

SAMARITANS

# Step by Step

Helping school communities respond to  
and recover from a suspected suicide

Postvention

Information for students

UK

Suicide is a tragedy. The loss of a life through suicide has an impact on so many people that had a connection with the person who has died. It can affect the whole school community and beyond; even if the person who has died wasn't someone you knew very well.

Such a sad event can bring up a range of feelings and questions that you may never have experienced before. You may find it hard to explain how you are feeling to others or to ask for help. This leaflet will explain some of these feelings and what to do if you think you or one of your friends might need help.

**If you would like to find out more about this service:**

**Email**  
[stepbystep@samaritans.org](mailto:stepbystep@samaritans.org)

**Phone**  
**0808 168 2528**  
Calls are free from landlines and some mobile providers.

## How might I be feeling or reacting?

When there has been an event as traumatic as someone you know taking their own life, it can throw up all kinds of feelings. Everyone acts or reacts in their own way. It's important to know that there's no right or wrong way of feeling.

### Things you may feel:

- Anger
- Detached
- Guilt
- Numbness
- Betrayal
- Disbelief
- Hurt
- Shock
- Confusion
- Fear
- Isolation
- Tearful

You may experience one or more of these emotions and that's ok. Feelings vary from person to person. You may also have lots of questions. That's also common but often there are no clear answers or reasons. It may be that many of your questions cannot be answered. It is important to express how you feel in a safe way. Talk to someone you can trust; someone who listens and won't tell you how you should be feeling.

**Samaritans can provide support day or night, 365 days a year. Whatever you're facing, we're here to listen.**

**Tel: 116 123** (this number is free to call)

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

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

*Please note these are the main Samaritans contact details and not for the Step by Step or Schools service.*

## How can I help my friends?

If you are worried about how a friend is feeling, the best thing you can do is listen and be there for them. You may not know exactly what to say or do – most people don't. You don't need to have ready answers or solutions. Being there for them and listening to them is often enough.

It's hard knowing that a friend is hurting, and you may find yourself struggling to cope. Make sure you have support yourself if you're trying to help a grieving friend. It can be very difficult if your friend changes from the person you know into someone who's expressing difficult, unusual or intense emotions. Sometimes the best support you can offer them is to involve a supporting adult.

### Try to:

- give them time to cry when they need to
- listen without judging or criticising. Let them know you are there for them. They may go over the story time and time again. That's fine – it's part of the healing process
- remember the reason they may be angry is because of the pain they're going through, not because of you.

There may be days when they seem fine and days when they don't. That's all part of coming to terms with what's happened. Suggest doing things you know they enjoy. They may not feel ready, but it's important to make them feel included. Even if they seem to have lots of family and close friends around, your friend may still need support. It's important they know they can talk to you about their grief, so they don't feel alone with it.

If you think they need it, offer to help them get support by contacting a teacher, GP, school counsellor, bereavement specialist or talk to an agency like ChildLine or Samaritans. Make sure you're supported too. Don't feel like you're carrying responsibility for their support all on your own shoulders. Helping someone come to terms with the loss of someone close to them isn't easy.

## Can online memorials help?

It's important to remember that anything posted on social media sites, can reach many people, very quickly. It can be helpful to share memories of the person who has died and to send messages of support to others. However, please be aware that using social media comes with the risk of online rumours, unkind messages about the person who has died, their friends and family, or messages that victimise other students.

Tell your parents or a teacher about any messages that concern you. You can ask for offensive messages to be removed by contacting the site.

You may be concerned about how someone else is coping because of their messages online. If so, tell someone you can trust and try to help them get the support they need.

Memorial pages should always be respectful and honour the person who has died. It's not helpful to post messages about how the person died or discuss the possible reasons why. This can be damaging and hurtful to the family and those who were close to the person who has died.

## Why do people take their own lives?

Suicide is a very complicated and difficult thing to understand. Usually there isn't a single reason why someone takes their own life.

Sometimes people get to a point where they are unable to see any other solution to pain they are feeling. However, we know that there are often other options and people can feel better with support. Situations are always temporary but death is permanent, so it's a tragedy when someone is unable to reach out for help. Sadly, most people thinking about suicide don't really want to die but just want the pain they are feeling to stop.

### When and how to seek help

It's important not to struggle with difficult emotions on your own. If your feelings become overwhelming or it's difficult to cope with small everyday events, find someone to talk to. No matter how awful things seem, there is always someone you can reach out to. Counsellors, family members, teachers or support staff can be of great help when you are feeling low.

**There are some possible warning signs that you, or someone you know may need to get support:**

- spending much of your time thinking or talking about suicide
- problems sleeping or concentrating
- not wanting to socialise or see friends
- not showing an interest in your usual activities.

If you are finding it hard to cope with your thoughts and feelings or your feelings become overwhelming and it's difficult to cope with small everyday events, find someone to talk to. No matter how awful things seem, there is always someone you can reach out to.

If you start having thoughts about suicide tell someone. It may feel scary and confusing but others can help you through this difficult time. You are not alone.

If you'd prefer to talk to someone who is not part of your school or family, you can contact ChildLine. They are there at any time of the day or night to help you. You can also contact them by email or text.

## Talking can help

Everyone faces challenges in their lives and sometimes we all need someone to talk to, to help us cope. There is no shame in asking for help when you feel like coping on your own is too difficult.

Samaritans know from experience how important it is that you feel able to talk about things that are troubling you. Be kind to your fellow students during this difficult time, as others may be affected by what has happened too.

### Other things that can help:

- try and have a routine, meal times, getting up
- eat and sleep well
- do some physical exercise, walk or play a sport
- try and be outside for some time every day
- be with people you enjoy spending time with.

### Further information

**Breathing Space Scotland** is a free, confidential phone and web-based service for people in Scotland experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety: [breathingspace.scot](http://breathingspace.scot)

**Child Bereavement UK** provides support to families grieving the loss of a child, and advice for professionals working with bereaved families: **01494 568900**, [childbereavement.org.uk](http://childbereavement.org.uk)

**ChildLine** provides support services to children and young people: **0800 1111**, [childline.org.uk](http://childline.org.uk)

**Cruse Bereavement Care** promotes the wellbeing of bereaved people and enables anyone bereaved by death to understand their grief and cope with their loss. Provides support and offers information, advice, education and training services: [cruse.org.uk](http://cruse.org.uk), [crusescotland.org.uk](http://crusescotland.org.uk)

**Young Minds** offers advice and support to parents worried about their children's emotional or mental wellbeing: **0808 8025544**, [youngminds.org.uk](http://youngminds.org.uk)

**Winston's Wish** practical support and guidance to bereaved children, young people and their families: **08452 030405**, [winstonswish.org.uk](http://winstonswish.org.uk)

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### Visit

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