

SUICIDE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION

SAMPLE PAGES

A faint, stylized illustration of a person with blonde hair sitting at a desk, looking at a laptop. Above their head is a thought bubble with a pink exclamation mark inside. The person is wearing a light blue shirt and blue pants. The desk is grey.

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Reasons for Suicide

The causes of suicide are many and complex, and it is not possible to identify a specific set of reasons behind any suicide. We know that people have always had to cope with a variety of pressures, but certain demographics are particularly vulnerable to depression and suicide.

In the UK and Ireland, suicide was once a criminal offence and for this reason it was often under-reported. Doctors and coroners were reluctant to add to the distress of grieving loved ones by issuing a verdict of suicide because of the legal consequences. Suicide is still a crime in many parts of the world, and because definitions and recording practices differ, it can be difficult to compare statistics based on socio-demographic factors across different countries. Even comparing the UK and Ireland is not always that simple, so we tend to rely on trends over set periods of time.



As stated at the outset, the reasons why people attempt suicide are varied and complicated and it can be helpful to look at overall trends. In the UK, suicide is three times more common among men than women, and in Ireland the figure is four times more common among men. Suicide is most common among people aged 45 and 54 in both the UK and Ireland.

notice a newfound interest and fascination with brutality, warfare and all types of weaponry, and again this may be completely out of character.

Detachment from Surroundings

In addition to their obsession with death, many suicidal people report feeling detached from their surroundings — as if they are simply an observer of what is going on around them. This condition is called depersonalisation disorder (detached from one's body/mind) and derealisation disorder (detached from one's surroundings), and both are a type of dissociative disorder. Many people experience these feelings on occasions, perhaps after a period of stress. However, when someone is suicidal, these feelings can start to take over their life.

Survivors of suicide attempts have mentioned that, at the time of their attempted suicide, they had the sensation that they were 'standing behind' themselves, watching what was happening as if observing a film about their life. They felt as if they had no power over events and their life was careering out of control. They wanted to apply the brakes and stop things spiraling downwards, but they didn't know how. If someone you know is experiencing detachment to such an extent that it is interfering with their life, it is a signal that something is not right.

Changes in Behaviour

When an individual is severely depressed and suicidal, there may be a sudden change in their behaviour. You may notice unexpected mood swings or a sudden change in personality. A person who is usually optimistic and gregarious may become sullen, silent, and withdrawn, or even angry and abusive. As well as these noticeable changes, there are other changes in behaviour that signify they are suffering emotionally:

Sleeping Habits

You may notice a difference in their sleeping habits and they may sleep far more or less than usual. Typically a depressed person will sleep for hours and will seem tired even when they have had a good night's sleep. They may complain of feeling lethargic with no energy to do anything



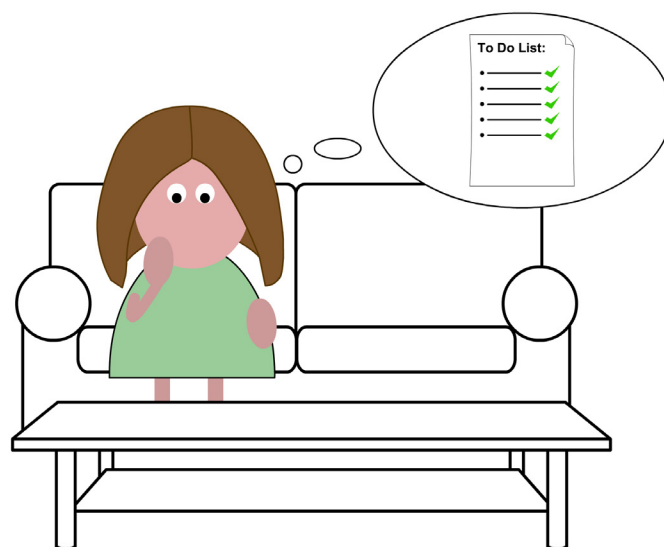
Aggressive Behaviour

When someone is considering suicide, they often begin to behave more aggressively than usual, with violent outbursts which are out of character. You will also notice signs of increased disobedience in young people, which will be apparent at home and at school or college. They may behave defiantly towards parents and teachers and will break rules at every opportunity. They may also engage in risky behavior such as driving recklessly or without a licence, or they may get into trouble for petty theft or vandalism. If you notice any type of aggressive or defiant behavior by a young person who formerly did not engage in such activities, it can be an indication that something is wrong.

In older ones, you may also notice signs of irritability and/or aggression as well as inappropriate behaviour which is inconsistent with their personality. They may also act recklessly, perhaps driving under the influence of drink or drugs. Any sort of behaviour like this which is totally out of character could be a sign that something is wrong. If possible, try to talk to them to find out what is causing their erratic behaviour. Be persistent, wait for the right time, and broach the subject firmly but kindly. Ask them outright if they are deliberately trying to cause themselves harm, then be quiet and give them time to speak.

Sudden Peace and Calmness

An often overlooked sign of suicidal ideation, and one that can completely fool people and lull them into a false sense of security, is where the depressed individual suddenly becomes calmer and more content. It is easy to assume this means they are on the mend, but unfortunately, this is often not the case. They will often appear calm and at peace because they know their suffering will soon end because they have made a decision to end their life. This is often the case where someone has been extremely distressed and agitated. They will suddenly appear to be tranquil and composed—quite the opposite to the way they have been behaving for the past few weeks or months.



Suicide Prevention Programmes on Our Railways

Current Situation

When someone dies by suicide on the railways, it takes a terrible toll on all involved. There are dreadful consequences for families and railway staff including train drivers and emergency staff who deal with the aftermath of such a tragedy.

It is difficult to prevent someone who is determined to end their life on the railways. There is ongoing research which seeks to throw light on the behaviours that may precede a suicide attempt, but further research is needed to understand the mindset of such an action.

What is Being Done?

Transport and railway organisations are currently training staff to intervene in suicide attempts. Partnerships are also being set up with mental health charities to remove the stigma attached to mental health issues including suicide.

There are currently a number of training programmes for railway staff to teach them how to reach out to a person in crisis who is exhibiting suicidal behaviour. Staff have intervened in many potential suicides and lives have been saved.

What is Required?

Again, as with the waterways, we are all responsible and can play our part in relation to suicide prevention. One prevention idea is to have barriers on all stations that prevent jumping, but this is not possible in many railways stations due to the layout. The most effective method is to educate people on how to prevent a suicide.



As part of our own personal education, we can keep an eye out for any available suicide prevention courses and public awareness campaigns. Many courses are free of charge. There are also resources available online which teach how to approach and manage a suicidal person on the platform, thereby saving a life.