

# World Suicide Prevention Day

Creating Hope Through Action

10 September 2023

# Trigger Warning

Suicide, Bereavement by Suicide

**IN A LIFE-THREATENING EMERGENCY ALWAYS DIAL 999 FIRST**

# Understanding Suicide

Suicide is when someone ends their own life, and it is one of the leading causes of death in the UK. In 2021, there were 5,583 suicides registered in England and Wales, and 753 registered in Scotland, which is equivalent to around 17 lives lost per day.

With around one in five people experiencing suicidal thought at some point in their lifetime, it is vital to create space to talk, as you never know what may be going on in someone else's life.

Sometimes just asking that second time 'How are you doing?' whilst listening non-judgmentally is the most important thing you can do.

Opposite are some common questions that people are often unsure of and therefore less confident in understanding suicide

17  
lives lost  
per day

Create  
space  
to talk

You can't ask  
someone if they're  
suicidal,  
can you?

Asking someone  
if they are suicidal can  
protect them, as it opens a  
dialogue and helps to reduce  
the stigma that prevents  
access to support

Suicide can be about  
perceived relief, as people want the  
situation or the feelings they are  
experiencing to stop, and not  
actually life itself. This is an important,  
as it allows for the presence of hope,  
of recovery

People  
who are suicidal  
want to die, don't  
they?

If someone tells you  
they are suicidal it is important to listen  
without judgement, but you must also prioritize your  
own safety and well-being. The best course of action is to  
help them access the support they need, as you may be a  
part of their journey, but they will need to choose to  
walk along that path of staying alive.  
You cannot do that for them

If someone is  
suicidal, it is my job  
to persuade them to  
stay alive, isn't it?

# CLARE'S STORY

You'd think work would have been the last thing on my mind when my partner ended his life by suicide in January 2021. But work is such an integral part of our lives, our identities, our days. We often spend more time with colleagues than we do with our friends or some of our family, whether that's in person or online.

So when suicide suddenly wasn't something that affected other people, work still mattered.

These are personal reflections, and I'm absolutely not saying everyone will or should react like this. I'm writing this to share some of what helped me, some of what didn't help, and to encourage anyone reading it to think about what they would do if suicide touched a colleague.

## What helped in the early days?

I took some time off – but I spent a while putting my work in order and asking colleagues to take up different actions/areas for me. I needed to feel that I hadn't left chaos and uncertainty behind me. In my personal life I was struggling with a thousand unanswered questions and I couldn't face the thought of adding to the untidiness.

I told my close colleagues about what had happened immediately – not the details, but enough to let them start thinking about how they could support me as friends, and take on some of my workload as colleagues. I asked them to share what had happened with the rest of the team and to say that I knew people would be thinking of me but to please pass any messages through my close colleagues.

I was honest with them about my feelings of pain, anxiety, fear and how that was affecting me physically and mentally. I checked in with them most days in that first week. I needed to speak to people at the times when I felt able to do so. It helped me knowing I'd be able to answer any queries about work and then leave it with them for the rest of the day.

They made sure that external contacts knew I was away from work and would likely be off for some time, and who to contact in my absence.

My GP was brilliant. She checked in on me and made sure I had the right information for HR about time off from work.

Freeing up my mental energy from work let me tackle some of the heartbreaking, administrative nightmares that even a highly planned suicide leaves: speaking with family and friends, liaising with the police and the coroner, talking to my partner's boss and colleagues, thinking about funeral arrangements.

I had a phased return to work, starting after three weeks off, which really helped. I was starting to sleep more at night and needed the mental distraction of just an hour or two a day at my desk.

Before I started back at work, I asked my close colleagues to ensure everyone in the team was aware I'd be back and that I was OK with talking about what had happened. I warned them that I might become distressed during conversations but I'd far rather they sit (online) with me while I had a cry and we finished our conversations, than we ended calls and then pretended everything was OK. I also said if people felt uncomfortable then I understood but I hoped they would share their discomfort with me rather than keeping their distance.

I found the time when it got dark on Friday evenings extremely hard to begin with, because that was when my partner had gone missing and I had sat with the police, waiting for them to find him. For a while, I finished work pretty early on a Friday.

I really valued being able to take time off work for calls with a support worker from a charity which cares for people bereaved by suicide, and for a short course of counselling too.

“

Being able to speak openly about my late partner with colleagues – in the same way that we often talk about our spouses, our children, our parents – was invaluable. It meant he had existed.

He had mattered. He was still important to me.

”

# What helped later on?

Grief isn't linear and it doesn't follow a timetable. Some days are just hard: first birthday, first anniversary, first Christmas, first silly memory. It's not just the firsts, either. One year feels symbolic but it's not a hard line with grief one side and restoration the other.

Being able to talk to close colleagues about the stress of investigations into my partner's death, preparing for and attending the inquest, and taking a bit of time to recover from the strain of the inquest also helped.

During this time, one of my line managers was a steady, empathetic support. We used 1:1 sessions to consider workload, challenging issues and relationships with colleagues, like in any 1:1, but we also used the time to plan for taking time off around the inquest.

My late partner and I were together for 18 months – not a long time, but an intense time, during Covid lockdowns. I still miss him. But several months later, it really helped I was able to tell my colleagues about a new relationship and let them see my happiness, without any fear of judgment.



## What didn't help?

One thing that isn't helpful, and which continues to hurt when it happens, is referring to people as 'committing suicide.' That short phrase has a whole heap of stigma attached to it. 'Commit' in this sense has a really negative feel to it, because it dates back to when suicide was a crime. When I talk about my partner, I talk about him having died, if I don't want to go into any details.

If I want to talk about how he died, I say he ended his own life, or died by suicide.



The language we use is powerful and we don't always see the effects our choice of words has on others. I recommend anyone wanting to understand more about how we talk about suicide to read *Language Matters: Why We Don't Say "Committed Suicide"* by Sally Spencer-Thomas.

The only other thing that really made me angry? A message on LinkedIn from a former colleague. We no longer worked together and had parted on less than good terms – we had a fundamental disagreement about workplace culture. I responded to the first message with a "Thanks, I appreciate your kind thoughts." But I then had a further message... Don't use someone else's grief as a time to try to rebuild a failed professional relationship. Just don't.

## A few thoughts on campaigning

We all want to change the world – that's why we work in the charity sector. The urge to campaign as a way of finding some bright light in the dark is not unusual and across the sector there are countless charities and campaigns which have been set up in the aftermath of loss, pain and tragedy. Many of them make a massive difference and are simply brilliant.

The urge to find some tiny spark of hope – "to make sure no one else goes through this" can be overwhelming. I thought hard about what, if anything to do. It takes a lot of effort to do nothing, sometimes. After several lengthy conversations, I decided that I would wait for a year and then decide if I wanted to spend my energy on a legacy campaign. I am so glad I did that.

“

Because it turns out I don't want to be 'that woman whose partner died by suicide, who campaigns.'

I want to be Clare.

”

# Charities and Organisations

There are many organisations that can support you, whether you need to talk to someone, or you need further resources, or you are trying to learn more about the topic

## Suicide Prevention UK



Run the National Suicide Prevention Hotline and their volunteers listen without judgement to help signpost individuals to the most relevant support available to them at that time, to get them the help they deserve.

National Suicide Prevention Helpline UK: 0800 689 5652

Website: SPUK - Suicide Prevention UK Charity 1187866

## Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide

UK-based organisation offering peer-led support to adults impacted by suicide loss. Provide safe, confidential environments where people can share their experiences and feelings, giving and gaining support from each other.

National Supportline: 0300 111 5065 

Website: Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide

## If U Care Share

Provide a range of services fundamental to their three main aims of prevention, intervention and supporting those bereaved by suicide.



Crisis Messenger: Text IUCS to 85258

Website: Supporting families affected by suicide

## National Suicide Prevention Alliance

An alliance of over 1,700 individuals and public, private, voluntary and community organisations in England who care about suicide prevention and are willing to take action to reduce suicide and support those affected by suicide.



Website: Preventing suicide together - NSPA



It is important to have structural support in place so your employees know how to access help when they need it.

Here is an example of how CFG aims to create a safe working environment:



One important phrase to avoid using is 'committed suicide'. This stems from a time when suicide was illegal and perceived as a sin, and using that terminology reinforces shame and stigma. Instead, we can use neutral words like 'died by suicide'. We should also avoid saying 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' when discussing a suicide attempt, and instead use the word 'survived' or 'lived through'.

Plumm is a brilliant resource for all staff to use. There are written articles, videos, guided meditations, and one-on-one support through EMMA (virtual wellbeing assistant). You can book a therapy session with a qualified psychologist. There are live classes you can attend or watch recordings of on a range of topics such as addiction, trauma, and suicide prevention.

CFG is committed to providing a safe environment in which people can speak without fear of judgement about anything they may be experiencing. Colleagues can talk with their managers, a member of the LT, HR or a trained MHFAider.

# Find Support

If you need to talk:

## **National Suicide Prevention Helpline UK**

PHONE: 0800 689 5652

**Everyday: 18:00 – Midnight**

**Website:** <https://www.spuk.org.uk/>

## **Samaritans**

PHONE: 116 123

**24 hours a day, 365 days a year**

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

**Website:** <https://www.samaritans.org/>

## **Shout**

TEXT: the word 'SHOUT' to 85258

**24 hours a day, 356 days a year**

**Website:** <https://giveusashout.org/>

## **Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)**

PHONE: 0800 58 58 58

**Everyday: 17:00 – Midnight**

**Website:** <https://www.thecalmzone.net/> (access their WEBCHAT)

## **SOS Silence Of Suicide**

PHONE: 0808 115 1505

**Every Week Night: 20:00 – Midnight**

**Every Weekend: 16:00 – Midnight**

**Website:** <https://sossilenceofsuicide.org/>

**IN A LIFE-THREATENING EMERGENCY ALWAYS DIAL 999 FIRST**

If you want support specific to you:

## **Papyrus (under 35)**

PHONE: 0800 068 4141

**24 hours a day, 356 days a year**

TEXT: 07860039967

Email: [pat@papyrus-uk.org](mailto:pat@papyrus-uk.org)

**Website:** <https://www.papyrus-uk.org/>

## **Switchboard (LGBT+ Helpline)**

PHONE: 0800 0119 100

**Everyday: 10:00 – 22:00**

Email: [hello@switchboard.lgbt](mailto:hello@switchboard.lgbt)

**Website:** <https://switchboard.lgbt/>

**Further Resources:**

## **Mind**

List of helplines and crisis support organisations

**Website:** <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/crisis-services/helplines-listening-services/>

## **Mental Health Foundation**

Further information and educational resources

**Website:** <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/public-engagement/suicide-prevention>



# Thank You

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