



UNIVERSITY OF  
WINCHESTER

**SUICIDE SAFETY PREVENTION  
AND POSTVENTION STRATEGY  
AND GUIDANCE**

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| <b>Document Title:</b>  | Suicide Safety Prevention and Postvention Strategy and Guidance  |
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| <b>Summary:</b><br><p>This document sets out the institutional responsibilities and pathways in the event of an unexpected death (confirmed or anticipated to be confirmed as suicide). The document applies to both staff and student unexpected death. The document also covers prevention and postvention.</p> <p>This policy is underpinned by our commitment to promoting a university wide approach to health, safety and wellbeing and is supported by the principles of the University Mental Health Charter. Care has been taken to ensure that the policy is written compassionately, with consideration of the potential impact on staff and students.</p> |  |

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Senior Sponsorship
3. Prevention and Intervention
4. Postvention
  - Appendix 1: Suicide Myths and Facts
  - Appendix 2: Dos and Don'ts
  - Appendix 3: Appropriate Language (how to talk about suicide)
  - Appendix 4: Guidance for Staff (worried about a student or colleague)
  - Appendix 5: At Risk Protocols and Procedures

## **Content Warning**

This document includes references to suicide, death and mental ill health. If you feel that your mental health or wellbeing may be affected by reading this document, we encourage you to read the document with a friend or colleague. If you feel negatively affected after reading the document, please do reach out to talk with someone. Support is always available.

### **Available support at the University may be accessed via:**

- If you are a student, email [studentsupport@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:studentsupport@winchester.ac.uk)
- If you are staff, speak with your line manager, contact the People and Culture team, or reach out to the Employee Assistance Programme.
- Both staff and students may access Togetherall for advice and peer support. ([www.togetherall.com](http://www.togetherall.com))

### **External support can be accessed via:**

- Samaritans – 24hour a day free support by email – [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) or calling 116123
- NHS Mental Health Hub - telephone advice and support on healthcare can be obtained from NHS24 by phoning 111. The Mental Health Hub is open 24/7
- Shout – free confidential messaging support through texting 85258
- PAPYRUS HOPELINE247. If you are having thoughts of suicide or are concerned for a young person who might be, you can contact PAPYRUS HOPELINE247 for confidential support and practical advice. Call: 0800 068 4141 Text: 07860 039 967 Email: [pat@papyrus-uk.org](mailto:pat@papyrus-uk.org)

### **Advice and Support when not in the UK:**

[The International Association for Suicide Prevention](http://www.theinternationalassociationforsuicideprevention.org) has information on support available, including crisis helplines for many countries outside the UK.

## **Emergency/Critical support**

If you believe someone is in immediate danger of harming themselves or attempting to take their own life:

- Ensure they are escorted directly to the local Accident and Emergency Department
- If they cannot reach the hospital themselves, dial 999 (in the UK) to request an ambulance
- If they are on campus, please alert the Site Stewards on x **7666**

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Unexpected, sudden death is enormously impactful on all involved. Student or staff death by suicide is devastating for family and friends and deeply affects the University community as a whole. Suicide and self-harm are not mental health problems in themselves; they are, however, linked with mental distress. At Winchester, we want all students and staff, to feel able to reach out for support and help if they find themselves struggling with their mental health and wellbeing.
- 1.2. This strategy aligns with the [Suicide-Safer Universities](#) guidance and with the [Hampshire Suicide Prevention Plan](#). It outlines the roles, responsibilities, and processes through which we, as a community, seek to prevent suicide (prevention and intervention). It will also seek to consider the consequences, when, despite best practice, a sudden death, by suicide, does occur (postvention).
- 1.3. We strive to ensure that our institutional policies and procedures do no harm and this strategy forms part of our overarching [Mental Wellbeing Strategy](#) and its associated operational plans. Additionally, for staff it is part of our [Staff Health, Wellbeing and Stress Management Policy](#), with the linked [Staff Wellbeing Action Plan](#). Guidance on the implementation of this strategy can be sourced from the Mental Wellbeing Team in Student Support and Success, or from colleagues in People and Culture.
- 1.4. As an institution we recognise that we play a key role in helping to prevent suicide. Our People and Culture department leads on staff concerns and our Student Support and Success department leads on student concerns.

## 2. Senior sponsorship

- 2.1. Overall responsibility for this strategy is shared between the Executive Leadership team. They take leadership for and provide guidance on the whole-university approach to good mental health and wellbeing and the creation of compassionate communities amongst our staff and student bodies.

## 3. Prevention and Intervention

- 3.1. Suicide is complex, and we acknowledge that thoughts of suicide (suicidal ideation) are common across the population and do not necessarily mean an individual is at risk. Suicide is often the result of several contributing factors, and the reasons are frequently complicated and personal to an individual; nonetheless, we believe that it is possible to learn lessons from each death that can help us, along with colleagues in the wider community, prevent future deaths.
- 3.2. As a values-driven institution, we strive to encourage, develop and maintain a compassionate campus. One where our community encourages disclosures of distress. We aim to have a supportive, resilient community who can identify need and can signpost and follow up those who require additional support.
- 3.3. We provide our staff and students with opportunities to safely raise concerns with people who are qualified to offer support and guidance, or to refer onwards. We will always seek to act in a way that does not deter anyone from coming forward for help if they are living with suicidal ideation.
- 3.4. We provide opportunities for our staff and students to develop skills and confidence to support others who are experiencing mental distress.
- 3.5. Although no formal training is strictly necessary to support a person in distress, we will ensure identified staff across professional services and faculties are able to access appropriate formal Mental Health training, for example suicide first aid.

- 3.6. Our Personal Academic Tutors and Support and Success Advisers play a key preventative role via their respective outreach to students following 14 and 21 days absence from teaching sessions. Every non-attendance outreach point is logged on the Academic Dashboard to provide a complete overview of proactive support.
- 3.7. We offer a range of accessible and culturally appropriate on campus and online support for both staff and students experiencing mental distress. Students can find out about the support available from the [Mental Wellbeing intranet pages](#). This support will not replace statutory support.
- 3.8. We continue to keep our support service offerings under regular review to ensure relevance and appropriateness.
- 3.9. We safeguard green spaces on campus that nurture positive mental wellbeing, actively maintaining our community's ability to connect with the environment.
- 3.10. We aim to model and nurture good communications across the whole institutional community. This means, as staff, we will ensure we signpost all available support to staff and students across the University. This would include both institutionally provided support and externally available support. It also means we will always strive to communicate in a clear and compassionate manner.
- 3.11. We provide guidance for all staff on how to raise concerns about a student's welfare, including what actions to take in an emergency: [Student Support Information for Staff](#).
- 3.12. We value and protect freedom of speech, but we also acknowledge the power of words. We strive to prevent all forms of misconduct, bullying, harassment and hate crime.
- 3.13. We will continue to work closely in partnership with colleagues from, amongst others, Hampshire Public Health, Winchester Primary Care Network and the Community and Acute Mental Health teams.

#### 4. Postvention

- 4.1. The immediate aftermath of a suspected suicide can be highly emotive and challenging for all involved. The University has postvention plans that ensure an appropriate and timely response.
- 4.2. In the event of an unexpected death, including suspected suicide, we will follow the Death of a Student Procedures, or the Guidelines for Dealing with the Death of a Member of Staff, as appropriate. Our leadership team will be clear about what institutional action should be taken. An Incident Management Team meeting will be called and each team member will have defined responsibility, this will include staff and student support, communication with external agencies, including the media, family liaison and so on.
- 4.3. Our Executive Leadership Team will be confident in understanding what a suicide [cluster](#) is, how to identify the emergence of a possible cluster and how best to respond should a cluster be identified.
- 4.4. The University is mindful of the need to appropriately communicate sudden deaths and it will take into account best practice guidelines such as the Samaritan's Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide.
- 4.5. Our Death of a Student Procedures/ Guidelines for Dealing with the Death of a Member of Staff will guide the majority of our postvention activities, not least because of the delay that can take place in the formal confirmation of cause of death.; however, we acknowledge that death by suspected suicide does carry specific considerations and the Incident Management Team

will take these into account and act accordingly. This will include working closely with appropriate colleagues internally and externally, including Hampshire Public Health, as required to support colleagues and manage concerns around the impact of an unexpected death, including the potential for a cluster.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-identifying-and-responding-to-suicide-clusters/responding-to-suicide-clusters-guidance-for-stakeholders-and-members-of-cluster-response-groups>

## **Appendix 1: Suicide Myths and Facts**

Suicide is an emotive and at times taboo topic and people are often concerned about how to engage in conversations with someone expressing suicidal ideation. Often people worry about making someone's situation worse. There are many myths around suicide and engaging with people who are suicidal. Below are a few of the main ones.

**Myth: If a person is serious about taking their own life there is nothing you can do.**

Fact: Feeling actively suicidal is often temporary. Reaching out to support someone is important as it can enable the right support at the right time.

**Myth: People who talk about suicide are unlikely to follow through with it.**

Fact: Often people who take their own lives have told someone they feel hopeless or that life is not worth living. Some do say they wish to die. It is possible that people raising these concerns are calling out for help. It is important to always take someone seriously if they tell you they feel suicidal. Helping them get appropriate support could save their life.

**Myth: Asking someone if they feel suicidal may make them think about taking their own life.**

Fact: Asking someone directly gives them permission to talk with you and opening up can be a positive experience for many. There is no evidence that enquiring if someone feels suicidal will cause them to take their own life, rather it can open the door to support.

**Myth: People who feel suicidal want to die.**

Fact: Not everyone who feels suicidal may want to die. It is thought that the majority of people who feel suicidal do not actually want to die; however, they do want to change the life they are living.

For more information about facts and myths around suicide, please see the Samaritan's or Papyrus guidance [online](#)

[Myths about suicide \(samaritans.org\)](https://www.samaritans.org); [Worried About Someone? - Papyrus UK | Suicide Prevention Charity \(papyrus-uk.org\)](https://www.papyrus-uk.org)

## **Appendix 2: Dos and Don'ts**

- **Do try and remain calm** if someone shares with you that they are feeling suicidal.
- **Do be prepared to talk about suicide** – it is important to talk openly and honestly. This can decrease anxiety and highlight other options to the individual who is struggling.
- **Do be prepared to act and support** the individual by assisting them (if possible) to reach out for professional help or reaching out on their behalf if they are unable to do so.
- **Don't try and solve everything yourself.** Acting and supporting is important, but you also have to look after yourself. Reach out for professional support as soon as possible.
- **Don't put yourself in physical danger.**
- **Don't promise confidentiality.** You may not be able to keep such a promise.
- **Do access appropriate training,** such as Suicide First Aid, which is available to all staff.

### **Appendix 3: Appropriate Language (how to talk about suicide)**

Language matters and is emotionally charged. It is important to be considerate in the language we use when speaking about suicide.

Suicide is no longer a criminal act and therefore it is not appropriate to use the phrase '*committed suicide*'.

Alternatives include: *took one's own life/ ended one's life /died by suicide* or, more recently *completed suicide*.

Ask open questions to enable the person to open up more to you.

Give the other person time to speak – this might mean some long silences Validate their emotions by taking what they say seriously.

Try to remain calm and respond in a non-judgmental fashion.

Be direct and clear when asking questions. Don't try and avoid the topic or speak in unclear terms.

## **Appendix 4: Guidance for Staff (worried about a student or colleague)**

We know that it can be challenging if you are worried about someone who is suicidal. It's important to remember that you are not alone and you don't have to support them on your own.

Do seek professional help or guidance. This might be from the Mental Wellbeing team in Student Support and Success or from colleagues in People and Culture. Student Journey team colleagues are also able to offer support and guidance.

If the situation is critical and you are concerned the person has acted upon suicidal thoughts or there is imminent risk to life, please contact 999. NHS colleagues may also be able to provide guidance, depending on the situation.

If the student is on campus (or within close proximity of campus) colleagues can also reach out to site security (01962 827666) for additional support. Site security colleagues are available 24/7 and are trained in responding to people in distress, including suicidal students.

### **Key contacts:**

- **999**: for life threatening or critical health situations
- **01962 827 666**: Site Security: to advise of situation if 999 has been dialled and/or to receive additional emergency support
- [mentalwellbeing@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:mentalwellbeing@winchester.ac.uk) for general and bespoke, non-emergency, advice and guidance on mental health concerns
- [StudentSupport@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:StudentSupport@winchester.ac.uk) for general and bespoke, non-emergency, student advice and guidance on general wellbeing and support
- [People@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:People@winchester.ac.uk) : for general, non-emergency staff advice and guidance on general wellbeing and support.

Wherever possible, seek consent from the individual to share information more widely; however, if you believe there is risk to life, consent, although preferred, is not required (as above, don't promise confidentiality).

## **Appendix 5: At Risk Protocols and Procedures**

Students who are identified as being ***At Risk*** (for the purposes of this document specifically as a serious risk to themselves) are discussed at a fortnightly ***At Risk*** meeting. This is chaired by the Director **or** Deputy Director of Student Support and Success and includes colleagues from across the institution.

This meeting reviews students holistically, taking into account as much information as possible, including health, social and academic information. Colleagues may be approached by members of the ***At Risk*** meeting for information about a student to enable the group to make appropriate, timely decisions. Due to confidentiality, it may not be possible for ***At Risk*** group members to share detailed information.

Staff who feel a student might be classified as ***At Risk*** should contact [mentalwellbeing@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:mentalwellbeing@winchester.ac.uk) or flag directly to the **Head of Mental Wellbeing**, the **Deputy Director of Student Support and Success** or the **Director of Student Support and Success**.