

For your team's wellbeing.
For Living



Talking about suicide and support at work.

A photograph of a woman with her hair in a ponytail, wearing a grey cardigan, looking thoughtfully out of a window. She is holding a white mug with both hands. The background is a blurred office interior.

Here, we'll look at some of the ways employers can reduce the risk of suicide amongst employees. Plus, how to support colleagues if it happens.

How common is suicide for people of a working age?

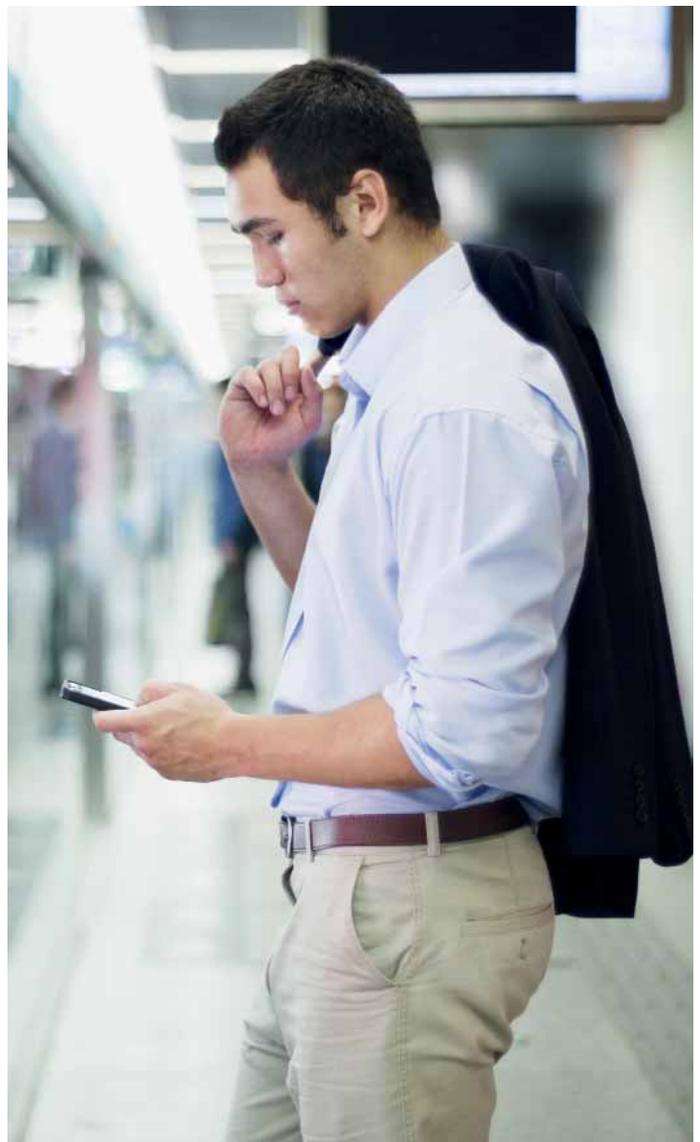
Suicide can naturally be a very difficult topic to discuss. But it's important to be mindful of the possibility that a colleague may be experiencing mental health problems or suicidal thoughts. If you're able to foster a supportive working environment, it could really help people to take that important first step of opening up about their feelings.

Suicide is unfortunately a leading cause of death for people aged between 20 and 64, and the main cause of death for those aged from 20 to 34. This means that more employers than you might think will have experience of an employee (or perhaps someone who works closely with the business, such as a client) dying of suicide.

The highest rate of suicide is among males aged 45 to 49 years.

ONS. Suicides in the UK: 2017 registrations

Even more likely is the possibility that someone in your workplace will have suicidal thoughts, even if they're ultimately unlikely to act on these thoughts. One in five of us are believed to have experienced suicidal thoughts at one time or another. People often keep their feelings to themselves at work, so you may simply not know when someone around you in the office might be struggling to cope with their emotions. They may simply continue to work as these feelings become worse.



What puts a person at risk of suicide?

There's no straightforward answer to this. The reasons for suicide are complex and we can never know them for sure. We do know that around nine in every ten people who take their own life have a mental health problem at the time of their death, whether or not the problem has been formally diagnosed. We also know that men are around three times more likely to take their own lives than women.

Other factors thought to play a role in some cases can include alcohol or drug problems, long-term illnesses (such as chronic pain) or going through a significant negative life

event, such as a bereavement or a family breakdown. Ultimately though, suicide isn't limited to any particular groups of people and often can't be predicted.

Men are three times more likely to take their own lives than women.

Samaritans. Suicide statistics report 2018.

Support measures you can introduce

Suicide isn't inevitable; most people who contemplate taking their own life don't go on to do so. It's important to remember that you're not expected to take sole responsibility for anyone's care or safety. But introducing some of the steps below could contribute towards employees getting the care they need.

- Make sure your workplace culture is one where people feel respected and able to communicate openly, and where their emotional wellbeing is valued.
- Provide mental health training or education, including suicide awareness, particularly for managers.
- Have policies, procedures and guidance in place for employees who need support. This could include support with mental health, long-term health conditions, domestic violence and financial problems.
- If you have an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), check whether the providers are trained in suicide awareness and prevention.
- Signpost to national helplines and charities, such as Samaritans or Mind, in your workplace. This could be as simple as putting up some posters.
- Use your internal communication channels to ensure employees know about the support available to them, and to promote a culture of openness.

Managing in the event of a suicide

Suicide is relatively rare, but when it does happen it can have a huge emotional impact on those who'd been close to the person, which may well include their colleagues. It can help to have a crisis plan in place to prepare for such a situation.

Public Health England and Business in the Community have produced a toolkit for employers called '[Crisis management in the event of a suicide](#)' that you might want to use as the basis for your response. The tips include having a communication plan, which takes into account best practice for reporting a suicide sensitively and safely – Samaritans also provide media guidelines on their website about this.

The toolkit suggests several steps you can take to support those who are affected in the workplace. Colleagues may benefit from having access to a counsellor, either in individual or group sessions. It could also make a difference for you to provide bereavement support training for line managers whose direct reports have been particularly affected.



Further support

Public Health England and Business in the Community have produced toolkits for suicide prevention and managing in the event of a suicide, which are available at wellbeing.bitc.org.uk

Samaritans provides free, 24-hour telephone and online support to anyone struggling to cope with their emotions (**call 116 123**).

Bupa has more information about workplace mental health that you may find useful at bupa.co.uk/workplace-mental-health



Sources

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