

How can I help a colleague with suicidal feelings?

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1. General Advice

It can be very distressing if you are worried about someone at work who feels suicidal. They may have talked about wanting to end their life, or you may be concerned that they are thinking about it.

You might feel unsure of what to do, but there are lots of things that might help. You could:

Encourage them to talk about their feelings

Ask open questions, give them time, take them seriously, stay calm, try not to make assumptions or make judgements

Encourage them to seek treatment and support

Contact their GP/out of hours service for an emergency appointment, the Crisis Team on 0800 169 0398 (Glos) or 01432 364046 (Hereford) or encourage them to phone one of the contact numbers given below.

Offer emotional support

You don't need any special training to show someone you care about them. Listen to what they have to say, offer reassurance that you will help them, stay calm even though it might be upsetting, be patient and let them set the pace, try not to make assumptions about what has caused these feelings.

Offer practical support

Look for information/signposting that might be helpful, help to plan work so they can take time to go to appointments, ask them if there are any specific issues at work they are worried about or is contributing to their feelings and if so refer them to Occupational Health.

Help them think of ideas for self-help

Taking things minute by minute can help make things more bearable. Encourage them to remove anything that could be used for harm. Ask if they have a crisis or safety plan in place and if so to talk about what is on it.

Distraction techniques

- holding an ice cube in your hand until it melts and focus on how cold it feels
- tearing something up into hundreds of pieces
- take a very cold shower or bath

- think about what you can smell, taste, touch, hear and see can help ground your thoughts
- take long deep breaths, breathing out for longer than you breathe in can help you to feel calmer

Other advice you can give

- Avoid taking drugs or drinking alcohol as this can make the feelings worse. Drink water, eat something if hungry, sit somewhere comfortable and write down how you are feeling
- Go outside – feeling the rain, sun or wind against your skin can help you to feel more connected to your body
- Reach out – talk to someone you know or contact a telephone support service

Help them to make a support plan

A support plan might include the following details

- **What can I do to take care of myself?**

This could include things like 'write down how I feel', 'cuddle a pet' or 'do some exercise like walking or swimming'.

- **How would I like to be supported?**

This could include a list of names and numbers of friends, family or professionals you can contact when you need support.

- **Who can be contacted in an emergency?**

It's best to agree on what to do in an emergency, with names and numbers for crisis services. This could include things like 'call 999 for an ambulance', 'contact my Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) on...' or 'call 116 123 for Samaritans'.

2. EMERGENCY ADVICE

There may be times when you need to seek help more urgently, such as if someone:

- has harmed themselves and needs medical attention
- is having suicidal feelings, and feel they may act on them
- is putting themselves or someone else at immediate, serious risk of harm.

In this case:

- **If they are not safe by themselves right now** – as long as you feel able to do so, you should stay with them and help them call 999 for an ambulance, or help them get to A&E. They may appreciate it if you can wait with them until they can see a doctor.
- **If they can keep themselves safe for a little while** – you can get quick medical advice by calling NHS Direct on 111 (England) or 0845 46 47 (Wales), or you could help them make an emergency GP appointment to see a doctor soon. You can encourage them to call the Samaritans on 116 123 at any time of night or day to talk to someone, or try other telephone support services.
- **If you feel personally in danger right now**, or that others are in immediate danger – you can dial 999 and ask for the police to help. You might feel worried about getting someone in trouble, but it's important to put your own safety first.

USEFUL CONTACTS

- **To talk about anything that is upsetting you**, you can contact Samaritans 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You can call 116 123 (free from any phone), email jo@samaritans.org or visit some branches in person. You can also call the Welsh Language Line on 0300 123 3011 (7pm–11pm every day).

- **If you're experiencing a mental health problem or supporting someone else**, you can call SANEline on 0300 304 7000 (4.30pm–10.30pm every day).
- **If you're under 25**, you can call The Mix on 0808 808 4994 (Sunday-Friday 2pm–11pm), request support by email using this form on The Mix website or use their crisis text messenger service.
- **If you're under 35 and struggling with suicidal feelings or self-harm**, you can call Papyrus HOPEline on 0800 068 4141 (weekdays 10am-10pm, weekends 2pm-10pm and bank holidays 2pm–5pm), email pat@papyrus-uk.org or text 07786 209 697.
- **If you identify as male**, you can call the Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) on 0800 58 58 58 (5pm–midnight every day) or use their webchat service.
- **If you're a student**, you can look on the Nightline website to see if your university or college offers a night-time listening service. Nightline phone operators are all students too.
- **If you identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender**, you can call Switchboard on 0300 330 0630 (10am–10pm every day), email chris@switchboard.lgbt or use their webchat service. Phone operators all identify as LGBT+.
- **If you live in Wales**, you can call the Community Advice and Listening Line (C.A.L.L.) on 0800 123 737 (open 24/7) or you can text 'help' followed by a question to 81066.

Contact MIND (lines are open 9 am to 6 pm Mon-Fri (except for bank holidays) **0300 123 3393**
Text: 86463 info@mind.org.uk

Some other best practices

- Make sure you have an up to date emergency 'next of kin' contact number for your staff
- Make sure there is a contact plan in place with the individual – it does not necessarily need to be the line manager or HR, but someone should make contact with them on a regular basis to maintain contact.
- Make sure you seek help for your own wellbeing as it can be very upsetting trying to support someone who is suicidal

Reference: www.mind.org.uk