



# RESPONDING TO A SUICIDE OR SUDDEN DEATH

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The original source for this document is Creating a Response Plan, Samaritans 2014.

ACET will aim to:

- Respond to the suicide or sudden death of a student within 48 hours.
- Establish the facts before acting on the news.
- Contact the Educational Psychology Service for support to deal with the situation. - Provide support for peers and staff that are affected by the event.

Establish the facts before acting on news of a suicide or sudden death.

Contact the police or family as soon as possible to confirm the death and whether or not it is being treated as a suicide.

(Note, there may be a great deal of speculation within the academy community and that we may have to act on the basis that the death is being treated as suicide.)

Notify appropriate local authority (RMBC) agencies and other contacts (see Appendix A). Act quickly, whilst at the same time prepare the academy leadership team and administration for continuous enquiries once the death is made known.

Inform staff first and give them time to take in the news before addressing students. Ensure that staff know where and to whom they can turn for emotional support. (See Appendix C).

Prepare a statement for staff to use to ensure consistency across the academy.

Where possible break the news to students in small groups or classes.

When breaking the news, if the death is being treated as suicide, staff need to be factual but avoid excessive detail about the act itself. Rumours may be circulating and people may ask direct questions, but do not to disclose details about the method used, whether there was a suicide note, or its contents.

Where possible, provide immediate counselling or emotional support to support students and staff in academy. RMBC services, Public Health and CAMHS will provide staff with advice as requested to help them to meet the emotional needs of students.



Strike a balance between sensitivity to those who are grieving and in shock and the need to maintain academy routine. Set aside a supervised room where students can go if they are upset.

### **Contacting the academy community.**

Parents/carers and all staff need to know:

- In brief what has happened.
- What support the academy is putting in place.
- What actions the academy will take with regards to funerals and memorials.
- Where to find information about suicide, sudden death and grief.
- Where to access support for themselves.
- What to do if they are worried about someone else.

(The Samaritans Step by Step service can advise and assist with this and provide template letters on request).

### **Communicating sensitively and appropriately about suicide or sudden death.**

Information provided to the academy community in the immediate aftermath of a suicide should include and reinforce:

- Facts (not rumours).
- An understanding that death is permanent.
- An exploration of normal and wide-ranging reactions to suicide or sudden death (expressions of anger and guilt are normal).
- An understanding that, with support, people can cope.
- An understanding that fleeting thoughts of suicide are not unusual.
- An awareness of suicidal warning signs and resources available to help.
- An understanding of funeral expectations.

When discussing any suicide or sudden death that has occurred, make sure the information given:

- Is factually correct but, if suicide, does not include detail of the act itself.
- Does not romanticise, glorify or vilify death.



- Does not include any details of a suicide note.
- Does not include speculation over the motive for suicide- suicide is a very complex issue and there is danger in drawing overly simplistic conclusions as to the cause.
- Use appropriate language and terminology (see Appendix B).

### Identifying and supporting vulnerable students

Those affected by suicide are themselves at increased risk of serious upset and may potentially be at greater risk of taking their own life. There is some evidence to suggest that people who have previously experienced bereavement or undergone a personal crisis, people with mental health problems and those in marginal groups may be more vulnerable. Academy staff should be asked to identify any young people who are vulnerable and be alert to any students who are excessively upset or disturbed by the death. These students should be offered appropriate support, including referral to specialist services without delay.

### Guidance for staff in starting difficult conversations

You might feel that you don't know how to help someone because you don't know what to say, but you don't need to be an expert. Remember that everyone is different, so what works for one person may not work for another. If you are worried about a student, find a good time and place then:

Ask gentle, open questions, like "What happened about ...", "Tell me about...", "How do you feel about..."

- The more open questions the better, as questions that allow someone to talk through their feelings are more useful than closed questions, which can prompt a 'yes' or 'no' response.
- Listen with care.
- Repeat what they say to show you understand and ask more open questions.
- Focus on their feelings -ask how they feel, rather than trying to solve anything. This can be more helpful and shows you care. If you are gentle and calm it is okay to bring up the subject of self-harm or suicide.
- Respect what the student tells you. Try and let them make their own decisions rather than try and fix things or give them advice.
- Ask questions such as:
  - When did you realise?
  - Where did this happen?
  - What else happened?



- What do you think about getting some help?
- How did that feel?
- Who else have you talked to about this?
- Be careful not to ask "Why..?" Questions such as "What made you choose that?" or "What were you thinking at the time?" are more effective.
- Establish how they feel
- Revealing their innermost emotions- anger, sadness, fear, hope, jealousy, despair etc. can be a huge relief. It sometimes also gives clues about what the student is most worried about - Check that they know where to get help.
- Ask if they would like someone to attend any support sessions with them. (See Appendix D) - If you say something that appears to cause more upset, don't panic, show you are listening.
- Look after yourself and talk to someone too.

## Memorials

It is important not to sensationalise or glamorise suicide, as that may act as a trigger for anyone who is deeply affected. A time limit will be set for memorials (approximately 2 weeks). If requested by the academy community, ACET will offer to forward cards and other tribute material to the family afterwards. In line with advice from Samaritans, there will not be a permanent memorial on site following a suicide. ACET cannot however control online memorials and other social networking activity following a suicide. Students will be warned about the risks of online memorials - their comments may become public/published without their permission and online memorials can attract negative and hurtful comment to those who are vulnerable. Following advice, ACET would consider establishing an online memorial on the academy's website, which can be moderated and then removed after an agreed time.

## Funerals

The nature of the student's death should not itself encourage greater attendance at the funeral than it would for any other tragic death of a member of the academy community. Where students wish to attend, they will be accompanied by parents/carers. Those who don't attend will have lessons as normal. If appropriate, the faith leader will be contacted prior to the funeral to suggest that eulogies should be fitting and not sensationalise what has happened.



## Responding to suspected Suicide

It can take several months for an inquest to be held and in many cases unexplained deaths are not given a verdict of suicide. ACET and authorities often have to act on whether an unexplained death is being treated as suicide. In some cases, where there is an ongoing investigation or where the family does not want the cause of death to be disclosed (or reported as suicide), it can be challenging for an academy to decide on how to proceed. In this situation, ACET will state that the nature and cause of death are still to be determined and that additional information will be forthcoming in accordance with the wishes of the family. It will be acknowledged that there are rumours (which are often inaccurate) and students will be reminded that rumours can be deeply hurtful, distressing and unfair to the deceased person, their family and friends.

When there is an ongoing investigation ACET will consult with police before speaking about the death with students who may need to be interviewed by the authorities.

In the event of friends of the young person being called as witnesses at the inquest, a parent/carer would be encouraged to attend and if requested, a senior member of staff would also attend to support. In the event of a staff member being called as a witness, senior staff will discuss what support is appropriate and respond to the needs of the individual.

Consideration will need to be given to if the family does not want the nature or cause of death to be disclosed. While the fact that someone has died may be disclosed immediately, information about the nature of cause of death will not be disclosed until the family has been consulted. If the death has been declared as suspected suicide, but the family does not want this to be disclosed, an appropriate member of staff, preferably someone who has a good relationship with the family will contact them. They will explain that students are talking about the death and that having adults in the academy talk to students about suicide and its causes, can help keep young people safe.

If the family do not give permission for disclosure, ACET will simply state that the family has requested that the information is not shared. If appropriate, staff may still take the opportunity to acknowledge rumours about suicide and to address the topic in a sensitive and sensible way in order to support other young people who may be depressed or suicidal.

Mental health professionals will still be requested to work alongside the academy in helping to meet the immediate counselling needs of affected students.



## Responding to Attempted Suicide

While suicide is the second most common cause of death among young people aged 10-24, most attempted suicides do not result in death. Young people may return to academy following a suicide attempt and the academy will not underestimate the impact of this on other students.

Anyone who has attempted suicide will be referred to and cared for by mental health professionals. Mental health professionals will be able to work alongside the academy in the following key areas:

- Planning support for a student who has attempted suicide.
- Helping meet the immediate counselling needs of affected students.
- Identifying other vulnerable young people.

If ACET is informed of an attempted suicide that took place away from the academy or other students are not aware of the attempt, the spread of the information may be contained. If there is complete containment of the information, any communication with staff, students and parents will be on a 'need to know basis' only, in consultation with the young person, their family and appropriate mental health professionals.

If the details of the attempted suicide are already known in the academy population, advice will be sought from the mental health professionals involved. In all instances, a Support Plan and Risk Assessment will be developed by an identified member of staff (e.g. DSL, Deputy DSL) and approved by the Principal/ Associate Principal, the student, the family and mental health professionals before the student returns to academy. In the event of a repeated attempt(s), the Support Plan will be reviewed and revised as necessary.

Sensitive areas to be addressed when meeting with the young person's family:

- What information is provided and to which section of the academy community.
- The support plan for their child's return to academy.
- The support for any siblings or friends in academy.
- Liaison with the appropriate mental health professionals.
- Suicide or sudden death of a staff member



The preceding guidelines are relevant and will be followed when the suicide or sudden death is that of a member of staff.

### **Handling the Media**

ACET will seek advice and support from RMBC Communications Team, recognising any such incidents may lead to media interest.

Suicide or sudden death of a parent or friend who is not a student within ACET

The academy will contact the Educational Psychology Service for advice and support. Recommendations will be acted upon and a plan of support put in place.





## Appendix A

In the event of a serious incident, the details below will be completed and forwarded to the appropriate person within RMBC as soon as possible.

Telephone: the Rotherham Children's Safeguarding Partnership (RCSP) Enquiries – 01709 382121

This is to enable 'Children & Young People's Services to provide suitable support wherever possible and to prepare appropriate response.

### Name of Academy/Unit affected:

Name of person reporting the incident: Designation:

Contact details:

Date of incident:

Details of incident:

Details of any action taken (e.g. Emergency Services involvement, closure of part or whole of the academy/unit if incident takes place on site).

Details of people informed of the incident (e.g. police, premises management, health).

### Critical incident prompt sheet

This document provides a checklist for academies / settings to work through following notification of a critical or any serious incident such as serious self-harm, suicide or death by other causes. Whilst the guidance aims to be comprehensive it is acknowledged that each situation is different and there may be points listed which are not relevant or missing. The suggestions should serve



to act as prompts in order that a swift and effective response can be put into place within the shortest possible timescale.

As a starting point it may also be helpful to consider these Do's and Don'ts.

**DON'T** attempt to deal with the situation alone.

**DO** consider staff well-being. Staff may have experienced or be going through challenging times and the incident might raise difficult emotions. Be mindful of this, check how colleagues are doing, and make allowances where staff feel unable to respond.

**DO** look after yourself and seek support and supervision.

### **Checklist following notification of a serious incident:**

Establish the facts

Whilst first and foremost putting a plan into place, if you think you are the first point of contact and hold the only information, notify the Local Authority- Assistant Director of CYPs, in the first instance or whoever is deputising on 01709 334075 or 334032) as soon as is viable- this should then trigger further alerts to relevant agencies and elected members where appropriate.

In the event of a 'major incident' refer to the Borough Emergency Plan- i.e. RMBC website;

Tel: 01709 823878 and ask for the Borough Emergency Co-ordinator or (24-hour) Duty Forward Liaison Officer. A 'major incident' is defined as a situation, event or occurrence which necessitates a response from the Authority that is beyond the scope of normal day to day operation. An 'emergency' is defined as an event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare, the environment, or war or terrorism which threatens serious damage to the security of the UK.

In the case of suspected suicide or serious self-harm it is recommended that an action plan is put into place within 48-hours where possible. Public Health will help co-ordinate a response and a Community Response Plan will be initiated if the incident directly involves either a child/young person or a member of academy staff.

Following a suicide or attempted suicide a police officer from the Vulnerable Persons Unit will usually visit the family, assess the situation and offer support. They are keen to liaise with



academies and be part of a multiagency response. They can be contacted on [Rotherhamvpu@southyorks.pnn.police.uk](mailto:Rotherhamvpu@southyorks.pnn.police.uk) or Tel: 01709 832702

The Samaritans also offer a free 'Step by Step' service to academies/settings and have a useful document which can be downloaded 'Help when we needed it most: how to prepare and respond to suicide in academies and colleges'. They can be contacted on [stepbystep@samaritans.org](mailto:stepbystep@samaritans.org) or Tel: 0808 168 2528 or (24-hour) 07804131290. [www.samaritans.org/your-community/supportingacademies/step-step/step-step-frequently-asked-questions](http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/supportingacademies/step-step/step-step-frequently-asked-questions)

In cases of self-harm refer to 'Supporting Children & Young People who Self Harm: Rotherham Self Harm Practice Guidance'. This document is currently under review.

Whilst observing confidentiality, ensure that those who need to know are made formally aware, e.g. key staff around that child/young person and governors, etc. Inform staff first and give them time to take in the news before addressing the children/young people Consider siblings and the need to liaise with other settings.

It may also be helpful to inform previous settings that a child/young person has attended so that others can pay their respects/attend the funeral

Seek advice from RMBC's Communications & Media Team ('Comms')- Tel: 01709 822732/3/6 or 254432; Emergency and out of hours enquiries: 07771 941415 or 07769 726193. They can approve formal press statements, help proof letters (e.g. to parents/carers) and will draft a tribute piece for public release if necessary.

Think about nominating a media spokesperson to liaise with RMBC Comms Advise staff not to talk to the press and recommend against posting anything on social media.

Seek support from ACET's HR Team where appropriate, e.g. death of a member of staff in service.

Remove names of the deceased from general mailing lists/text databases to avoid unwittingly creating offence.

Contact CAMHS (locality worker or duty team on 01709 304808) to log the details in case they pick up any subsequent referrals or have any current cases for which there may be implications.

Consider contacting the Early Help Team and draw on existing resources from both within and available to your setting such as counsellors, Academy Nursing Service, etc. Staff from the Educational Psychology Service can share useful resources.



Talk through your action plan and will offer support, tailored to your needs, if necessary. Tel: 01709 822580

Possible actions to be considered: staff briefing and debriefings, letter to parents/carers (Public Health/EPS/Samaritans can provide examples), circle time, how to manage the first assembly, funeral attendance, academy closure, staff cover.

Call a multiagency strategy meeting to develop an action plan (a Community Response Plan will only be activated in some cases of suspected suicide or serious self-harm)

When briefing students, it is better to do so in small groups. It may be helpful to prepare a statement to ensure consistency which all staff can rehearse and use.

Remember, some children/young people and staff will be affected for some time after the event and long after others have forgotten. Be mindful of anniversaries, inquest dates and further media attention that this may bring.

Child Bereavement UK has a useful website with downloadable factsheets aimed at educating professionals faced with supporting families when a baby or child dies or is dying, or when a child/young person is facing bereavement. Helpline: 0800 02 888 40. [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org) Resources and lesson plans for younger children can be found at: [www.elephantsteaparty.co.uk](http://www.elephantsteaparty.co.uk)

In the event of a sudden or near death it is advisable to include some or all of the following information, depending on relevance, at the end of any letter sent to parents/carers so as to signpost further opportunities for support.

### **Helpful Contact Details**

If you, or someone you know has concerns about their immediate health call 999 or contact Rotherham Crisis Service Tel: 01709 302670 (24-hour) for those aged 16+ Rotherham Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Duty team (Monday-Friday 9am to 5pm) can be contacted on 01709 304808 CAMHS out of hours for emergencies access via A& E. Please note the services are shut on public bank holidays but the out of hours service continues to operate.



## Appendix B

Appropriate terminology and examples of responses to difficult questions. Always emphasise that it is very sad news.

Avoid phrases such as:

- A successful suicide attempt
- Commit suicide
- Suicide victim
- An unsuccessful/failed suicide attempt
- Just a cry for help
- Suicide prone person Use phrases such as:
  - A suicide
  - Death by suicide
  - Take one's own life
  - A completed suicide
  - A suicide attempt
  - Person at risk of suicide

### Possible questions and responses

"I heard that he killed himself I committed suicide" - "It is very sad when someone dies" (avoid detail). We can acknowledge that it was suicide, but only if we have permission from the family.

"Someone told me that he...(details of suicide method)" - "It is very sad when someone dies" (avoid detail). We can acknowledge that it was suicide, but only if we have permission from the family.

"Why did he kill himself?"- "We don't know and that is something very private. When we are sad it's important to talk about our feelings. If you are feeling sad please talk to people at academy or your family. There are people who can help."

"Why do people kill themselves?"- "We don't know why, but sometimes people feel very sad and need help and support. When people have help and support they can feel better."

"My mum/dad has mental health needs will he/she die?" - "There is support and help for people. If you are worried about someone talk to me (separate time in private)."



"I heard on Facebook someone told me...."- " I don't know if that's true and it's a private family matter."

"What does suicide mean?"- " It means that a person took their own life and it is very sad."

## Appendix C

### Support for Staff

The LA will prioritise offering timely support.

In addition, help and support is available from the following organisations:

Rotherham Crisis Service Tel. 01709 302670 (24 hours) 24 hour telephone counselling line 0800 092 0987 or 01455 255 123 and quote scheme number70695 or Rotherham.

Samaritans Tel. 0330 094 5717 (24 hours) [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy- to find information re: counsellors in your area. [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

Cruse- Tel. 01455 883300

Survivors of Bereavement by suicide (SOBS) Tel. 0300 1115065 [uk-sobs.org.uk](http://uk-sobs.org.uk)

## Appendix D

### Support for Students

RMBC, Public Health and CAMHS will provide staff with advice as requested to help meet the emotional needs of students. Contact with parents/carers will include the following information regarding organisations that can offer help:

Rotherham CAMHS -Tel. 01709 304808 Barnsley CAMHS- 01226 433163/717155

For out of hours call Rotherham Crisis Service on 01709 302670 Samaritans Tel. 01709 361717 or 08457 909090 (24 hours)

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

PAPYRUS- Prevention of Young Suicide Tel. 0800 068 4141 [www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)

Winston's Wish- a charity for bereaved children Tel. 08452 030405 [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)

Childline- Tel. 0800 1111 [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

YoungMinds- Tel. 0808 802 5544 [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk) Survivors of Bereavement by suicide (SOBS) - [uk-sobs.org.uk](http://uk-sobs.org.uk)

Children & Young People's Services

Website for children/young people and parents/carers with information about positive mental health and emotional wellbeing: [www.mymindmatters.org.uk](http://www.mymindmatters.org.uk)

Sheffield Samaritans have a walk-in service 10am-10pm: 272, Queens Road, Sheffield, S2 4DL. It is advisable to call in advance to check availability. Tel: 0114 2767277

Rotherham Samaritans- Tel: 01709 361717. Lines will be open 24/7. or Text: 07725 90 90 90. Advice can be obtained from the local branch. : 22, Percy Street, Rotherham, S65 1ED

NATIONAL Childline (for all academy age children and young people) -Telephone free on 0800 1111 or visit the website [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

Young Minds: the UK's leading charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people. Parent helpline: 0808 802 5544, [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

Winston's Wish: the charity for bereaved children- Tel: 08452 03 04 05, [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)

Child Bereavement UK supports families when a baby or child dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement. They operate a free and confidential information helpline 9am-5pm, Monday - Friday. Tel: 0800 02 888 40, PAPYRUS prevention of young suicide. Tel: 0800 068 41 41, Text: 07786 209697,



[www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)

SOBS: Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide. Helpline: 0300 111 5065, 9am-9pm every day, [www.uksobs.org.uk](http://www.uksobs.org.uk)

CHUMS: mental health and emotional wellbeing service for children and young people. Tel: 01525 863924, [www.chums.uk.com](http://www.chums.uk.com)

Cruse Bereavement Care- Tel: 0808 808 1677; e-mail: [helpline@cruse.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk), [www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)

Child Death Helpline: for all those affected by the death of a child. Your call will be answered by a trained volunteer who has also lost a child. Freephone: 0800 282 986 or 0808 800 6019, [www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk](http://www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk)

Samaritans- Freephone national: 116 123

