

A photograph of two people sitting on a light-colored surface, holding hands in a supportive gesture. The person on the left is wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans. The person on the right is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt and dark blue trousers. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue.

Suicide prevention

A guide
to help
colleagues
support each
other.



It's what we do

Suicide prevention

In England over 6,500 people die by suicide every year, there is no common reason why and no simple answer as what we can do to prevent it.

What we can do within the Co-op is play a part, at work and in our communities to learn about it and help prevent it.

This guide will inform you about suicide, how to talk about it and how to help someone, it covers:

- The role of colleagues in preventing suicide: we can all help
- Self-awareness and self-care
- Understanding suicide
- Myths and facts about suicide
- How to identify someone at risk
- Warning signs for immediate risk for suicide
- The needs of a person at risk
- How to have a caring conversation & step towards safety
- Resources and further support

- People from **all walks of life** and ages die each year by taking their own lives
- **Many more people have suicidal thoughts**
- A lot of suicides are **preventable**
- Most people who experience suicidal thoughts **don't want to die**, but they don't know another way out how to deal with the immense, emotional pain they are experiencing
- Each suicide leaves big ripple effects on workplaces, families, friends and the wider community; it can be **difficult to understand** and to make sense of the loss and grief
- We all can learn **how to spot warning signs** and **how to help** with suicide prevention
- Suicide can be seen as a process: from having thoughts, to making a plan, to acting on it; **the sooner someone is there to help and prevent, the better**

The role of colleagues in preventing suicide: we can all help

We all have a role to play

Understanding the issues around suicide and mental health is important for everyone. We can all play a role in suicide prevention, have supportive conversations and help others in crisis.

We know from research, suicidal people:

- most often go to familiar and trusted people rather than professionals
- very often don't know where to go for professional support

We are far more likely to come across a person in suicidal crisis than someone experiencing a heart attack.

It is very important how colleagues, managers, family and friends respond and support each other. Talking about suicide can be hard and this guide will inform you about suicide, how to talk about it and how to help someone.

Anyone can become more knowledgeable and better skilled in suicide prevention and understand more on how to help colleagues with mental health problems.

To learn more about mental health support the Co-op offers visit Wellbeing in Retail. If you are a line manager you can find out about mental health by [downloading the Mental health toolkit](#).

Prevention is about reducing risks and increasing protective factors. The more everyone knows and learns, the more supportive and safer our workplace can be.

We are here to support you

The Co-op wants to support you and create a workplace where it's OK to talk about what is overwhelming you, about emotional pain, about suicidal thoughts and where colleagues are free to 'open up' and [seek the support](#) you need.

Where to go for help

If you feel you might be at risk yourself, the Samaritans are available 24 hours on 116 123.

Self-awareness and self-care

Look after you

Before we learn about how to help someone else, we need to think about our own wellbeing. It's like putting on 'your oxygen mask' first and ensuring that we have the emotional energy to help. Supporting someone can be a challenging and emotionally exhausting experience, so it is **important to look after yourself**.

If you are not able to support a colleague yourself, find somebody else who might be able to, such as another colleague, your line manager or **ER Services** if you are a manager.

If you support a colleague yourself, there are things you can do for your own wellbeing afterwards. For example, you could take some time out to appreciate your own kindness and willingness to help. Find ways that help you reduce your immediate stress levels, like going for a walk outside, listening to calming music, talking to family, other colleagues or friends. Co-op cares and there will always be **someone to talk to at LifeWorks** if you need it.

Talk to people who can help

Many people find it helpful to talk with someone who is experienced in suicide prevention. The **Samaritans helpline 116 123** is not only for colleagues who are suicidal, but also for people who support(ed) someone in crisis. You can talk to them about anything that might worry you. They can also give further guidance as it's important to get support yourself.



Look after you

We can always encourage more self-care in each other. It's easily overlooked, but to take care of our physical and mental wellbeing is our own responsibility. Self-care can help, regardless how good or bad our wellbeing is.

Regular physical activity, eating a balanced and healthy diet, getting enough sleep are also important ways to help manage and reduce the impact of stress and dealing with daily challenges.

[Click here to download the great mental health toolkit](#) and why not have a go at the [Co-op quiz](#) to learn more about your personal resilience.

Understanding suicide

"Suicide means ending your own life. It is sometimes a way for people to escape pain or suffering."



It's what we do

Spotting those in need of help



As colleagues, we are well positioned to notice if someone at work is struggling and if they are in emotional pain or suffering.

Their crisis can come from many sources:

- Relationships
- Money worries
- Conflicts at work
- Health and health of their family
- Discrimination
- Previous suicide attempt
- Self-harm behaviours
- Mental health problems
- Drug and alcohol misuse
- Chronic physical pain
- Family history of suicide


We can live in a challenging world sometimes and you can play an important role, by connecting with someone in crisis and encouraging them to get further help. At the Co-op we care about our colleagues and want the best for each other.

If you spot changes in their behaviour or they seem overwhelmed, not looking after themselves and if you see anything that concerns you, please seek help.

You can positively contribute towards a culture of care, a sense of community, belonging, and respect. Feeling connected to a community could help improve emotional wellbeing and can reduce risk for suicide.



- It's not about "fixing" another person/colleague but giving them the opportunity to talk and explore options for help
- It's about linking up all helpful resources and the right people
- You don't have to do this alone and you might be able to play an important part



Click here to
see all help
available

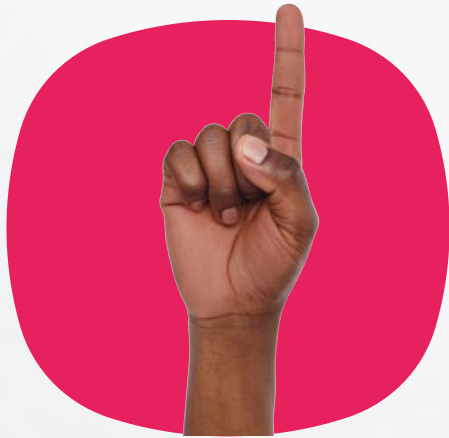
Myths and facts about suicide

Before we learn how to help, let's consider some common myths around the topic of suicide.

This may influence how we treat the other person, but also what difference we can make ourselves. Although suicide is very serious and you might want to shy away from it, you should not underestimate your ability to help.

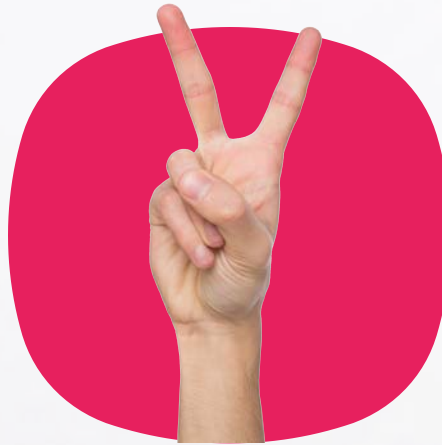


Myths and facts about suicide



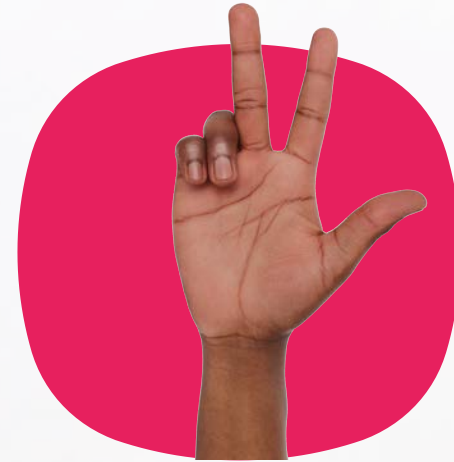
Myth 1: Once a colleague has made a plan, there is nothing you can do

Most times the suicide crisis is very time-limited and a desperate struggle to get away from pain and problems. Often colleagues see no other way out and have unclear thoughts. A caring conversation can help through this acute phase until the person can consider other solutions again.



Myth 2: Colleagues go and see professionals

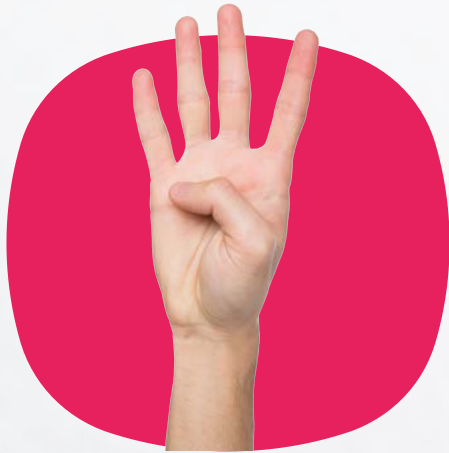
Only 28% of people who take their own life will have contacted mental health services before. Creating strong connections at work and in our communities means we are close to hand when we are most needed.



Myth 3: If you ask a colleague, it will make the situation worse or you encourage them

The opposite is true. Asking colleagues how they feel often lowers their anxiety and sense of isolation, it can be a relief to talk and could help prevent a suicide. Allowing colleagues to talk about their distress, their crisis can lessen their pain. Openness, acceptance and genuine care can make a big difference for the person.

Myths and facts about suicide



Myth 4: When people talk about taking their own life they won't act on it

8 out of 10 people who take their own lives give definite warning signs of their intentions. Colleagues who show warning signs or talk about it must be taken seriously.



Myth 5: Suicide happens without warning

Suicidal people give many warning signs for their plans. But because people fear to be judged they often disguise their distress signals. It is essential we all become more alert and open to each other.

Good information to know

- In 2018, there were 6507 suicides registered in the UK, this is equal to passengers on 17 jumbo jets
- In comparison 1,770 people died in road traffic accidents
- Suicide attempts are 10-25 times higher
- More men die by suicide: 75% males and 25% females
- Drug and alcohol misuse increase the risk of suicide
- 90% of people who die by suicide give previous clues
- Most suicides are believed to be preventable
- Suicide was decriminalised in 1961, but people still use 'commit suicide' as a term; it is better to say, 'dying by suicide' or 'taking their own life'

How to identify someone at risk



Some groups in our community are at greater risk, but we need to always look at each individual and be alert that anyone can become suicidal.

What could increase the risk of suicide?

First of all, we need to be alert to problems that increase suicide risk. You may be able to spot some of your colleague's problems that may put them at risk. Risk factors for suicide are characteristics that make it more likely that someone will consider, plan or die by suicide. They don't directly cause or predict a suicide attempt, but we need to be aware of them.

These risk factors are different for everyone, but some of the most important ones are:

- previous suicide attempt(s)
- influence of alcohol and drugs
- mental health conditions, particularly mood disorders like depression
- loss of a loved one through suicide
- access to lethal means (i.e. ways to kill themselves)



Other risk factors are:

- impulsive tendencies
- trauma or abuse
- hopelessness
- major physical illness
- job or financial loss
- loss of relationship
- social isolation

How to identify someone at risk



Suicide risk is usually bigger when someone has more than one risk factor.

For individuals who are already at risk, a specific event may make them more likely to attempt suicide. These events may include relationship issues, problems with work, money worries, legal difficulties and ill health. Feelings of shame and despair are also common.

Most colleagues with risk factors will not become suicidal, but you should listen and act on disguised hints or clues. If your colleague, friend or family member is at risk, the sooner they get help, the higher the chance to prevent a possible suicide.

Click here to
see all help
and resources
available



Where to go for help

The Samaritans are available 24 hours and you can call them on **116 123**.

Speak to LifeWorks

You can call them from a UK landline or a mobile with **FREE** contract minutes on **0800 069 8854**.



Warning signs for immediate risk for suicide

Some behaviours may mean a person is at immediate risk for suicide.

If you see these in someone you should act straight away.

There is help and also hope when individuals and workplaces work together to prevent suicide.

Be alert to new behaviours, especially if a colleague has experienced a painful event, loss or a change in their life:

- talking about wanting to hurt themselves or to die
- talking about hopelessness and no future
- talking about no reason to live or feeling trapped
- looking for ways to take their own life, like searching online or getting pills and other means

Other warning signs can be:

- using more alcohol or drugs
- talking about a feeling of numbness, or ability to 'feel'
- talking about being a burden
- dramatic changes in mood; also sudden unexplained improvement following episode of depression
- anxious or agitated behaviour
- risky/reckless behaviour; anger, rage
- saying goodbye
- putting things in order; giving precious items away
- withdrawing from others
- sleeping a lot more or far less than before

If you personally feel suicidal or feel someone is at immediate risk, please know there is lots of help.

Click here to
see all help
and resources
available



The needs of a person at risk

Before we look at how to act if we think a colleague is at risk, we need to explore what they might need from us and what we should avoid doing:

What is needed from you

- The **chance to talk** and express their experience and pain
- **To be taken seriously** if giving hints they are in crisis
- To be **heard and understood**
- To have the chance to **share** thoughts and feelings **honestly**
- To be **accepted and not judged**
- To feel validated that their **pain is real**
- To feel **empathy**
- **Time** for the conversation
- To **be helped** through intense risk phase and be able to get back to clearer thinking
- Their **mind calmed**, slowed down, thinking more clearly, so they can explore other solutions
- **To be direct**, if you are concerned someone is thinking of ending their life, ask them honestly whether they feel unsafe and whether they have a specific plan
- **To stay safe for now with you**
- **Signposting** where to go for help

What your colleague won't need

- Made to **feel guilty**
- To be dismissed as **'attention seeking'**
- Their problems to be minimised
- To be **rushed**
- To be **ignored**
- To be **laughed at**, mocked or belittled
- To be told **'get over it'**
- To be told they are being **'selfish'**
- To feel they have no support



Caring conversations & steps towards safety

It's important to listen with your full attention

When you support someone at risk of suicide it is more important to show genuine care, than saying all the 'perfect' words. Try and be as supportive and understanding as possible. **It is important to listen to them with your full attention.**

Suicidal thoughts come from deep distress. If they feel they can't cope with their problems and difficult emotions any longer, they're likely to feel really alone.

Being with them and showing them you are comfortable to talk about their situation can make a big difference. Ideally work in partnership with them towards safety. Making **a connection with your colleague** can be a major step in that direction.



To learn more about how to have a confident conversation with a colleague with a mental health problem visit Wellbeing in Retail.

Important to remember

Never promise to keep their plans a secret. If they are in immediate danger, you need to get someone else or **call emergency services, dial 999**. You can explain to them that you care about them too much and that you are helping them to get the support they need.

How to ask if someone is suicidal

If you have noticed any warning signs, then you need to speak to your colleague and be direct.

- **Approach them sensitively** - ask a few open questions about their wellbeing and current situation
- If you get the gut feeling that they might be at risk, then be really clear that you will help them get support. They might just look for help, but they could also have thoughts or plans to take their own life so you need to take action
- Ask clearly if they feel suicidal. This will show you care and are ready to talk even if it is hard. Try not to put ideas in their head, and you won't increase their risk further
- Being direct gives them permission to talk, create connection and open themselves up to help

Possible questions are:

"Sometimes when people go through such a difficult time they think of taking their own life. Are you thinking of suicide?"

"Do you have thoughts of suicide?"

"Are you thinking of taking your own life?"

If they don't have those thoughts, they will tell you 'no' and you can continue a general wellbeing conversation.

Avoid unclear and judgemental questions such as:

- "You're not thinking of doing something silly?"
- " You're not being daft and planning something stupid are you?"
- "Are you winding me up?"
- "It's not that bad, tell me your OK ?"
- "You have a lot to live for, pull yourself together"
- "It will get better" or "You'll be all right"
- " You're being selfish, think about all you have"

How to ask if someone is suicidal

How to listen and explore

- If they say yes, try and respond supportively. A good thing to say next is: *"I'm so glad you told me, thank you."* This gives you both a moment to breathe
- It might be good to acknowledge how hard it can be to open up
- They might be thinking very unclearly because of their emotional pain, so having a reassuring conversation might help them lessen their pain and calm their mind
- Try and find out if they have an immediate plan, have attempted suicide before or have the means available already. These all put your colleague at higher risk



What actions to take next

- A quick, **immediate safety check** again: are you both safe enough right now? If not – you need to get additional help. Call emergency 999, Samaritans on **116 123** or find someone at the Co-op to help
- This can be difficult as your colleague might not want you to do this
- You need to keep them safe and if you think you can't do this by yourself, **you need to get additional help**. You can explain that you are doing this for their wellbeing and safety, but that you feel it goes beyond what you can do
- You can explain that there is help available and that there might be other options for them. It is your responsibility to get professional help involved

Guiding towards safety and support


Your conversation might be the 'pause button' they need to get back to clearer thinking.



If they don't have an immediate plan and are in less serious danger, continue to engage them in the conversation with you.

- Say that that you care, for example: *"This is important and I'm here to listen. Tell me what you are experiencing right now."* Or *"What is making you feel this way?"*
- It is good to explore what is causing them to think about suicide, what pain they are experiencing
- Try and find out what might be reasons for them to stay alive. When we are **overcome with emotion**, our thinking can be very clouded. Before your colleague can **consider different solutions**, they need to feel heard and understood
- It is also good to find out about other people who might have helped them in the past

- Discuss what might be most helpful for them. For some, there might be **social support** to help through loneliness, others could get help with their mental health or financial advice through **LifeWorks**. This differs for each person, so you might go with them through the **resources available** to find what helps them best
- Ask what else they might need so they **can stay safe for now**
- Confirm if they think they are safe. If you're not confident about this, you need to get someone else involved for more, additional help
- **Look after you** – it is very difficult challenge and you need support too, talk to friends, colleagues, LifeWorks and family to share your experience



Click here to
see all help
and resources
available

We are here to help

Remember – you don't have to do this all by yourself, there might be informal help from other colleagues, friends, family, and their wider community. Co-op cares and we will find you the help and support you need.

There are also formal resources such as LifeWorks, primary care, mental health services and helplines for professional support.

Suicide isn't inevitable and together at the Co-op, we can all play a part in preventing it.



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It's good to talk

It's really important for colleagues to talk about mental health problems and tough times.



Who are ER Services and how can they help?

If you are a manager, you're often the best person to offer help and support to the colleagues in your team, although there may be times when this isn't possible. It maybe you don't know what to do or you feel that the situation is too much for you to cope with. This is where ER Services can help.

ER Services are the Co-op team who provide phone based HR support to colleagues who are managers.

They can support on most colleague related matters including wellbeing, absence and performance.

You should look at our [People Policies on the Colleague Website](#), or How Do I if you're in Store, in the first instance and call ER Services if you need more information or can't find what you're looking for.

You can call: 0330 606 1001 (option 2). They're open Monday to Friday 8am - 6pm and Saturday 8:30am - 4pm.

To help as best they can, they need to understand as much about the situation as possible. Ideally you should use the toolkit as a guide to get as much detail as possible before calling them. They'll also need to know what you've done to try and help so far, along with what the colleague's already doing for themselves.



Help and support

There is often a stigma around mental health and people don't like to talk about how they are feeling.

The following links can be used to read, learn and contact others in order to support you to xxxxxxxx

Many of the sites have downloadable fact sheets and take-away information which will support the use of this guide.

For more toolkits, including how to have great mental health visit colleagues.coop.co.uk/mental-health-policy

Speak to LifeWorks

You can contact the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) from a UK landline or a mobile with **FREE** contract minutes on **0800 069 8854**.

For online support, you can visit the LifeWorks website.
www.coop.lifeworks.com

Here are links to online support:

- **Samaritans** - If you need somebody to talk to, the Samaritans are available 24 hours a day. Visit [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org) or **Call 116 123**
- **Medical emergency** - When someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk. **Call 999**
- **GP** - To find a local GP, click here <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-GP>
- **Self-Help App** - Keep track of how you're feeling, and get recommendations for things you can do to help yourself cope, feel better and stay safe in a crisis <https://selfhelp.samaritans.org/>
- **CALM** - The Campaign Against Living Miserably is leading a movement against suicide. Phone: **0800 58 58 58** (helpline, 5pm -12pm, 7 days a week) www.thecalmzone.net

Resources and further support

The Silver Line

The Silver Line is the only free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people, open 24 hours a day, every day of the year

Need help? Call us ANYTIME on 0800 4 70 80 90

www.thesilverline.org.uk

A&E

To find a local accident and emergency service near you click here; <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services/Accident%20and%20emergency%20services/LocationSearch/428>

Psychological therapies

You can refer yourself directly to a psychological therapies service (IAPT) without seeing your GP. (England only) by clicking here

<https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-psychological-therapies-service>

The switchboard

Switchboard provides a one-stop listening service for LGBT+ people on the phone, by email and through instant messaging

0300 330 0630 – Open 10:00 – 22:00 every day

<https://switchboard.lgbt>

Rethink

Provide help and mental health services in your local area

Phone: 0300 5000 927 (9.30am-4pm)

<https://www.rethink.org/aboutus/what-we-do/our-services-and-groups/>

Zero Suicide Alliance

This online training takes around 20 minutes and will lead you through the skills you might need to help someone who may be considering suicide, tackling stigma and promoting open communication.

<https://www.zerosuicidealliance.com/training>

Andy's Man Club

This is a talking group for men where you can access information and clubs if you've either been through a storm, currently going through a storm or have a storm brewing in your life.

<https://andysmanclub.co.uk/>