

And finally...

Be sure to look after your own mental health! For tips on emotional wellbeing as well as a list of sources of support in your area go to www.mindingyourhead.info.

Action Mental Health offers training specially designed to help managers build resilience and manage stress in addition to advice on supporting staff. For more information see www.amh.org.uk.

It is estimated that 1 in 6 of the workforce is affected by mental ill health at any time and poor mental health costs employers an average of £1,035 per year, per employee. Investing some time and effort into making your workplace happier and healthier can save money, increase productivity and could even save a life.

For more information contact:

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**East Belfast
Community
Development
Agency**

Advice for Employers

Suicide Prevention



**East Belfast
Community
Development
Agency**



- How to:
- Promote good mental health
 - Support employees
 - Respond to a suicide

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Introduction

The workplace provides a great opportunity to promote positive mental health and suicide awareness. Your organisation and employees will benefit in addition to playing an important role in community suicide prevention.

Basic suicide prevention in the workplace can be dealt with at three different levels:

1. Creating a healthy place to work, see page 2;
2. Supporting employees who are feeling suicidal or are experiencing mental health issues, see page 4;
3. Offering support following a death by suicide, see page 10.

This guide has been developed by East Belfast Community Development Agency (EBCDA) to provide basic information and advice for employers in East Belfast. While many larger organisations may already have measures in place to support the emotional wellbeing of their staff, this guide has been designed to be relevant to employers of any size.

Many of the suggestions presented here do not require any significant investment of resources but could result in a healthier and more productive workforce.

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After a Suicide

Some tips on how to respond in the event of a suicide:

1. Talk About it:

In the event of a suicide among your staff, managers should talk in an open and honest way about the death. By openly addressing what has happened you can reduce rumour and gossip. Having said that, it's not necessary to give details about the method and you should take the family's privacy into account when sharing information with your staff.

2. Preventative Action:

Others may be vulnerable in the months following the death of a colleague. We can try to prevent further suicides by providing accurate information to all workers about suicide risk factors and sources of support. This information is available in East Belfast Community Development Agency's leaflet "Community Suicide Prevention Information".

3. Memorials:

Remembering those who have died by suicide should be carried out in a fitting and safe way in order to limit 'copycat' acts and increase suicide prevention. Try to discourage permanent memorials such as shrines, park benches or planting trees. Instead go for an activity focussed memorial like a sponsored walk or run to raise money for a local charity. This allows people to come together and do something positive in memory of the person who died. Always consult the family of the person who died when planning the event.

Creating a Healthy Place to Work



Take it in turns to organise a monthly team outing or event. Try to steer away from anything that involves alcohol or is expensive; how about a picnic or a quiz?

Use communal areas to display information on services that can support staff with personal or emotional issues such as debt, depression, bereavement or relationship breakdown



Talk openly about stress and emotional health at work during staff meetings and appraisals, particularly in times of change or busy periods

Get staff involved in volunteering or fundraising for a mental health or suicide prevention charity of their choice to raise awareness and build team morale



For more ideas see Business in the Community Northern Ireland's online wellbeing toolkit at www.bitcni.org.uk

Supporting Employees

Dealing with Suicide Risk

If a staff member discloses that they are having thoughts of suicide, you must act.

Stay calm, explain that you are concerned and that you want to help. You cannot take responsibility for supporting someone on your own. Try not to impose decisions on them, but do explain that they should to seek appropriate and specialist help elsewhere.

If they are not already receiving support from either their GP or from Lifeline, then ask them if they would be willing to make contact with them.

You can support them to make use of these services by:

- Providing information about the Lifeline service and making the number available;
- Supporting them to make contact with these services by staying with them while they make the phone call, or providing a quiet, private space for them to do so alone;
- Allowing time off to attend appointments;
- Reassuring the staff member that what they have disclosed will remain confidential and will not be shared with other staff members without their prior consent;
- You may want to agree which other staff members or managers who need to be aware of the situation;
- Always agree a follow up meeting or phone call to review how things are going.



Relevant Training

Training in suicide prevention skills or mental health awareness can be invaluable for anyone managing staff. Here are some of the most popular and accessible courses which are regularly delivered in Belfast and often have free places available:

Living Works offer 2 suicide prevention training programmes which are widely used worldwide. ASIST is a 2 day intensive course while SafeTalk is a 3 hour course giving the basics. See www.livingworks.net



PIPS Programmes deliver a series of locally developed suicide prevention courses including “Preventing Suicides in the Workplace”. See www.pipsprogrammes.com

Mental Health first Aid is a 12 hour course covering mental health concerns such as depression, anxiety, self-harm, panic attacks and suicide. See www.aware-ni.org.uk/training



EBCDA regularly advertise training programmes which have free places available. To receive updates contact clare@ebcda.org

Creating a Healthy Place to Work

Your full time staff are likely to spend more time at work than doing any other activity, apart from sleeping! For this reason, their experiences at work have a huge impact on their emotional wellbeing.

Stress or upset caused by work naturally affects our mood and our relationships. This, in turn, makes us unhappier and usually leads to employees being less focussed, less productive and more likely to take time off through sickness.

Here are some simple steps you could take to improve mental health in your workplace:



Encourage staff to take their lunch break away from their desk and provide a water cooler plus healthy options in vending machines or the canteen

Make sure staff are not working unreasonable hours and encourage them not to take work home or respond to calls or emails at home if possible



Start a walking club or exercise class after work or enquire about corporate membership at your local gym so that your staff can join for a reduced rate

Supporting Employees

Tips for Managers

Tips for managers: Warning Signs at Work

If you manage staff, it's likely that one of them will experience a mental or emotional health difficulty at some time. Hopefully they will feel able to talk to you about it but you can also look out for these early warning signs:

- * Increased absences, sick leave and poor timekeeping,
- * Deterioration in performance,
- * Increased use of drugs such as caffeine, tobacco or painkillers,
- * Constant tiredness or low energy,
- * Decreased concentration, poor judgment or indecision,
- * Unusual displays of emotion such as anger or tearfulness.

If you have concerns about a member of staff then have a conversation with them...

- * Talk to them in a private and neutral space with no interruptions
- * Don't ask questions that could make them defensive e.g: "What's wrong with you?" instead you could say "You seem very low today. How are you doing?"
- * Allow them time and space to respond
- * Suggest options for support

Supporting Employees

Even an organisation with a dedicated HR team can find it difficult to support staff who are experiencing mental health issues, but the right approach can play an important role in supporting an individual to make a full recovery.

Finding out that a colleague is having thoughts of suicide can be even more daunting but as it is estimated that 5% of the population will have suicidal thoughts in any given year, it's good to be prepared.

In order to deliver this type of support to staff you may wish to consider these suggestions:



- * Send managers on suicide prevention or mental health awareness training to equip them with the basic skills to identify and support someone at risk of suicide. This type of training can be accessed for free and usually only requires staff to be out of work for one or two days. Further information on training options is provided on page 9.

- * Sign up for an employee assistance programme which gives staff access to free, confidential support. Carecall is the leading provider in Northern

Ireland, see www.carecallwellbeing.com. Alternatively you could make staff aware of existing services such as Lifeline and Samaritans, or ask your local counselling agency to visit your workplace to talk about the support that they can provide.

Risk Factors

Who is at risk of suicide?

Anyone can experience thoughts of suicide and it can happen at any stage in a person's life. There are some times when people may be more at risk of feeling suicidal, including:

- If they are experiencing a mental health issue such as depression or anxiety;
- If they are dealing with big changes in their life, e.g.: relationship breakup, moving home, redundancy or retirement;
- People who are abusing drugs and alcohol;
- If they are dealing with a traumatic event such as abuse, bullying or bereavement;
- If they have easy access to a means of attempting suicide such as firearms or large quantities of prescription drugs;
- If they are trying to cope with their problems on their own without asking for help or talking to someone about how they feel.



Warning Signs

Make yourself aware of the warning signs that someone may be at risk of suicide. The more people in our community who are doing this, the more likely that we can identify people at risk and get them the support they need.

Common warning signs

Saying they feel suicidal - always take this seriously

Saying they feel hopeless about the future

Saying they feel helpless and can't see a solution to problems

Talking about or showing an interest in death or suicide methods

Change in personality, e.g.: quieter and more withdrawn or more angry and irritable

Increased use of alcohol or other drugs

Losing interest in things that they used to enjoy and do regularly

Not taking care of themselves, e.g.: not washing or eating properly

Not able to sleep or concentrate as normal

Sudden change in religious views and beliefs

Giving things away, especially things of importance or value to that person

Sorting out financial affairs such as making a will or planning funeral expenses

Looking for ways to harm themselves such as collecting large amounts of tablets or other items which would be used in a suicide attempt