



# Managers' Guide to supporting staff who express suicidal feelings

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# Managing and supporting individuals who express suicidal thoughts

## 1 Introduction

We are committed to providing an environment that supports the health of our employees and appreciate there may be circumstances that impact on mental health and that very occasionally this may lead to a member of staff disclosing suicidal feelings or intent.

This guide aims to help managers to:

- Recognise and respond to individuals who are expressing suicidal intent.
- Assist them in assessing the risk.
- Clarify the options for support.

## 2 Scope

This guide applies to all University leaders and managers who may be required to support and manage team members who express suicidal feelings. Very occasionally a member of staff may disclose feeling suicidal and / or indicate that they have plans to act out suicide. In such circumstances your responsibility is to offer immediate support, facilitate a professional suicide risk assessment and ensure that the member of staff and anyone else involved is aware of the support available within the University and externally. The staff member is then responsible for their own behaviour and for taking up available support.

## 3 Potential forms of disclosure

Suicidal feelings and thoughts may be expressed very explicitly or more implicitly. If a member of your team has communicated that they are feeling suicidal or appeared to communicate that, then you need to take action and respond.

## 4 First Step – check and clarify the communication

See if it is possible to clarify the meaning of the communication directly with the person concerned. Often things said in the heat of a moment may be an expression of anger, frustration or despair rather than suicidal intent. For example you could say to the person: *You said (or I heard you say or X has told me that) you were feeling like killing yourself (or whatever wording has been used) – is that correct?*

If they indicate that it is not an ongoing feeling or they didn't mean it literally you can proceed to explore their support needs non-urgently following the **Managers' Guide to supporting individuals experiencing stress and / or mental health issues**.

Sometimes the nature of the situation means that it is not possible to clarify the meaning; then it is best to proceed as if there is an immediate threat of harm.

## 5. Responding to disclosures of suicidal intent and assessing risk.

Your role in dealing with the immediate situation is to respond to the risk of harm by facilitating a mental health assessment by the GP or external health professional or emergency service. The following process will help identify appropriate sources of support who know the person or who can conduct a fuller assessment of the risk and of protective factors.

- Ask who else knows about their feelings (i.e. friends, family, GP, external health professional, Occupational Health Practitioner and Staff Counsellor). Check if there is already a plan in place for these situations.
- If they tell you that they are attending a GP, external or staff counsellor: Ask if the GP or counsellor is aware of the extent of her / his distress. Also ask when the next appointment is booked.
- See if they will make an earlier appointment with their GP (i.e. that day).
- If the member of staff is very distressed you could ask if they would like you to help organise the appointment, or if they have someone who could do that for them.
- If an urgent appointment with the GP isn't possible, you could encourage the member of staff to call the NHS 111 service or go to A&E for an assessment at A&E. In some cases it may be appropriate to escort the member of staff to A&E.
- If the member of staff tells you that they not seeing a GP or counsellor and that nobody else knows about their feelings, ask if they will go and see a GP and discuss the problem and then follow the guidance above.

## 6 Maintaining professional boundaries

In these circumstances it can be difficult to manage the professional boundaries of offering support without becoming more closely involved than you are comfortable with or are appropriate within your role.

## 7 Consult the Staff Counselling and Psychological Team

Telephone extension: 33694 or email: [staffcounselling@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:staffcounselling@leeds.ac.uk)

The Staff Counselling and Psychological Support Service can provide personal consultation counselling and coaching to individuals who are experiencing stress, distress or psychological challenges, enabling them to function more effectively. They can also provide specific professional support and tools to enable those in leadership and management roles to deal with any particular psychological and professional challenges associated with their roles. For further details visit the [staff counselling website](#).

If a staff counsellor is available they will be happy to talk through the situation and your response with you.

If the situation has had an unsettling impact on you and/or you are concerned about how to follow up with the person involved, or other colleagues (see below) it may be helpful to make an appointment for a Professional Consultation.

Please note that the Staff Counselling and Psychological Support Service and the Occupational Health Service are not crisis support services and are not usually able to offer immediate support to suicidal staff.

## 8 Immediate external support for the member of staff

The [Samaritans Website Link](#) provide 24 hours a day helpline to provide confidential emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress, despair or suicidal thoughts.

## 9 Providing follow-up support for the member of staff and colleagues in the wider team

See the Managers' Guide to supporting individuals experiencing stress and / or mental health issues.

## 10. Other helpful contact details

Name	Email	Telephone	Link
Human Resources	<a href="mailto:hr@leeds.ac.uk">hr@leeds.ac.uk</a>	0113 343 4146	<a href="#">HR Contacts</a>
Staff Counselling & Psychological Support Service	<a href="mailto:staffcounselling@leeds.ac.uk">staffcounselling@leeds.ac.uk</a>	0113 34 33694	<a href="#">Staff counselling website.</a>
Occupational Health	<a href="mailto:occupationalhealth@leeds.ac.uk">occupationalhealth@leeds.ac.uk</a>	0113 343 2997	<a href="#">Occupational Health website.</a>
Health Safety and Wellbeing	<a href="mailto:safety@leeds.ac.uk">safety@leeds.ac.uk</a>	0113 34 34201 Or extension 32997	<a href="#">Well-being safety and health website.</a>
Equality Policy Unit	<a href="mailto:equality@leeds.ac.uk">equality@leeds.ac.uk</a>		<a href="#">Equality website</a>
Organisational Development Professional Learning	<a href="mailto:peopledev@leeds.ac.uk">peopledev@leeds.ac.uk</a>	0113 3434012	<a href="#">ODPL website</a>
Security	<a href="mailto:security@leeds.ac.uk">security@leeds.ac.uk</a>	0113 343 5494/5 (non-emergencies) or (0113) 343 2222 (emergencies only)	<a href="#">Security website</a>

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