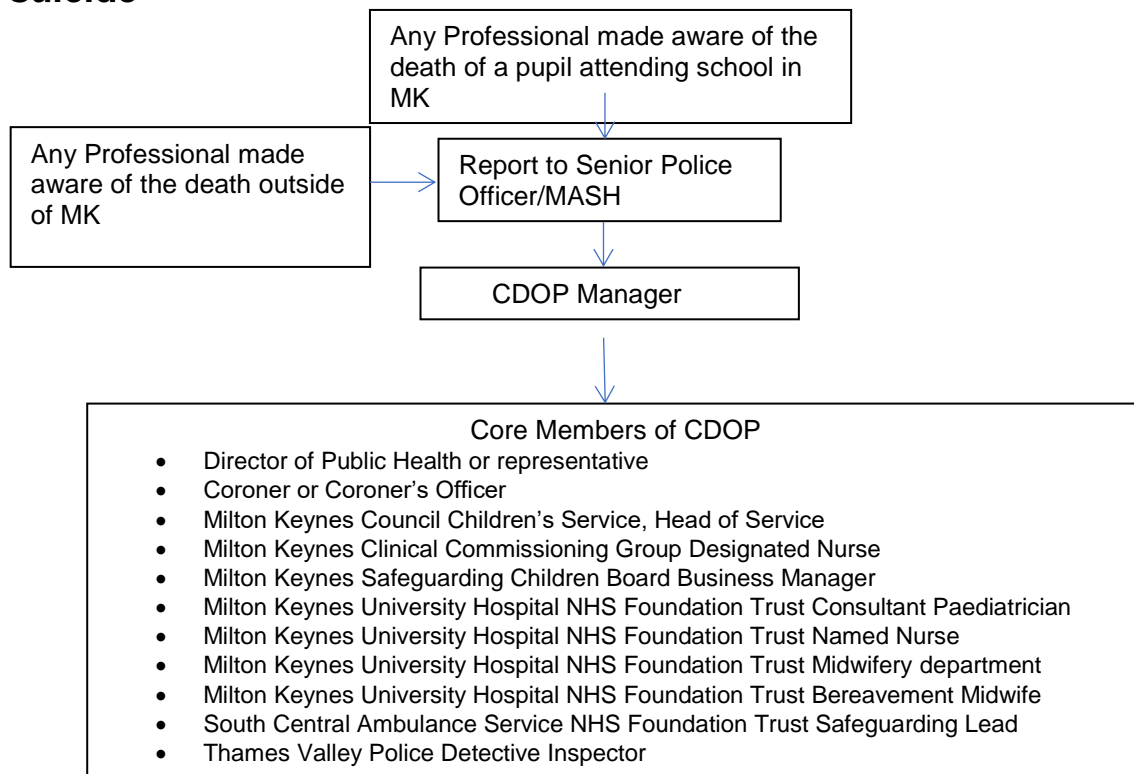
Statement of Purpose:

- 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

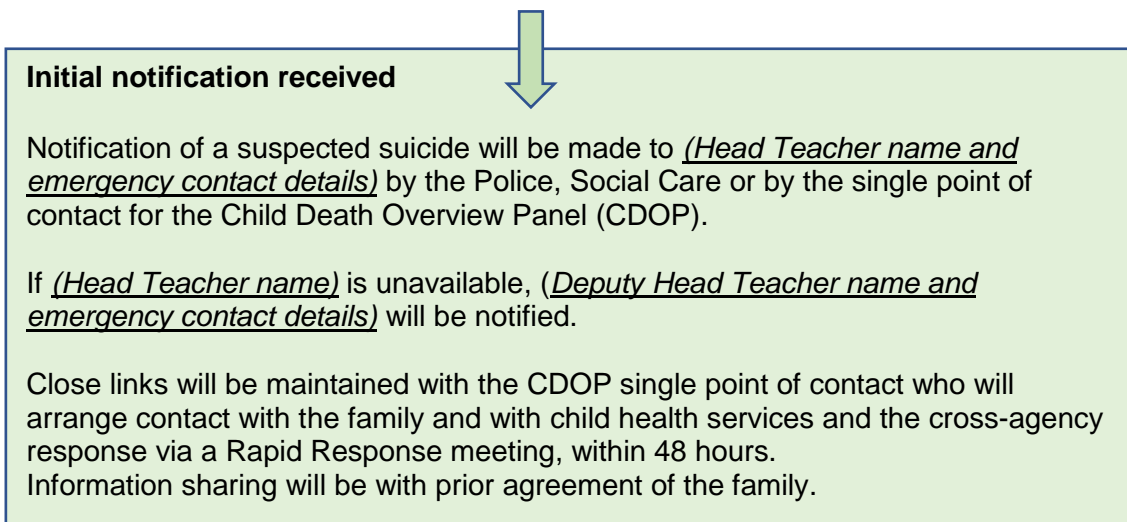
• Pupils and students aged 17 years and under


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

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



Our school/college procedure:





School College coordination group notification

Head teacher name/Deputy Head Teacher name) will notify our school/college coordination group, consisting of the following school/ college staff:

- *(Contact name and emergency contact details) e.g. Welfare Lead*
- *(Contact name and emergency contact details)e.g. Safeguarding Lead*
- *(Contact name and emergency contact details) e.g. Head of Year*
- *(Contact name and emergency contact details)*
- *(Contact name and emergency contact details)*

Notification will follow guidance at appendix A

Head teacher name/Deputy Head Teacher name) and members of the coordination group will liaise with PH who will coordinate a Suicide Response Team involving all relevant agencies

School/college staff notification

(Name of staff member/ Head Teacher) will notify other staff members and Governors using guidance at appendix A.

This will initially be made directly to those involved with the deceased, followed by other staff members.

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

We will follow the script guidance at Appendix A.

Identifying those students/ pupils most at risk of suicide

Pastoral Lead/Safeguarding Lead name will liaise with CAMHS and other specialists to identify those 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.

Working with services and partners

(Name of staff member/ Head Teacher) will liaise with the Public Health Suicide Response Lead (01908 254218) SRnotification@milton-keynes.gov.uk at Milton Keynes Council as part of the Suicide Response Team, and will plan appropriate action and support in partnership with:

- CAMHS
- Milton Keynes Samaritans – 01908 667777 Email jo@samaritans.org
- Our Educational Psychologist
- Our School Nurse
- Milton Keynes Social Care
- The LSCB representative

(Name of staff member/ Head Teacher) 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.

Parent /Carer and community group communication

The school should notify parents by letter (see draft at appendix B) following agreement with the family of the deceased.

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 C

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 (named school press officer) and we will inform all other staff and students not to respond to journalists.

We will respond in accordance with the guidance at appendix C

Supporting students/pupils and staff

We will

- Support and respond in collaboration with suicide response team.
- We will provide facilities for students/colleagues who require a quiet area and will be offered opportunities for further support.
- We will ensure that relevant support resources are communicated to all staff and to our school community (see appendix D)
- We will 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.
- We recognise that student/pupil distress might manifest in their behaviour and/or performance

- We will 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.
- We will liaise with our support agencies including CAMHS and our School Nursing Service to develop a plan to support colleagues and students/pupils
- We will debrief colleagues and 'check in' with students/pupils and encourage an ethos of care and support throughout the school/college.
- We will ensure 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
 - what risk factors and signs to look out for in colleagues and students/pupils including self-harm
- We will consult with the family about disseminating the funeral arrangements
- We will remember our student/pupil who had died and will consult with the family about an assembly memorial or short-term memorial site but will but avoid romanticising suicide with a prolonged site.
- We will 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 (insert responsible staff member).

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

- Our Pastoral Care Lead(s),
- Our Vulnerable Learners Lead (Designated Teacher)
- Members of our senior leadership team
- (Other staff members as appropriate)
- Our School Nurse
- CAMHS
- Our pupils/students
- 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)
- (Others)

NB. Resources regarding how to support someone who has been bereaved and affected by suicide can be found in **Appendix F**

Appendix A²

Script guidance for notifying staff and students. In order to reduce the risk of 'contagion' it is important to limit information provided to:

- The pertinent facts about the death as agreed with the family but without the details of the method of death.
- Normalisation of the emotions experienced in response to the death
- Encouraging caring for each other and letting staff know if anyone has concerns about other students/pupils
- Encouraging positive ways of managing distress
- Letting staff/ students/pupils know that support is available and how to access these such as the School Nurse drop in, CAMHS , school's counsellor contact details.
- Sharing useful resources with staff/students/pupils via printed cards, the school website or on notice boards: see appendix D

Appendix B³

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 to let their son/daughter know that the letter has been received and that they(parents)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 that 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 Appendix C and D

Suggested school letter to parent/carers informing them of the apparent death by suicide of a pupil/student:

Dear Parent/Carers

(Name of school) was sad to learn of the death of one of our students (full name). (first name), a year(x) yesterday morning. The school were notified by (police, family) (when).

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>

³ Papyrus Suicide Safer Schools <https://www.papyrus-uk.org/shop/item/suicidesafer-schools-and-colleges-guide>

All children at the school were informed by (*class teachers/ other*) (*when*). The students were told that (*first name*) had apparently died by suicide, that the death is being investigated and no further information is available at present.

We would encourage you to let your child(ren) know that this letter has been received by yourselves and that you are aware of the death of (*first name*).

Of course, the death of a young person by suspected suicide evokes a considerable number of questions, worries and fears in everyone and yet we know that experts agree that in nearly all suicides there is rarely a single cause or simple explanation.

We understand that (*first name'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.

A dedicated group of our staff will be liaising with (*first name's*) 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, and CAMHS 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 to (*first name*), please take them to (*place/ person*). We have also (*describe memorial intentions eg placed a book on the table in which students can write a memory or a message for (first name's) 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 don't 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 can be found at

- Samaritans 116 123.Papyrus (Prevention of Young Suicide) www.papyrus-uk.org - PAPYRUS 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.org.uk

Appendix C⁴

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 don't feel under any obligation to make any statement without having a chance to properly consider your position.

Samaritans have produced *Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide* which detail appropriate and sensitive reporting of suicide and can be contacted to give advice on how to respond to the media.

Samaritans Media Guidance

- 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 emphasising 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're feeling lost, desperate or alone, please contact.

- Samaritans 116 123.

⁴ <https://www.samaritans.org/media-centre/media-guidelines-reporting-suicide>

- Papyrus www.papyrus-uk.org
- Helpline 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.co.uk

Appendix D

List of resources for staff, pupils and parents

- CAMHS <https://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/service/milton-keynes-camhs/>
- 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=EAlaIqobChMlt7jm56OC2QIV7b_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/schools/?gclid=EAlaIqobChMlq9WghsCC2QIVz7vtCh10-AU3EAAYASAAEgJeZ_D_BwE

Appendix E³

Helpful language around suicide or attempted suicide	Unhelpful language around suicide or attempted suicide
<i>Whist the right language is helpful, the most important response is one which is non-judgemental, caring and calm.</i>	
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)

Appendix F

How to support someone who has been bereaved and affected by suicide

'Help is at Hand' is a guide that provides people affected by suicide with both emotional and practical support, it can be downloaded or copies can be ordered from <http://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/support-guides/> . The guide has some information in about how schools can support students and at the back of the guide are support organisations that can offer further information or support to children and young people (Pg61-62). It is a useful resource for anyone affected by suicide to read including staff.

The Support after Suicide Partnership (www.supportaftersuicide.org.uk) provides a range of bereavement support materials and is a network of organisations that support people who have been bereaved or effected by suicide. You can use the search option to look at local support available.

Winston's Wish <https://www.winstonswish.org/> is a national charity that offers support and guidance to bereaved children and families. They have a good booklet called 'Beyond the Rough Rock' which is a resource to support children effected by suicide. It is a good organisation to refer families to to support children.

Samaritans Step-by-Step <https://www.samaritans.org/your-community/samaritans-education/step-step> is a service that supports schools with all aspects of suicide. They can offer advice over the telephone (0808 168 2528) or email stepbystep@samaritans.org .

The booklet attached 'Finding the Words' is a new resource to support people to know how to support someone who has been bereaved and affected by suicide, it provides practical information.



finding-the-words
(how to talk to somec