



Suicide

Relationships between colleagues at work may not always be as significant or important as those with family and close friends however when someone at work dies this can affect everyone who knew and worked with the person. When someone in an organisation commits suicide, the impact of the death can have a profound and disturbing impact on colleagues and team functioning.

HELP 

As a manager navigating a sensitive path through the complex reactions a suicide can create, it will help if you understand the wide range of individual responses you may encounter which can include intense emotional reactions.

Factors that can increase suicide risk

Some of the risk factors commonly involved are:

- > Long-term or acute physical illness
- > Alcohol or drug abuse
- > Mental illness including personality/mood disorders
- > Previous suicide attempts/earlier suicide in the family
- > Withdrawal and isolation from social situations
- > Psychological or sexual abuse.

Any one of these factors can lead to depression, hopelessness, low self-esteem, or other powerful emotions such as shame and despair. For some people, faced with the intensity of these feelings, suicide seems the only option.

What to do with someone who is suicidal

If you have concerns about anyone who you think might be suicidal it is important to act. If it is appropriate, ask them if you can help. Listening can be very helpful. In other situations discussing your options first, in confidence, with someone else may be helpful for you. This could be the Employee Assistance Programme, Occupational Health or the individual's GP. However, if there is an imminent threat of suicide or serious self-harm, the person should be accompanied to Accident and Emergency at a local hospital or you should phone 999 and request emergency medical help.

Understanding suicide

Bereavement after someone has taken their own life is often more intense, complicated and prolonged than it is from a death by natural causes. Reactions can include:

- > **Shock** – some people will find it hard to accept what has happened or the way in which it happened.
- > **Confusion** – it can be difficult to reconcile or understand what led to such a final act.
- > **Despair** – a suicide can leave some people with a sense of hopelessness and intense sadness which may lead to depression.

- > **Anger** – there may be anger directed towards the deceased (which may feel inappropriate) or levelled against family or friends, those who knew the deceased or those who found the body.
- > **Blame** – people close to the deceased may become the object of blame, being treated by others as if they missed clues to the suicidal intentions or blamed for not preventing the death.
- > **Grief** – people will grieve in different ways, according to their private needs, their relationship to the deceased, and their previous experiences of bereavement and loss.
- > **Sadness** – as work colleagues come to terms with the loss, sadness becomes a natural grief response. Tensions may arise as they try to reconcile 'paying their respects' with trying to get back to working normally.
- > **Guilt** – sometimes there can be a common 'could something have been done' response, perhaps linked to a last conversation or recent contact with the deceased.

Coping strategies after suicide

Each response is unique; some people may withdraw finding it hard to talk about, or preferring to deny what has happened. Others may need to talk. It is important that people do what is right for them. Whilst each unique response should clearly be respected, it is also important to manage the situation in a way that is appropriate for all employees and your organisation as a whole.

Talking through someone's response

Being able to talk about the experience in a safe and supportive environment can help people come to terms with the suicide. Ideally, this needs to be provided in the workplace by professional facilitators, qualified counsellors or managers who have been trained in the Support Post Trauma (SPoT) incident management model.

Going forward

If you would like to speak to a trained professional in confidence about any of the issues raised in this fact sheet, please telephone 0800 6888 777 or visit www.rmghelp.co.uk

You may also find the following websites and phone numbers useful:

CRUSE Bereavement Care

A national bereavement organisation offering emotional support regardless of age, race or belief.

Tel: 020 8939 9530

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

SOBS – Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide

A national self-help organisation supporting people who have been bereaved by suicide.

National Helpline – 0844 561 6855

www.uk-sobs.org.uk

RD4U

RD4U is a website designed for young people by young people. It is part of Cruse Bereavement Care's Youth Involvement Project which aims to support young people after the death of someone close.

Tel: 0808 808 1677

www.rd4u.org.uk

Depression Alliance

Provides information and support to people suffering from depression.

Tel: 0845 123 2320

www.depressionalliance.org

Mind

Provides information on a whole range of mental health issues. They are providers of mental health information and sign posting to other organisations, national and local.

Tel: 0845 766 0163

www.mind.org.uk

Samaritans

National 24 hour listening service for people in crisis.

Tel: 08457 90 90 90

www.samaritans.org