



Lifeline Workwell

Suicide Awareness and Prevention:
A guide for employers





An Introduction

Suicidal thoughts are **more common** than many people realise. They can affect anyone, at any time, and often come from a deep desire to stop emotional or physical pain, not a desire to die.

Why does this matter in your workplace?

It is estimated that 1 in 5 people experience suicidal thoughts at some point in their lives. In the workplace, a colleague's suicidal thinking may be contributing to performance issues, absence, or changes in behaviour. Suicide prevention and postvention (support offered when a person dies by suicide) are a vital part of that.

Suicide in a workplace context

While we understand that the workplace can be a source of stress, it can also be a protective factor when employees feel **secure, supported, and connected**.

- Suicidal thoughts are not the same as self-harm. While they may overlap, self-harm is often a coping mechanism. Suicidal ideation is usually about ending distress, not life itself.
- Talking about suicide doesn't increase the risk; in fact, it can reduce it. Open, non-judgmental conversations can save lives.
- It's not just about supporting those at risk - it's also about supporting colleagues who are dealing with a friend or family member at risk, or someone who has taken their own life.

Spotting the signs at work

As a leader or manager, you are not expected to diagnose, but you may observe behavioural or emotional changes that indicate the need for a check-in. These may include:

- Withdrawal from team conversations or events.
 - Sudden mood changes, irritability or seeming 'out of sorts'.
 - Comments about feeling hopeless, overwhelmed or like a burden.
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- Changes in performance, absence or lateness.
 - Risk-taking or reckless behaviour.
 - Talking about death or joking in a concerning way.
 - Saying goodbye in a way that feels final.
 - Giving away belongings or putting affairs in order.

distress or unusual cheeriness that doesn't feel genuine. If something doesn't feel right, trust your instincts and create space for conversation.

What you can do as a manager

You don't have to be a mental health expert, but your response can influence whether someone feels safe and supported. Here is how to help...

- **Open up a private conversation:** Express concern in a calm, non-judgmental way.
- **Ask directly:** if they're thinking about suicide. It's a myth that this increases risk - it can actually reduce it.
- **Listen actively:** Reflect on what you hear. Don't rush to fix, your presence matters more than perfect words.
- **Signpost to professional help:** This might include your EAP, GP, or a crisis line. Encourage them to access support early.
- **If there's an immediate risk,** stay with them and escalate according to your internal safeguarding protocol (or call emergency services if needed).
- **Follow-up:** A one-off conversation isn't always enough. Staying connected can be key to someone's recovery

Common risk factors to be aware of

Some employees may be more vulnerable due to:

- Difficult life events (bereavement, divorce, trauma).
- Poor physical health or chronic pain.
- Mental health conditions (depression, bipolar disorder, PTSD).
- Isolation, including working remotely or living alone.
- Misuse of alcohol or drugs.
- Financial stress or job insecurity.
- Belonging to LGBTQ+ or other diverse communities, who may face identity struggles, discrimination, rejection, chronic stress, and barriers to support.

Creating an environment where mental health conversations are normal and safe can help reduce these risks.





Postvention: Supporting your team after a suicide or attempt

If someone in your workplace, or a friend or family member, has attempted or died by suicide, the impact on your team can be profound. This is where postvention comes in. The structured care and support that helps teams process what's happened and begin to heal.

Here's how you can support effectively:

- **Acknowledge the loss sensitively:** Avoid silence or speculation. Use language that's clear but compassionate.
- **Make space for reflection:** Consider facilitated sessions such as Workplace Reflection or group support.
- **Provide access to support services:** This includes professional counselling or trauma-informed support.
- **Be aware of ripple effects:** Others may experience guilt, anxiety or increased personal risk. Follow up with those closest to the person affected.
- **Work with your leadership team** to review your internal response and identify any systemic changes that could help in future.

Postvention is also prevention. A well-handled response can reduce the risk of further crisis and foster a culture of care and trust.

You don't need to have all the answers. But by being available, compassionate and proactive, you can play a life-saving role - and help create a workplace where people know they're never alone.





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