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## OVERVIEW OF THE RESOURCE

This guide has been developed to assist leaders, managers and key staff to support their learning communities following suicide and sudden death. In recognition that learners or colleagues may experience distress, including thoughts of suicide, following the suicide or sudden death of a member of the community, this resource is designed to be used in conjunction with the [Managing Challenging Conversations About Suicide](#)

On average there are 135 people who have a connection to each person who dies by suicide.<sup>2</sup> Australian research has shown that on average there are 15 people emotionally injured by that sudden traumatic loss,<sup>3</sup> which may include thoughts of suicide in people who have lost a loved one to suicide.<sup>4,5</sup>

## **The aftermath of suicide and sudden death: Postvention**

The term 'postvention' was first used in 1968 by Ed Shneidman.<sup>6</sup> Recognising the impact that suicide can have on those bereaved, he subsequently described postvention as:

### **POSTVENTION IS PREVENTION FOR THE NEXT GENERATION.<sup>7</sup>**

Research shows that suicide postvention, developed by, with, or for people who have been bereaved by suicide, can support their recovery and prevent adverse outcomes, including suicide and suicide ideation.<sup>8</sup> 'From Grief to Hope', published in 2022,<sup>9</sup> highlighted the need for accessible information and access to immediate, proactive interventions, including face-to-face support when the person feels ready. This research also highlighted the importance of ongoing support and 'check ins' at 3, 6, 12 or 18 months after the suicide occurred, with a specialist suicide bereavement support worker. However, as no time frame can be set on grief, it's important for people to be aware that they can reach out for support at any point in the future. It is not necessarily obvious who will be most affected. We do not have to have known the learner or the staff member who has died or who has been involved in a traumatic event to be adversely impacted; some events may trigger memories of past trauma in affected individuals, and individual reactions need to be validated.

As well as postvention after a suicide or sudden death, we should also be mindful of the impact of other events on a learning community. A traumatic event such as an assault or serious accident affecting a member of the learning community will impact the individual involved, in addition to others in the learning community and beyond.

Further afield from the learning community, the impact of traumatic events, including acts of terror, war, extreme weather events or accidents, may be felt from across the community and further afield.

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<sup>2</sup> Cerel J, Brown M, Maple M. (2018) How Many People Are Exposed to Suicide? Not Six. *Suicide and Life-Threatening and Life*

After learning about global events that cause uncertainty, you may feel fear, anxiety, or a loss of control over your own life and plans. You may worry for the safety of strangers, loved ones or yourself. And if you have lived through similar events in the past, it may bring up traumatic memories.<sup>10</sup>

These events can impact some communities more than others, for example if there are family members living in the area of the trauma, or who have lived through a traumatic event. Members of the learning community can be signposted to the many sources of specific support which can be found online for communities affected by traumatic events.

### **Postvention: Crisis Planning**

At a time of intense shock following a suicide, sudden death or other traumatic event, having a pre-written crisis plan in place that can be implemented immediately is important. The crisis plan should identify the roles and responsibilities of key staff and have pre-agreed templates for communication to learners, staff, parents/carers. It can form part of a 'postvention toolkit', detailing the support put in place for the whole learning community following the event.

In the event of a suspected suicide, the Samaritans team of Postvention Advisors can provide guidance and information on addressing the impact, supporting education settings to proactively develop a response plan. There are other options for support and guidance available, including [Responding to an Unexpected Death: Support for Schools and Colleges – NSPA](#).

A learning community's Bereavement Policy can outline what the setting will do in the event of a sudden death or suicide, referring to the crisis plan/postvention toolkit – again detailing key staff members who would work together to communicate the information to the wider learning community.

Your crisis plan, policy or procedure may include guidance on:

Practical necessities following a suspected suicide or sudden death including:

- Notifying authorities where appropriate
- Securing the scene of the death if taken place on the learning provider's property
- Informing the crisis response team who are identified in the policy (and who ideally have received relevant training)
- Effective and timely information sharing and communication, using appropriate language, to avoid information being spread on social media first which can cause variations of information.
- Detailed guidance is available for schools from the Samaritans in their [Step by Step](#) resources, which may also be helpful for other learning communities.
- Up to date information of local and national support which is available so that you can empower and enable all members of the learning community to access support should they need it.

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<sup>10</sup> Mental Health Foundation (2023) Tips to look after your mental health during scary world events. Available at:

- Details of the support available for all learners and staff, recognising that people will be affected differently; this support can be from within the learning community as well as through statutory NHS services, the voluntary sector and self-care strategies.

[Steps to support learners and staff who are immediately affected.](#)

[Steps to support the wider learning community and beyond.](#) Part of this should be

In addition, young people may feel or express:<sup>11</sup>

Fear

Sense of numbness

Loneliness

Anxiety

Feeling responsible for taking on the role of the bereaved person, for example, 'being the man of the house'

Hopelessness

Relief if the family situation has been difficult, for example, addiction

Physical symptoms

Challenging behaviours

There is no right or wrong way to feel and express emotions relating to grief or the impact of

Learning about a sudden death or suicide, or about how a person died, is likely to be shocking. If details of the method or location of suicide are shared, for example, this can have a profound impact and can lead to the 'Werther' effect.<sup>13</sup> There is evidence from multiple studies that media reporting of methods and locations of suicide has an association with increased suicidal behaviour.<sup>14</sup> The increased risk is even greater where the person who died has celebrity status. There is evidence to say that vulnerable individuals can be influenced to engage in or imitate behaviours, particularly if coverage is extensive, prominent, sensationalist or explicitly describes the method of suicide. This highlights the importance of sensitive reporting by all, as well as calling out insensitive and harmful reporting.

If we talk in a confident and safe way about suicide, it enables people who are thinking about suicide to talk and to access the support that they may need to help them stay safe. Therefore, be prepared to initiate a 'Calm and Compassionate' conversation, using the 'ASK' and 'SHARE' framework outlined in the [Managing challenging conversations about suicide](#) guide.

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<sup>13</sup> The source is: [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-to-do-if-you-are-thinking-about-suicide](#)











## SUMMARY

Be aware of the potential impact following suicide, sudden death or traumatic events on learners, staff, their immediate family and extended family and friends, in addition to the wider learning community.

Have a clear crisis plan which outlines:

IMPACT AND  
POSTVENTION  
CRISIS PLANNING

Policies and procedures in the event of a suspected suicide or sudden death, including reporting a death and securing a scene. A postvention response team to manage ongoing response and



## ABOUT THE CHARLIE WALLER TRUST:

The Charlie Waller Trust is a national charity set up by the Waller family in 1997 after Charlie tragically took his own life aged 28. It provides mental health training, resources and consultancy with a focus on children and young people.

The Trust's expert trainers give parents, carers, teachers and employers the skills and confidence to spot signs of mental ill health and support young people to seek help. They work in schools, colleges, universities and workplaces throughout the UK.

All the Trust's work is evidence-based, with Charlie's story at its heart, and most of it is free. It strives to ensure young people's voices are heard.

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