

# Protocol for the Management of Self-harm in the Community

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Author: Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB/PPG	Previous version: June 2014	Review Date: September 2022

# **Protocol for the Management of Self-harm in the Community**

## **Introduction**

This protocol supports the implementation of the Strategy for the Reduction of Suicide and Self-harm by Young People in Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil by providing information for professionals about how to manage disclosures or suspicions of self-harm in children and young people.

The objectives of the strategy which are pertinent to this protocol are:

- Provide early intervention and support in order to reduce risk and prevent problems which may lead to suicidal and self-harming behaviour; and
- Respond to personal crisis so that those who are most at risk or are in crisis are supported to manage the immediate problems and to reduce the severity of those problems.

The recommended action to achieve these objectives is for agencies to:

- Work in partnership to develop and implement an evidence-based pathway for identifying and signposting young people with depression, suicidal ideation and self-harm.

Training in suicide and self-harm awareness is available in Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil in order to help staff understand more about these behaviours and how better to meet the needs of children and young people who may be at risk.

## **Organisation Responsibilities**

All agencies should ensure that staff are aware of organisational protocols and guidelines to follow in relation to self-harm and suicidal behaviour. They should also ensure that staff have been trained appropriately.

All staff have an obligation to safeguard children and are expected to understand their safeguarding responsibilities.

## **Staff Responsibilities**

All staff should be aware of their responsibilities in cases when a child or young person discloses self-harm or suicidal intent, or where they suspect

self-harm or suicidal intent to be a possibility. For example, there may be specific reporting mechanisms in place.

All disclosures should be taken seriously and staff should avoid dismissing them as invalid.

Remain calm and non-judgemental. However you feel inside, you need to do your best to remain calm and supportive. The young person may feel ashamed, frightened and vulnerable at this time.

Do not show disapproval, horror or disgust. This may be difficult but how you respond is important – the young person needs acceptance and understanding.

Encourage the young person to be open with you and reassure them that they can get the support they need if they are willing to talk. Talking about self-harm **and suicidal ideation** will not make the situation worse or make the young person self-harm more. Be aware that they may find it difficult to express how they feel so give them time to talk at their own pace. Be honest with the young person about your limitations with regard to confidentiality.

Listen to what the young person is saying to you as this is key to supporting them.

However, know your limits. Only do what you are comfortable with and seek appropriate help and support for the young person. You also need to consider your relationship with the young person and how this will affect the way you work with them in the future. Importantly you also need to consider how to look after yourself and make sure that you get the support that you need personally.

Ensure that you complete the relevant documentation in relation to this incident / episode so that there is a clear record of what happened and the action that you took. Inform your line manager and / or safeguarding lead as appropriate so that they are aware you are working with someone who is self-harming and to ensure that you receive the appropriate level of support and supervision.

### **For disclosures about self-harm**

You should avoid asking the young person to reveal their scars or to describe their self-harm. Visible monitoring of injuries will focus on those rather than the underlying problems.

However, you should check whether they are injured now so that immediate medical issues can be dealt with. Give advice sensitively and seek first aid advice as necessary.

Avoid asking the young person to stop self-harming. If this is their coping mechanism you cannot remove it until the young person is ready to replace it with something else. Telling them to stop is both aversive and condescending. Similarly, setting up contracts to stop should also be avoided as these can be more added pressure and may make the young person lie and become more secretive, thus increasing their risk of serious harm.

Refer the young person to another professional / service where appropriate. You must not promise that you will not seek advice from others and be honest about parameters of confidentiality. If you have to inform / talk to others it helps to do so in front of the young person and include them in the conversation respectfully where possible.

Ensure that you complete the relevant documentation in relation to this incident / episode so that there is a clear record of what happened and the action that you took. Inform your line manager and / or safeguarding lead as appropriate so that they are aware you are working with someone who is self-harming and to ensure that you receive the appropriate level of support and supervision.

### **For disclosures about suicidal intent**

When a young person discloses feelings of suicide you should ask questions to assess the seriousness of their thoughts and the immediacy of their intent. Questions you could ask include:

- Do you have a plan? (Have they thought about how, when, where, etc.?)
- What are you going to do after you leave me?
- Does anyone else know you feel this way?
- Ask about future plans?
- Ask about support, such as who do they live with?
- The parent/carer should be informed of the current risk however if the young person is in the care of the local authority the social worker needs to be informed without delay.

Please note if the young person is reluctant to give you permission to share with others you will need to be able to show that it is in their best interest, due to the level of risk to do so. This would apply whether they are Gillick competent or not.

**Assess the social support available to the young person and this should inform your decision.**

If answers to these questions indicate that the young person may attempt suicide before any further assessment can be arranged, get immediate support.

If the disclosure appears to be an indication of how the young person is feeling rather than an intent to attempt suicide arrange support for the soonest possible opportunity

Ensure that you complete and review the relevant documentation (risk assessment) in relation to this incident / episode so that there is a clear record of what happened and the action that you took. Inform your line manager and / or safeguarding lead as appropriate so that they are aware you are working with someone who is self-harming and to ensure that you receive the appropriate level of support and supervision.

**In cases of self-harm and suicidal intent, trust your instincts – if you are not happy sending the young person away then don't. Get immediate support.**

## Levels of Self-harm

### Key Principles

If you feel that the young person may be mentally unwell, consider referral to specialist mental health services either directly or via the young persons' GP (as per your organisational policy).

If you feel that the self-harm arises from the young person's life, staff can discuss with Public Protection Nurses in MASH if Health is the referrer and discuss with your line manager or safeguarding colleague for possible referral to the appropriate service(s) for further support.

Ensure that you complete the relevant documentation in relation to this incident / episode so that there is a clear record of what happened and the action that you took. Inform your line manager and / or safeguarding lead as appropriate so that they are aware you are working with someone who is self-harming and to ensure that you receive the appropriate level of support and supervision.

Know your limits and ensure your own safety, seeking support as necessary.

**In cases of self-harm and suicidal intent, trust your instincts – if you are not happy sending the young person away then don't. Seek advice and get immediate support.**

Levels of self-harm are provided below. However, you may also want to consider location of the injury on the body (e.g.. cuts to arterial areas such as the neck, inside wrists and groin would increase the level of risk), frequency of self-harming behaviour over a period of time (daily, weekly, monthly, etc.) and the duration (i.e.. how long the young person has been self-harming).

**It is also important to consider the severity of the cutting or other forms of harm, for example, burns, and ingesting poisons.**

## **EMERGENCY - Serious attempt to end life**

### ***Example: Overdose of tablets***

In instances where the child / young person has made a serious suicide attempt, has serious lacerations / injuries or has ingested / overdosed drugs within the last 48 hours the child / young person needs to be taken to the **Accident and Emergency Department (A&E)** immediately. Therefore you must either dial 999 or arrange for the child / young person to be taken to A&E. If taking a child / young person to A&E it is helpful to ring ahead to notify them.

Prince Charles Hospital	01685 721721
Royal Glamorgan Hospital	01443 443443
Princess of Wales Hospital	01656 752752

The ambulance service must inform the Police if the intent or attempted suicide is deemed to be a serious threat to life.

If a serious threat to life has been made, a Child Protection Referral must be made.

Select this [link](#) for the form and guidance for making a referral for a child/young person at risk in RCT or Merthyr Tydfil. For Bridgend, please select this [link](#).

With regard to drug ingestion / overdose:

- Ensure, as far as possible, that the person accompanying the child / young person to A&E has details about what has been taken, i.e. type of drug(s), amount taken, time taken, etc.
- Do not encourage the child / young person or give them anything to make them sick or to flush out their system.
- The Police require that illegal, Class A drug ingestion is to be reported via 101.

Ensure that your line manager is appraised of the situation and that you are working in line with any relevant organisational policies and safeguarding procedures.

For those young people under the age of 18 years you need to inform their parents / carers.

**HIGH LEVEL – Immediate risk of accidental death or intent to complete suicide**

***Example: Serious wounds that require multiple stitches and are potentially disfiguring or life threatening (cuts to arterial areas such as neck, inner wrist, groin and use of razors to cut would be of increased risk).***

***Expressed intent to complete suicide.***

In instances where an act of self-harm has immediate risk of accidental death or where there is intent to complete suicide (e.g. clear suicide plan in place) urgent medical advice should be sought.

Also seek medical advice if there is a previous history of suicide attempts or if there is known or history of alcohol / substance misuse.

If a serious threat to life has been made, a Child Protection Referral must be made.

Select this [link](#) for the form and guidance for making a referral for a child/young person at risk in RCT or Merthyr Tydfil. For Bridgend, please select this [link](#).

*Contact details are as follows:*

**Emergency services**

999

**CAMHS (<18 yrs) (9am–5pm)**

01443 443008

**CAMHS Crisis Liaison team (<18) (5pm–8pm)**

- UHW 02920 747747
- PCH 01685 721721
- POW 01443 443008

**CAMHS Crisis Consultation line**

- 01443 443021 (9–5pm)
- 5–9.30pm via UHW or PCH Switchboard

**Crisis Resolution Team (>18 years)**

- (Rhondda / Taf) 01443 443443
- (Cynon / Merthyr) 01685 723244

**A&E:**

Prince Charles Hospital

01685 728301



Royal Glamorgan Hospital	01443 443443 ext. 4166
Princess of Wales Hospital	01656 752393
NHS Direct	0845 46 47
Emergency Duty Team	01443 743665

Ensure that your line manager is apprised of the situation and that you are working in line with any relevant organisational policies.

For those young people under the age of 18 years, you need to inform their parents / carers.

#### **MASH numbers for referrals:**

Cwm Taf	01443 743730 (Children and Adults)
Bridgend	01656 642477 (Adults)
	01656 642320 (Children)
Emergency Duty Team	01443 743730
Public Protection Nurses	01443 742949

#### **MEDIUM LEVEL – Could cause accidental death**

***Example: Significant bleeding that requires either stitches or another sterile closure device. These wounds typically need to be treated at emergency centres or in a doctor's office.***

In instances where there is evidence of self-harm without the intention to die but which could cause accidental death staff should consult with their line manager regarding the level of risk. If there is immediate risk (including known or history of alcohol / substance misuse) consideration should be given to consulting with safeguarding or specialist mental health services for advice.

If no immediate action is required, ensure you follow up to make sure that the situation has not deteriorated which would require referral on.

For those young people under the age of 18 years you need to inform their parents / carers.

Ensure that your line manager is apprised of the situation and that you are working in line with any relevant organisational policies.

**CAMHS Crisis Consultation line:**

9-5pm 01443 443021

5-9.30pm via UHW or PCH Switchboard

UHW 02920 747747 or PCH 01685 721721

**LOW LEVEL – Unlikely to cause serious harm or death**

***Example: Superficial injuries which require no medical intervention other than cleaning the area***

In instances where there is evidence of self-harm which is unlikely to cause serious harm or death staff should consult with their line manager regarding the level of risk. If there is immediate risk consideration should be given to consulting with safeguarding or specialist mental health services for advice.

If no immediate action is required, ensure you follow up to make sure that the situation has not deteriorated which would require referral on.

Be vigilant – has the level of risk increased?

Eye to Eye Youth Counselling Service (RCT) 01443 204551 / 202940

There is a Counselling Service available in all schools throughout Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Counselling is now being made available through all GP surgeries via the Primary Care Mental Health Service

## Protocol for Responding to Self-harm in Young People

### EMERGENCY

Within the last 48 hours:

- Evidence of serious suicide attempt
- Serious laceration / self-injury
- Ingestion / overdose of drugs

Example:

- Overdose of tablets
- Intention to complete suicide

### HIGH LEVEL

- Any act of self-harm with **immediate risk of accidental death**
- Intent to complete suicide
- Clear suicide plan
- Previous suicide attempt
- History of alcohol / substance misuse

Example:

- Serious wounds requiring multiple stitches and are potentially disfiguring or life threatening
- Attempted hanging

### MEDIUM LEVEL

- Any act of self-harm which **could cause accidental death**
- Thoughts of suicide
- No suicide plan
- History of alcohol / substance misuse

Example:

- Significant bleeding that requires stitches and needs treatment at emergency centre or doctors surgery

### LOW LEVEL

- Any act of self-harm **unlikely to cause serious harm or death** or threats of self-harm
- No thoughts of suicide
- No suicide plan
- No suicidal intent

Example:

- Superficial injury which requires no medical intervention other than cleaning

- Dial 999 or
- Take to A&E
- Inform line manager
- Ensure details available for use by A&E.
- Submit a Child Referral Form (C1) to MASH

- Seek medical advice (GP, A&E or NHS Direct)
- Inform line manager
- Utilise CAMHS consultation line if appropriate.
- Submit a Child Referral Form (C1)

- If there is immediate risk, speak to line manager and consider seeking consultation with GP or A&E (or Specialist Mental Health if known to service). **You may also utilise the CAMHS consultation line.**
- If there are any concerns that the child is at risk of significant harm and/or risks cannot be mitigated through intervention, consider referral to local authority for multi-agency review.

- If there is no immediate risk, ensure you follow up the next working day

- If you feel the young person may be mentally unwell, consider referral to specialist Mental Health Services directly or via GP, Crisis Team, etc. (according to your organisational policies)
- If you feel the self-harm arises from the young person's life context or is escalating in severity, discuss with your safeguarding colleague, line manager or Public Protection Nurses in Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (01443 742949) for possible referral for further support.
- Ensure you complete relevant documentation in relation to this incident / episode including what occurred and the action you have taken
- Ensure your own safety and support
- Inform line manager and review at line management supervision

**In cases of self-harm and suicidal intent, trust your instincts – if you are not happy sending the young person away then don't. Seek advice and get immediate support.**

## Contact Details

### Emergency – Serious attempt to end life

999

### High Level – immediate risk of accidental death or intent to complete suicide

Emergency 999

### Medium Level – could cause accidental death

#### CAMHS Crisis Consultation line (<18 years):

9-5pm 01443 443021

5-9.30pm via UHW Switch Board or PCH Switch Board

UHW Switchboard Tel: 02920 747747

PCH Switchboard: 01685 721721

Crisis Resolution Team (for >18 year olds):

Rhondda / Taf Ely 01443 443443

Cynon / Merthyr Tydfil 01685 723244

A&E:

Prince Charles Hosp. (for Cynon/ Merthyr Tydfil) 01685 721721

Royal Glamorgan Hosp. (for Rhondda/Taf Ely) 01443 443443

Princess of Wales Hospital (for Bridgend) 01656 752393

NHS Direct 0845 46 47

Cwm Taf Mash 01443 743730 (Children and Adults)

Bridgend MASH 01656 642320 (Children)  
01656 642477 (Adults)

### Low Level – unlikely to cause serious harm or death

Eye to Eye Youth Counselling Service 01443  
202940

Emergency Duty Team (Evenings, weekends and bank 743730	01443
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holidays)

For social care issues which cannot wait until the following day.

Out of Hours GP Service 03454647	111 or
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Further information on Self-harm and Suicide can be found in the following documents:

'Managing Self-harm in young People' (CR192), Royal College of Psychiatry

'Feeling on the edge, Helping you get through it', Royal College of Psychiatry.