



SAMARITANS

Police service employee suicide:

a postvention toolkit to help manage
the impact and provide support.



Working in partnership with



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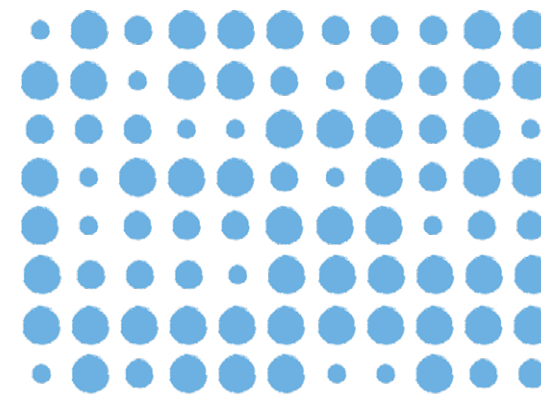
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FOREWORD



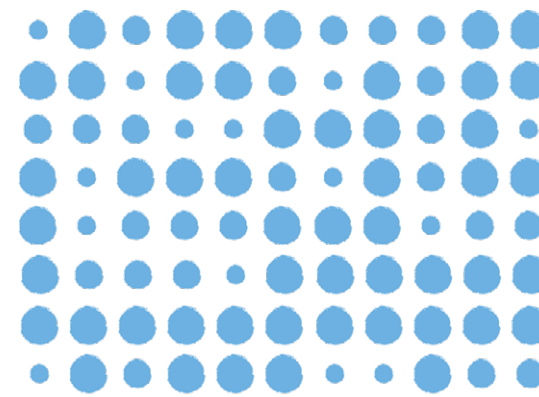
Andy Rhodes

National Police Wellbeing Service

The National Police Wellbeing Service – Oscar Kilo – exists to provide advice, guidance and operational support to everyone who works in policing, and we have developed this suicide postvention toolkit in response to requests from numerous forces, staff associations and unions. We have worked alongside colleagues from the ambulance service and the Samaritans to ensure we have the best expertise available.

Most importantly we have taken the time to listen to the voices of colleagues with lived experience of suicide and we thank them for their willingness to re-visit their thoughts, feelings and emotions in the pursuit of helping us to learn. Everything we do to support our people's mental health contributes in some way to reducing suicide, but we recognise there are specific improvements we need to make to raise awareness, reduce stigma and sensitively manage the aftermath of a colleague's suicide.

This toolkit will only be effective if it is put into action, and we will play our role in helping to embed it across the service.



FOREWORD

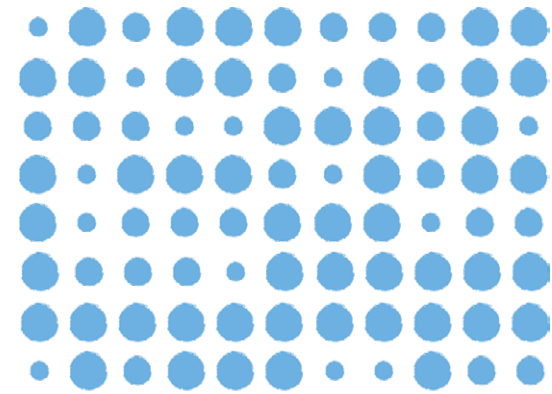


Andy Marsh

College of Policing CEO

The College of Policing exists to respond to the needs of everyone who works in policing and the call for more guidance and advice about suicide has been heard. I am personally committed to reducing stigma, raising awareness and improving how we manage the impact of a colleague's suicide, because I have first-hand experience of how difficult it can feel when we lose someone close to us.

We would like to thank the colleagues who provided their time to ensure this resource is grounded in their personal experiences of suicide. Also, we recognise the enthusiasm and commitment of the police officers, police staff, researchers and subject matter experts who for many years have been working hard to highlight the importance of suicide as an issue for us to prioritise.



FOREWORD



Julie Bentley

CEO of Samaritans

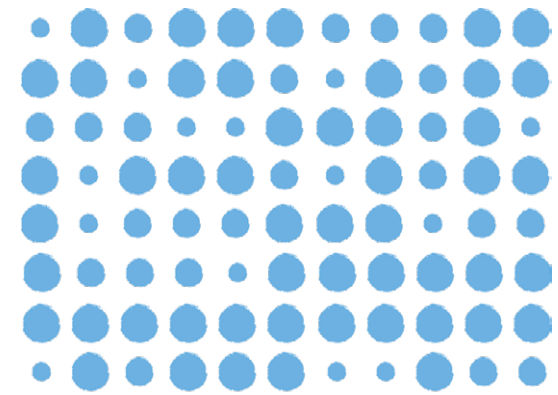
Suicide is complex. There is never one reason why a person might feel that they have no other option but to take their own life. Anyone affected by suicide can become at risk themselves, and it is impossible to predict who will react most and over what timescale. The trauma can have significant consequences at every level, from productivity and performance to wellbeing and relationships outside work, affecting those that did not directly know the person who died, as well as those who did.

We understand the challenges faced by police every day, often dealing with traumatic events and people in distress. It is easy to forget that, sometimes, you might need support yourselves. This toolkit is part of that support.

We are proud to have worked with the team at Oscar Kilo and the College of Policing to develop this toolkit. So many of your police colleagues openly and generously shared their experiences and insights with us. We found that, in a close community like a police force, the impact of the suicide of a colleague is significant, and its ripple effect reaches far beyond those closest.

Each time we go into workplaces we hear the same thing: "We wish we had known more. Suicide and suicidal feelings need to be discussed more, and more openly, so that people know they will be taken seriously and that they can reach out for support. And, if the worst happens, we need to be more prepared."

That is why this toolkit is such a valuable resource. If a colleague, friend or family member takes their own life, the worst has already happened. You can have the knowledge and skills to minimise the harm and help everyone to deal with its devastating consequences as best they can.



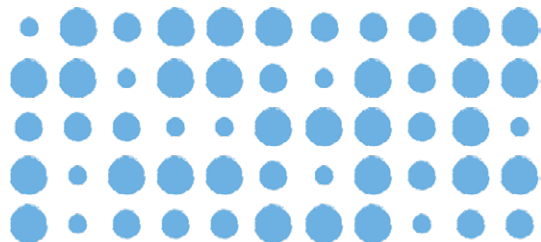
Introduction

Who should read this toolkit?

This toolkit aims to help senior leadership in police forces to support staff after the loss of a colleague to suicide. It may also be adapted to support staff who lose a family member or close friend outside the force to suicide.

It should be read by all senior people in a position to plan and implement a response in the event of a death of an employee by suicide. It is important to recognise the response will be challenging for everyone involved. Having a shared responsibility for postvention in your force is recommended.

Police officers and staff from different roles across the service, as well as membership organisations, have contributed their insights and experiences to the development of this toolkit. We have also used good practice from other sectors and organisations including the ambulance service.



The terms 'suicide' and 'died by suicide' are used in this toolkit, but please note that a conclusion of suicide can only be formally determined following a coroner's inquest. This usually takes several months to complete. The death may be talked about as **suicide by colleagues, the media and others, and it is important that postvention support for colleagues happens straight away, in any cases where it is a probable suicide.**

The conclusion following an inquest might not be one which you or employees expected so it is best to be conscious that this is a period of uncertainty. It might be helpful for your communications at this time to reference a sudden unexplained

death, 'possible suicide', or 'may have died by suicide', to enable necessary conversations to happen in advance of any coroner's ruling.

Avoid using outdated and judgmental terms like 'committed suicide', 'successful suicide' and phrases such as 'in a better place' or 'found peace'.

This toolkit provides guidance for when there is strong evidence that suicide is the cause of death, and when the community – colleagues, relatives and friends – are responding to what they believe is a suicide and so experiencing the corresponding impact and emotions.

“ Police officers and staff are regularly called upon to respond to an event where someone has taken their own life, however when that person is a member of our policing family this can deeply affect our staff in different and more personal ways. As Chief Constable I am keen to support in any way I can in alleviating the pressure and stress caused in such tragic circumstances. I wholeheartedly support postvention. We've made a plan and I urge every leader across the service to do the same so we can enhance our compassionate and sympathetic approach to our staff when they face difficult situations. ”

Shaun Sawyer, Chief Constable for Devon and Cornwall Police.

SECTION 1 – Introduction

Why is postvention important?

Postvention refers to the actions taken to provide support after someone dies by suicide. Evidence shows that people who have been bereaved or affected by suicide are almost three times more at risk of suicidal ideation.¹ It is estimated that as many as 1 in 10 people attempt suicide after losing someone to suicide and 8% drop out of work or education.² The impact of a suicide is far-reaching and up to 135 people can be affected by one death by suicide.³

Bereavement by suicide is complicated and unpredictable. Therefore, it is important to have a clear and supportive postvention plan in place in workplaces and all other environments where people are in close contact, such as schools and colleges.

- 1 Hill, N., Robinson, J., Pirkis, J., Andriessen, K., Kryszynska, K., & Payne, A. et al. (2020). Association of suicidal behavior with exposure to suicide and suicide attempt: A systematic review and multilevel meta-analysis. *PLOS Medicine*, 17(3), e1003074. doi: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1003074
- 2 Pitman, A. L., Osborn, D. P. J., Rantell, K., & King, M. B. (2016). Bereavement by suicide as a risk factor for suicide attempt: a cross-sectional national UK-wide study of 3432 young bereaved adults. *BMJ Open*, 6 (1), ARTN e009948. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2015-009948
- 3 Cerel, J. et al. (2018). *How many people are exposed to suicide? Not six.* Suicide and Life-Threatening Behaviour. DOI: 10.1111/sltb.12450

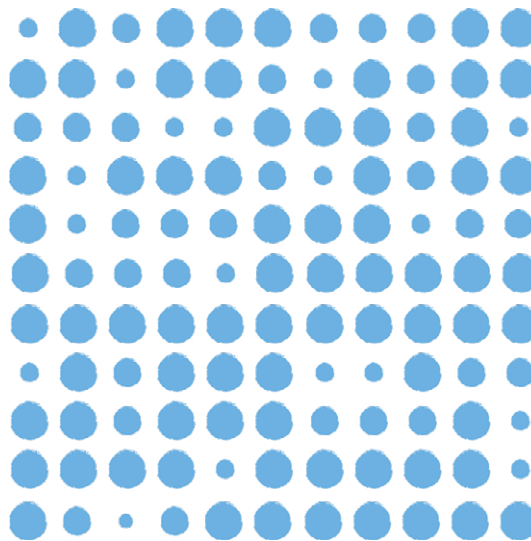
What is a cluster?

The term *suicide cluster* describes a situation in which more suicides than expected occur in terms of time, place, or both. It can apply to a situation where there are two or more deaths by suicide in a workplace or team over a short space of time. If this applies to your workplace, contact your Local Authority's Director of Public Health for specific guidance and support.

The need for postvention in the police service

Suicide within the police service is a rare event but when it does happen it can be devastating. The ripple effect can impact people beyond even those with the closest working relationships to the person who has died. In policing, responding to sudden and traumatic death can be an everyday experience. But when this becomes personal, it is even more important for officers and staff to take the time to process the loss. Officers and staff may try to get back to 'business as usual' quickly but can find that the complex emotions following a death by suicide of a colleague are not easily brushed away.

“We are probably better at dealing with things at arms-length for other people than we are dealing with it for ourselves. The service is improving in recognising that actually, we can be damaged by it ourselves and we're not bulletproof.”



SECTION 1 – Introduction

Grief after suicide

Bereavement after suicide is complex and it affects different people in different ways. It is often called 'grief with the volume turned up'. Alongside sadness and loss can be feelings of anger, shame, and guilt. Some people react by feeling numb. Some feel it would be easier to explain the death in a different way. Others may not know what to say. All these responses are normal.

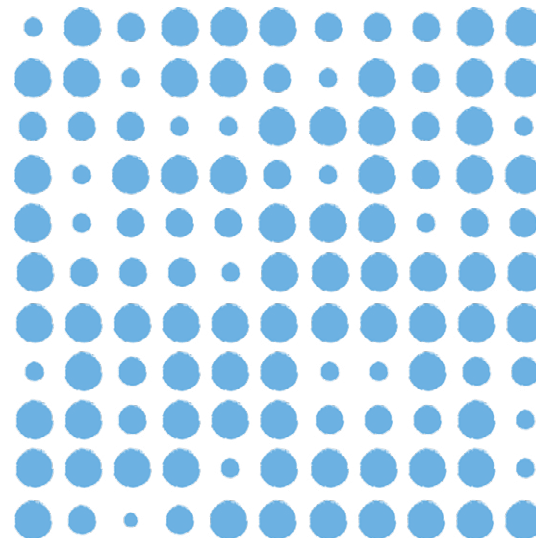
Officers and staff have told us that, due to the nature of policing and investigations, they struggled with feelings of guilt that they did not see what was happening with their colleague or 'spot the signs'.

[See Support after Suicide's website](#)

for more on emotions following a suicide

This complex grief can complicate how to respond to those bereaved by suicide. There won't be just one way to support, or a set pattern to the grief of those affected by the loss. This makes it essential to see each affected employee as someone with their own specific support needs which may change over time.

“When a colleague officer at a certain stage in their lives takes their own life, it produces a vulnerability in officers and staff. They start to unpack all the traumas which they have been holding within themselves. Death becomes personal where it may not have been previously.”



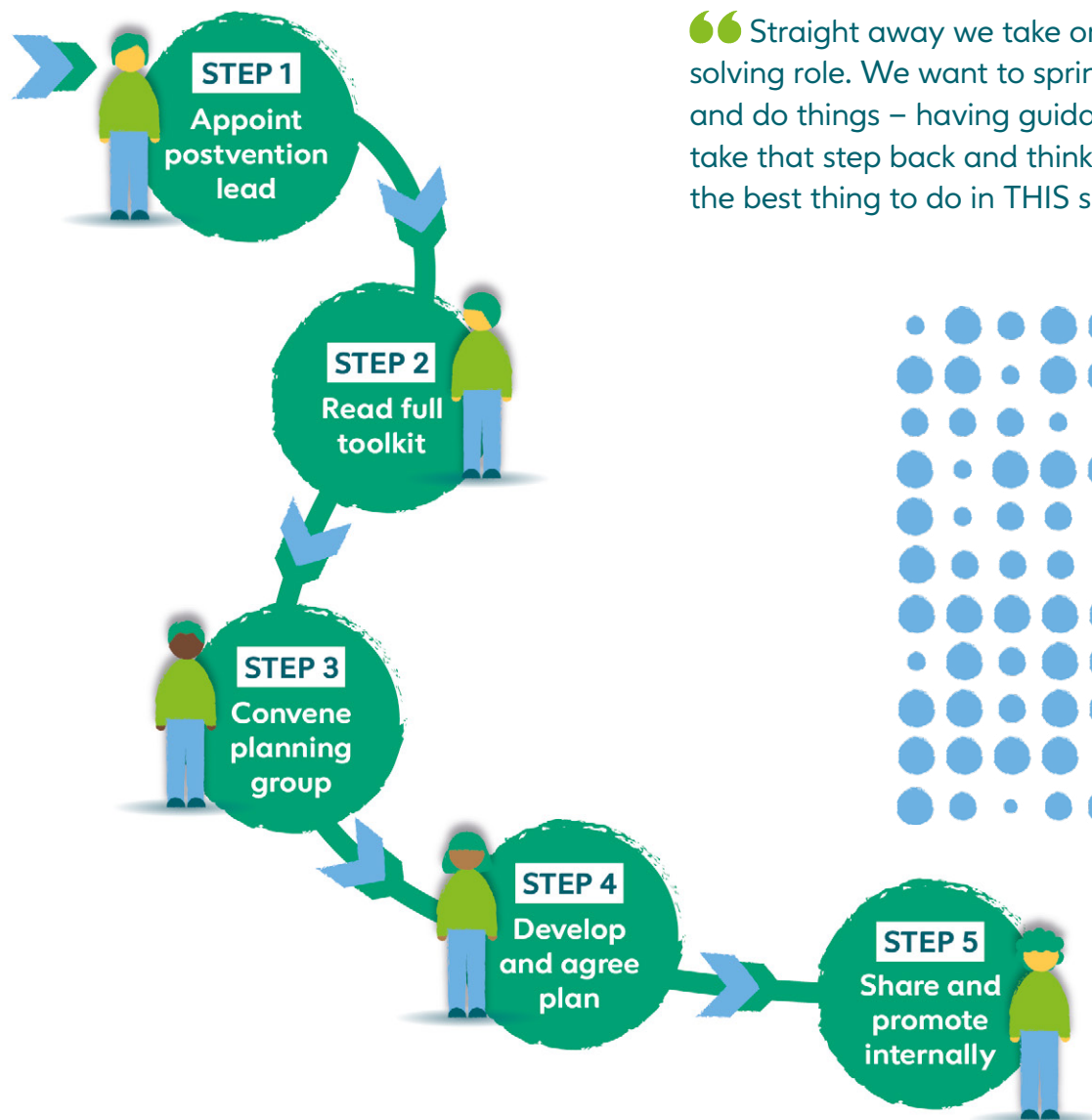
SECTION 1 – Introduction

How to use the toolkit

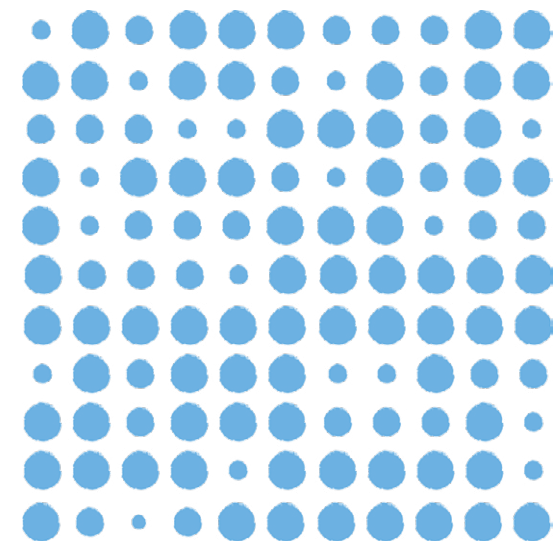
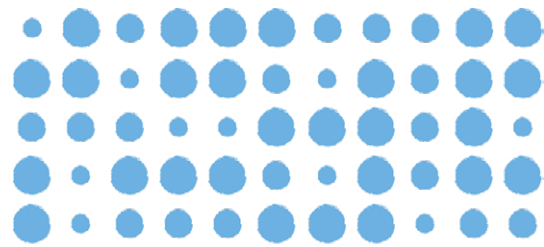
Each force will have its own structure and ways of working. This toolkit provides an overview for how you might roll out a postvention process within **your own force**.

➤ Here's how to get started.

- » Appoint a senior lead to oversee the development of the postvention plan. This could be an Assistant Chief Constable, Head of Human Resources, or wellbeing lead, but it is important that they have decision-making responsibility within the force.
- » Postvention lead reads the toolkit and familiarises themselves with all aspects of postvention.
- » Postvention lead convenes a planning group to develop your force's specific postvention plan. We have outlined some guidelines on this in Section 3, but the specifics will be unique to your force.
- » Postvention plan is developed and agreed, with key documents, checklists and signposting made accessible to all managers via the force's usual internal channels.



“Straight away we take on a problem-solving role. We want to spring into action and do things – having guidance helps us to take that step back and think about what the best thing to do in THIS situation.”



Be prepared

What to do in your force

➤ Tackle stigma around suicide

There is still a huge amount of stigma surrounding suicide, and as a result people can be hesitant to discuss it. If attending suicides is seen to be just 'part of the job' but too taboo to talk about at work, people may be less likely to seek support if they are feeling suicidal or if a colleague dies by suicide. Therefore, it's critical, even in the absence of an employee death, to destigmatise the discussion of suicide.

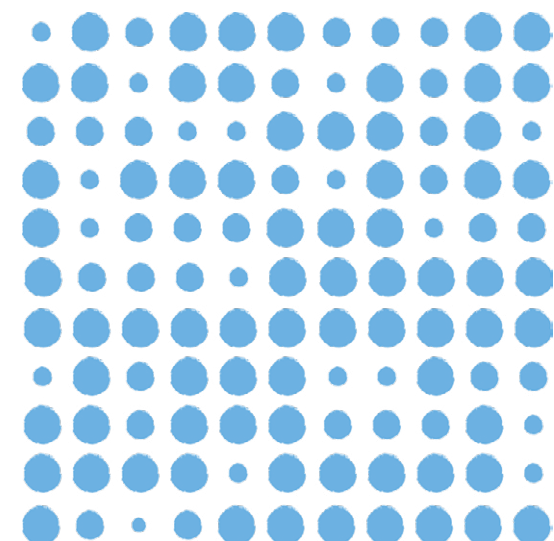
“No one in the force has ever sat me down and said: 'what did you feel, what led you to attempt to take your own life, what could we have done differently?'. They refer to the period as 'my sabbatical'. We talk about wellbeing but we have such a long way to go to tackle the taboo and normalise the conversation around suicide.”

Here are some things you can do now to help create a working culture that helps to destigmatise mental health and suicide and where conversation is encouraged:

- » Use the opportunity of suicide awareness days to talk about suicide.
- » Share voices and experiences of people within the service who have personal experience of suicide and are keen to use this to help break down barriers.
- » Consider fundraising for mental health and suicide prevention charities as part of employee fundraising initiatives.
- » Organise training on a range of topics from peer support to managing conversations around suicide.
- » Encourage staff to complete Zero Suicide Alliance training. This 20-minute online tool is free to use and gives people a basic awareness of suicide prevention. Samaritans also offer workplace training.

[Visit Samaritans website to find out more about training](#)

[Visit Zero Suicide Alliance website to find out more about training](#)



SECTION 2 – Be prepared

➤ Form a postvention planning group

Postvention support does not belong with one rank or team. Collaboration and cross-working are key to building the best possible response, providing the right support to colleagues and managing the impact on the service.

Identify individuals within your force who will act as a postvention planning group.

These will likely include:

- » Gold Command
- » Leads from HR, Health and Wellbeing, Occupational Health, Chaplaincy, Communications
- » Operational officers such as Sergeants - ideally peer support and mental health trained
- » A representative from the local staff association or federation
- » Someone with personal experience of suicide bereavement (in or outside of work) who will have a strong understanding of postvention needs

These individuals will be responsible for postvention planning **before** a suicide occurs. In the event of a suicide, they will also likely have a role in implementing the plan and in supporting those in direct contact with affected colleagues.

Make sure the postvention group members are clearly identified and that they understand the duties assigned to them and others across the service.

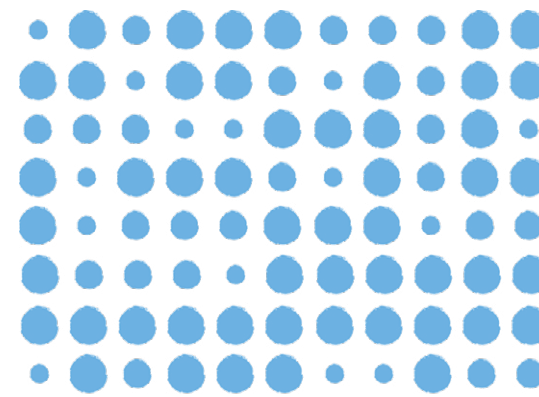
➤ Agree your postvention approach

Convene the group and discuss postvention-related issues that are important in your force.

This should include:

- » What your response structure or process will be: Gold Command/ critical incident etc.
- » Your individual roles and responsibilities.
- » What procedures, support and resources you already have in place.
- » How you will support staff at all levels.
- » Specifically, how you will support the operational lead or individual managing the process on the ground. Will you put in place peer support or a buddy?
- » Whether you will need to source external expertise, such as suicide bereavement counselling, if wellbeing or OH services are at capacity or not specialist enough.
- » Operational needs and how to cover short and longer-term staff absences from frontline duties while delivering business as usual.
- » Communications cascade, balancing the need for open and transparent communications with all staff with compassion for those bereaved, the wishes of the family and confidentiality.

- » What your family support model will be. Helping families with practical matters, supporting them to access financial support and bereavement help. The role of the family liaison representative and or federation representative. An exit strategy.
- » How you will allow for some accommodation in your usual workplace behaviour and continue to identify, monitor and support those most affected as the weeks and months go by.
- » Training, if necessary, for all those responsible for postvention support.



SECTION 2 – Be prepared

➤ Support for employees

Given the nature of policing, it's common for employees not to seek help when they need it. There can be a sense that they need to battle through and not let their colleagues down. This risks letting issues that could be addressed with early intervention go unchecked and reach crisis point. Encouraging a culture where it's OK to ask for help and ensuring that these requests are heard is critical in creating a healthy working environment and retaining staff over the long-term.

This is an ongoing task for senior management and all those responsible for the workforce.

“ I was having panic attacks, my hands were going numb, I'd lose my vision. People knew something wasn't right but no-one acted on it. The first referral I had was after I attempted suicide. We need to actively approach people. I didn't know what was wrong with me but I was withdrawing from everything and not keeping on top of my workload which was not like me; the warning signs were there. We need to look out for each other and encourage and promote self-care. ”

➤ Support for managers

Managers are often at the heart of the response to an employee's suicide. They will be responsible for seamless operations so that the day-to-day work of a busy force continues. They will be talking with their teams to make sure that emotional support is being offered in a timely and appropriate way.

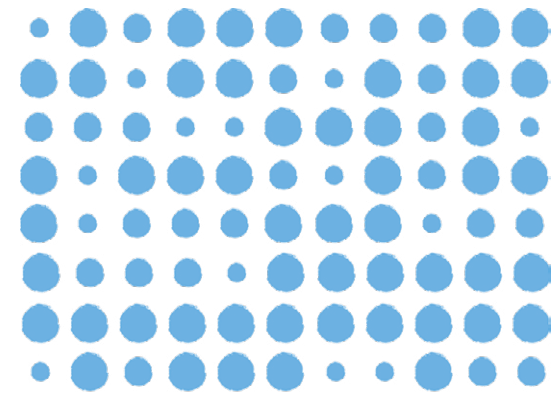
Yet they may also be deeply affected by the sudden death of a colleague but feel unable to express that grief. Assigning someone to provide peer support to the operational lead (similar to a tactical advisor but with understanding of postvention) is recommended.

“ When I was en route to give the death warning to the deceased parents I got a phone call from the Superintendents Association to say: 'are you ok'? That was good and supportive. A few days after, the Chief came to the district to see my boss, made a point of thanking me. Even just saying something helps you to know that someone is thinking of you. ”



Who is best to support the manager?

This person may have experience of responding to the suicide of an employee previously but should not be a close contact or colleague of the person who has died. Their role is to provide help and support to the manager at this challenging time. They may also support on operational planning or the 'day to day' work if the manager is struggling to deliver this.




SECTION 2 – Be prepared

Support for families

Support for the family often starts with the death warning. Deciding who takes on this role and that of ongoing liaison and support is important. In the days following a suicide, discussions with the family are likely to be about sharing the news, and what police involvement, if any, they want with the funeral and practical matters.

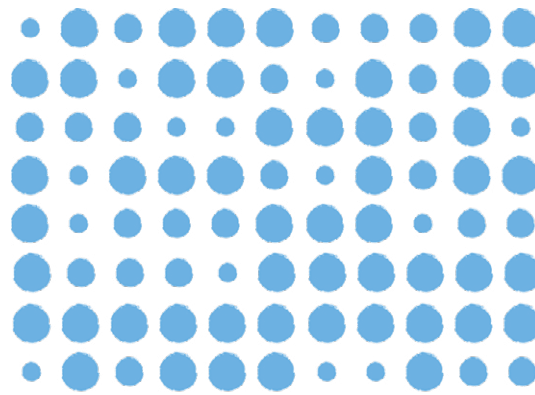
Some forces have found it helpful to have a family liaison role specific to one individual. This role will likely differ in its purpose to the usual Family Liaison Officer. It is important that this person is trained and feels comfortable with what may be difficult conversations. Some knowledge of complex bereavement by suicide, as well as an understanding of how to talk about suicide is essential. Being prepared for how a family might react is also important, there may be a great deal of anger and blame around the death. Whatever the circumstances it is crucial that the family's wishes are respected.



When you have agreed your postvention team, plan and approach – and when you have discussed your own specific requirements, policies and protocols – you can develop explainers, checklists and processes for sharing with managers on your force intranet.

The following sections will help you to further consider what to include in your plan and in these shared documents.

“ I went to the scene and next of kin to do the death warning. I did wonder if I was too senior, giving an enhanced level of service? But on the other hand, they are one of ours and we have that duty of care as their employer. ”



When suicide happens

What to do immediately

Officers and staff have said that it would be helpful to have a short checklist available at this time. There will be many factors to think through and action, so making the process as clear as possible is key. Here is an example of what your immediate process might incorporate.

1. Inform the response structure

(Gold command/ critical incident) and the local federation or association representative for the person who has died.

2. Enact your postvention plan - ensure you include the following:

» **Identify who is impacted** by mapping your priority audiences from the centre out. Remember it's not always those working closest who are most affected, there may be former colleagues on other teams, colleagues on sick leave or friends who have recently retired who will want to know. There may also be relational or disciplinary issues that need to be taken into account at this point in planning your immediate response.

» **Put in place peer support** for the person managing the situation on the ground – someone from your postvention group, or a peer with experience in dealing with the death of a suicide (check they feel able to and are not a close colleague of the person who has died).

» **Start communicating with those most affected** – share this responsibility among you, taking care to identify the right individuals to deliver the news. Ensure the right combination of seniority and natural empathy to demonstrate from the outset this loss matters.

Include

- › immediate team (on and off duty)
- › the family
 - who will deliver the death warning?
 - will you appoint a FLO?
 - role of the staff association/federation rep
- › close colleagues
- › and the wider force.



Family liaison will likely require specialist skills and relationship handling over time. Take care not to automatically let this role fall to the line manager or the individual delivering the news, but to the person best suited to provide ongoing support. Consider appointing a single point of contact from outside the immediate geographic area, or someone not known to the deceased or their close work colleagues.

» **Mobilise federation / staff association support** – for all who would benefit.

» **Sort operational logistics** - restrict the log, relieve affected staff on duty, put in a fresh team if necessary.

» **Start putting staff support in place now** - but recognise not everyone will feel ready to access structured help immediately.

- › give affected staff time and space to be together to talk now
- › utilise (or create) designated quiet rooms
- › draw on existing wellbeing, OH, chaplaincy and mental health resource
- › stay vigilant to employees needs as no one size fits all.

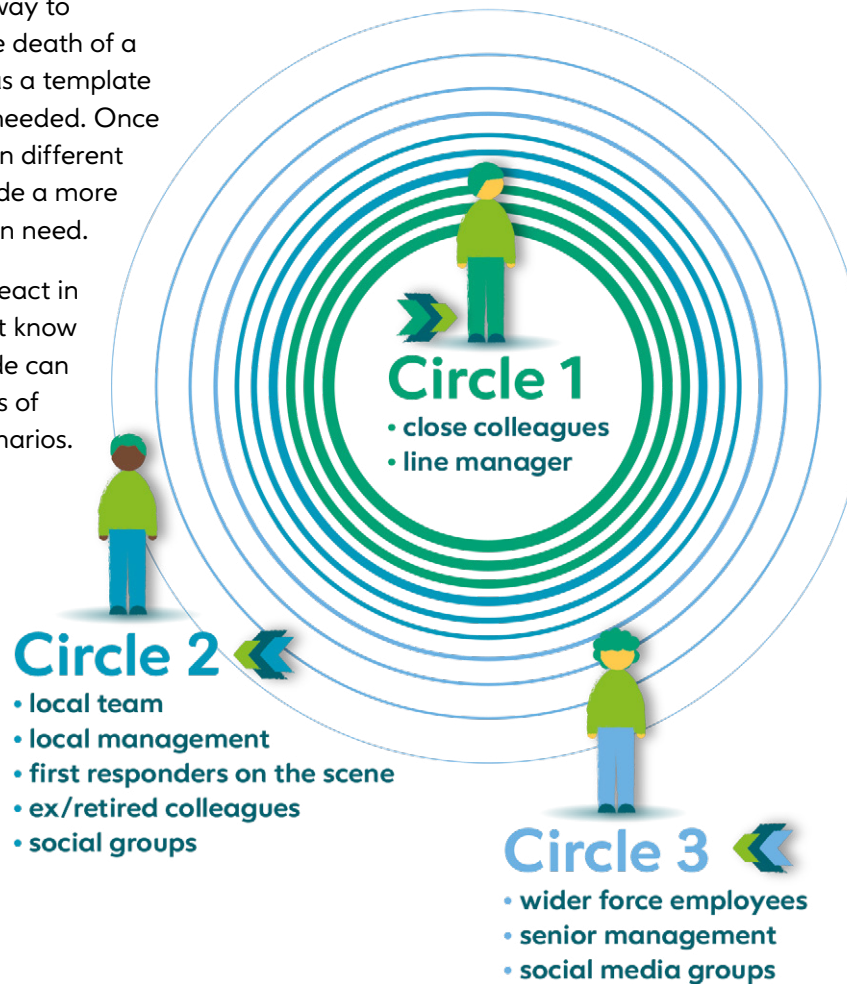
» **Pay particular attention to those affected by the death working in high-risk roles** such as safeguarding, firearms and roads policing or attending challenging incidents. Take care to check in on these individuals and be prepared to relieve them of front-line duty whilst reassuring them that in doing so they are not letting their team down.

SECTION 3 – When suicide happens

Circles of Impact

The Circles of Impact tool is a useful way to pattern who might be affected by the death of a colleague. We have included it here as a template which can be printed and filled in as needed. Once you have assessed the likely impact on different individuals and groups, you can provide a more bespoke level of support depending on need.

Be prepared too for some people to react in unexpected ways, even if they did not know the person very well. Grief after suicide can be unpredictable, but using the Circles of Impact can prepare you for most scenarios.



SECTION 3 – When suicide happens



What to do: next 48 hours

➤ Be flexible and listen – what do people want and need right now?

Leadership, local management and wellbeing leads need to take this time to really listen to colleagues. Team relationships and culture might dictate who needs help and when. It may be that the team wants to continue working through those first days of grief, but that they need time off and more support after the memorial or funeral service.

Some officers and staff prefer to be in the building, off duty but with other colleagues for moral support. Some want to be at home with their family, some want to get on with the job. There may be cultural, religious or generational differences in how people want to grieve and the expectations upon them regarding mourning rituals and the time needed to fulfil them.

It may take more time and resource but having a locally appropriate response, even down to the individual level, will have more positive impact on recovery than a 'one size fits all' response.

“ This is more personal and may be longer term for some people. It really comes down to line management recognising who's been impacted and just being sensitive to how long it may take someone to recover from that. ”

➤ Continue to communicate openly

Careful co-ordination of internal and external communications will be important in the first days following the death. Do not make any official statements until the death has been formally confirmed and carefully co-ordinate your employee communication in consultation with your postvention group, the family and communications team.

If the next of kin continues to request that the death not be disclosed as a suicide, an employer may not be able to maintain confidentiality. If information has already spread through informal communications, senior managers are at risk of appearing disingenuous if there is

no acknowledgement of the manner of death. Ongoing open liaison with the family to resolve this will be important, being honest that it is more beneficial to carefully manage how a death by suicide is communicated, than to allow rumours to spread among staff. You could discuss the use of terms like 'may have died by suicide' or 'may have taken their own life'.

As soon as you are able, provide an official in-house statement explaining the circumstances (where possible) for all employees and include the offer of support to those affected.

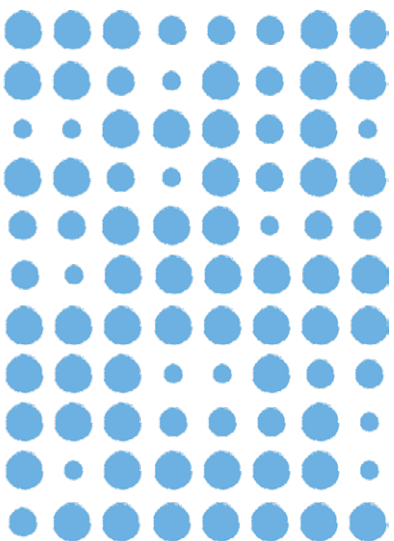
Consider also sending a more personal message to those closest to the person who has died to explain the internal process into the death and what information may or may not be expected to be released to the public.


SECTION 3 – When suicide happens

➤ Safe messaging and language around suicide

When communicating about suicide, it is critical to consider the safety of those receiving these messages. Using safe messaging mitigates the risk of encouraging other or future suicides.

[Samaritan's Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide](#) are a really useful resource for how to communicate using safe messaging. Here is a summary of the most relevant advice.



- 
- » Refrain from reporting details of suicide methods.
 - » **Avoid making unsubstantiated links between separate incidents of suicide.**
 - » **Don't give undue prominence to the news with dramatic language, extensive use of photographs and memorials of people who have previously died [treat it as you would any death in service].**
 - » **Manage speculation about a 'single trigger' for a suicide. Suicide is complex and seldom the result of a single factor.**
 - » **Sensitively portray the devastation left behind for families, friends and communities following a death by suicide.**
 - » **Be wary of over-emphasising community expressions of grief (for example romanticised comments and montages of images of floral tributes), as this can inadvertently glorify suicidal behaviour to others who may be vulnerable.**

➤ Language

- » Avoid outdated and judgmental terms like 'committed suicide,' 'successful suicide,' 'failed suicide attempt,' or 'completed suicide.'
- » Use 'died by suicide' and 'took his/her/their own life' instead.
- » Steer clear of comments, such as 'in a better place', 'found peace' and 'heaven has gained another angel.'

Managers in particular can worry about saying the wrong thing whilst feeling the need to remain composed and in control. The postvention group can support them to prepare and plan what is to be said. Reassure them that there is no shame in expressing emotion; rather it conveys compassion and demonstrates healthy grieving.

SECTION 3 – When suicide happens

➤ Managing media and social media interest

There may be media interest in the death by suicide of a member of the police service, so ensuring that communications colleagues responsible for the press office function are fully briefed from the outset is key. Ideally, you will also have senior representation for external communications on the postvention group.



Agree a template holding statement in advance as a starting point if needed. Some suggested wording is below:

It is with great sadness that we share the news that XX Police has lost a very dear colleague. [Name and title] or [the officer/manager/member of staff], whose family has asked not to be named, died [this morning/ yesterday, + insert date].

Our colleague, a much-loved member of the team, was [insert details the family has agreed/you deem suitable to share – eg, married with children and had worked for the force for a considerable number of years].

On behalf of everyone here at [XX Police], including the communities we serve, we would like to offer our sincere condolences to our colleague's family and friends at this difficult time.

This will deeply affect many people within the force and we are supporting the family and our staff. We would ask that the press respect the privacy of the family. We will not be making any further announcements at this time.

The statement should be treated as reactive and only used if deemed appropriate by the leadership team. Ideally, this should be cleared by the family/next of kin.

Remind all staff not to speak to the media or discuss the death at/on public forums as per your standard crisis communications procedures.

➤ Monitoring social media

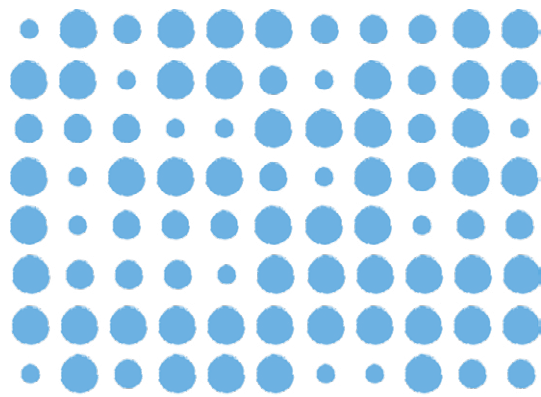
Social media can also become a vehicle for people to express their anger, or to apportion blame for the death of a colleague. If possible, speak to anyone within the workforce who may be using social media in this way to remind them of the need to respect the family's wishes and privacy at a very difficult time.

Posted comments can sometimes contain unsafe messages and sometimes include expressions of suicidal ideation by friends or family of the deceased.

Ensure that an agreed statement is shared on your own closed social media channels, such as a staff Facebook page.

Consider a role for a member of staff (perhaps on the postvention group) that involves monitoring and informing HR leads of social media posts around the death of a colleague. It is almost impossible to control what will be shared, but by rapidly responding to misinformation when talking to staff, or being vigilant to expressions of suicidal ideation, some management of the consequences of social media activity is possible.

Expressions of suicidal intention should be taken seriously and addressed with urgency.



SECTION 3 – When suicide happens

➤ Dealing with practicalities

The family liaison representative should continue to support the family with any relevant practical matters. This could include accessing financial support, information on workplace benefits after death in service and arranging a funeral. Your local federation team is an important resource and support at this time, especially in ensuring that the family receives all the help available to them.

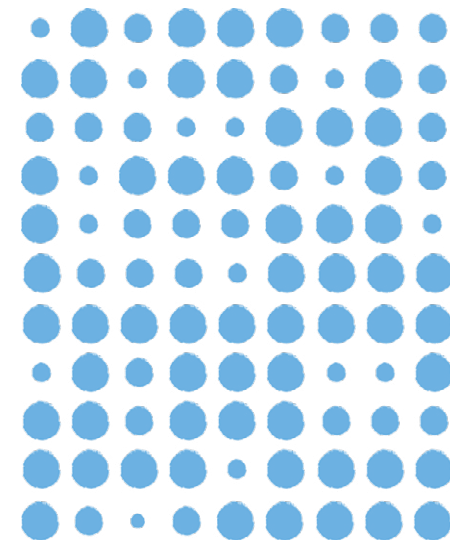
The force may also need to request the return of the employees' uniform and other work-related items, which should be handled sensitively and with care. It is best to keep channels of communication open with the family for as long as they need you to. You can also inform family that the federation team is there for them in the future too, when they may wish to talk more about the person they have lost once time has moved on.

➤ Supporting managers

Managers at all levels have said that they have struggled to hold all of their responsibilities at a time of immense pressure – and often while grieving themselves. While supporting their team, dealing with family and the administration of losing an employee, there can be an expectation that 'normal' everyday business has to continue.

Supporting managers through postvention is essential. This may be through very regular check-ins with HR to ensure that the manager is not being overwhelmed by their responsibilities. It may also be via a peer support system, where a manager from a different team is available to support on logistical or operational duties such as arranging cover for those on leave - or just being available to listen.

“ I was given 48 hours to put everything in place, visit the family, manage staff. I felt: 'do you not know what's happened here – back off.' I couldn't do my job for 48 hours, but then people were looking for other work to be done. It is not a 48-hour operation. ”



SECTION 3 – When suicide happens

Supporting and promoting healthy grieving

Line managers are not expected to be experts on grief, but it is important to know that grieving is a process that varies from person to person. People will experience different feelings from their colleagues, and this is likely to change over time.

Senior management and line managers can help support this natural grieving and healing process by:

- » Being aware of what types of workplace concessions might be made in the first few days and weeks (time off, lightened or alternative duties, funeral attendance).
- » Allowing time and space for those who want to continue to talk about the colleague they have lost, understanding the importance of telling stories and sharing experiences.
- » Being available, being visible and talking to employees. Remember to include your remote workers and those on leave in any communications.

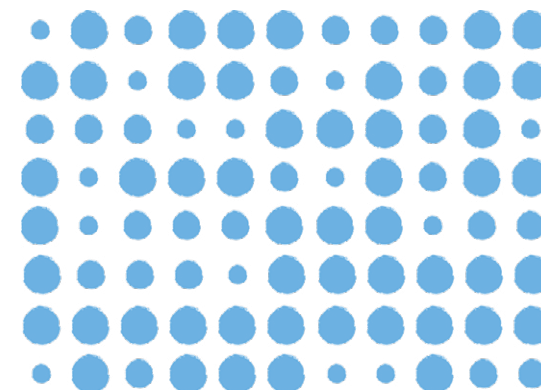
- » Helping find the right balance between commemorating the deceased, but not memorialising the death in a dramatic or glorified way.
- » Being a role model for healthy grieving. It is okay - and even beneficial - for managers to acknowledge their own feelings regarding the loss of a colleague, and if it feels comfortable, to share their own coping strategies.
- » Not putting a deadline on grief. For those most affected, life has changed, and it will take time to adjust.

“ I was given the weekend off. But I came back to work on the Monday (I needed to get back to normality) and that was it. Done. I didn't hear anything about it after that. It was like it never happened. ”

Taking care of yourself

This stage of postvention support is particularly challenging and it is very common to feel anxious about saying or doing the wrong thing, or even making things worse. Remember that even by just acknowledging the need for ongoing support, by listening and by bringing in the right people together, you are making an enormous difference to those affected by suicide.

Look out for everyone in the postvention delivery team at this stage – all of whom will be dealing with difficult conversations and circumstances.



SECTION 3 – When suicide happens



What to do: the following weeks and months

Managing the risk to other employees

It is essential that support after a suicide is ongoing, and that staff have repeated opportunities to access it beyond the first few days following a suicide. Collaboration, continuity and co-ordination between local management, wellbeing support and HR needs to continue beyond the initial response, especially for those employees who are struggling with their loss.

Have regular check-ins with the team, bring people together around two weeks after the death, and again a month after the death, so that colleagues know that there is no 'time limit' to their grief and the support that is available to them. Be prepared for some employees to seemingly take a step backwards in their grief.

“ This wasn't just a job; it was a personal thing. The force had no idea how much that affected me. I didn't realise probably for about a month how much I was struggling. ”

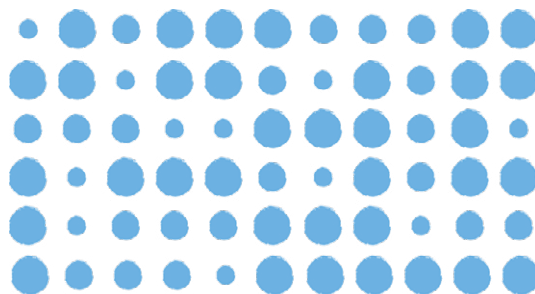
Managers will continue to have the very challenging task of balancing the need to care for and support affected employees, with the demands of police service provision. Continue to consider the needs of line managers at this point. They must not be isolated at this time. They need to continue to work with HR and their own supervisor to clarify the policies and boundaries of flexibility regarding accommodating employee needs and any changes in workloads or staffing.

Specialist bereavement support

Every area in the country should have a local suicide bereavement specialist service that can help with staff who need this level of support.

Find out what is available in your area on the [Support after Suicide website](#) or [visit At a Loss](#).

Your local federation may also be able to access local bereavement support.

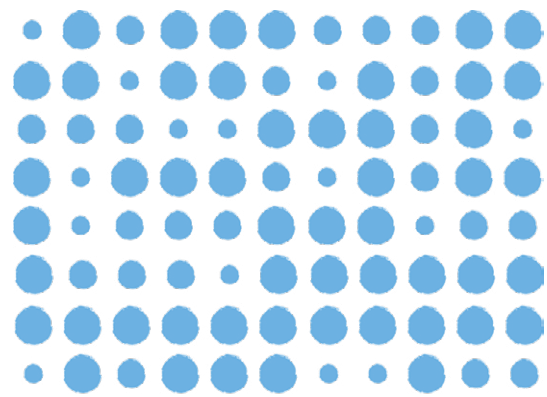


SECTION 3 – When suicide happens

➤ Supporting and attending a funeral

Balancing the family's wishes with those of colleagues can remain challenging, especially when arranging the funeral of the person who has died. Most forces have an officer in place who is experienced in managing this relationship and putting in place the ceremonial aspects of a police funeral. It is worth, in your preparation phase, ensuring that the ceremonial officer has had some basic training in suicide awareness to be able to deal with complex grief.

If the family agrees, attending the funeral should be open to anyone who wants to attend from the force. This of course will have operational repercussions, but it is an important aspect of dealing with suicide bereavement for those who are affected. The force should be supportive in addressing operational logistics for the day.



The time around the funeral is another important milestone for supporting staff. When the death is by suicide, often the emotional responses are amplified, and the remembrance service can be instrumental in promoting healing. However, tricky issues such as the circumstance of the death, the state of relationships in the team, can all surface again.

““ They are referred to as ‘police funerals’ but they are not; they are family funerals with an element of police involvement and the element very much depends on what the family wants. This is very important. ””

➤ Helping staff who want to ‘do something’

Some staff might feel a strong need to ‘do something’ after the death of a colleague as a way of coping and making sense of it all. The force can support this well-intentioned response by offering ideas and opportunities to help that are appropriate, proportionate and sensitive to the family.

Some forces have offered suicide awareness training to staff as a way of channelling this need into a practical and powerful way to support each other.

Condolence books, memorials, charity bike rides and other fundraisers are also helpful ways to remember and celebrate the life of a colleague. Be sensitive about setting a precedent that may be hard to follow, or overshadowing a family's efforts.

““ When we lose someone particularly to suicide, everyone wants to do something. As police we fix things. We want memorials, things named after people, but it needs to be a streamlined approach, or it is not ideal for the family. ””

SECTION 3 – When suicide happens

➤ Reinforcing and building trust in leadership

Feeling cared for and supported in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event is important in the healing and recovery process. The positive outcomes of this response can contribute to a stronger, more engaged, and positive workplace culture.

The opposite is also true: if leadership fails to respond promptly, appropriately, and sensitively to a suicide, there will inevitably be at least some loss of trust and confidence. The overall impact of the traumatic event may be magnified if employees feel that management did not care or did not know what to do and therefore did nothing.

One way to establish trust is for leaders to acknowledge how they have been personally affected by the loss. It is also important that all staff are aware of the existence of your postvention plan as an element of the force's wider mental health and wellbeing support. This helps to reassure that leadership are fully committed to supporting staff should it be needed.

“ Just because you put a uniform on doesn't make you immune to the adverse impacts. How an organisation deals with its staff, looks after them, is imperative to everything linked to performance. You need your staff at work, if you get it wrong you can lose staff for years. ”

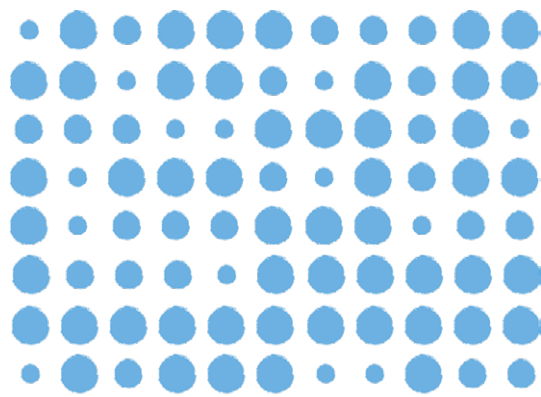
➤ Preparing for reactions to anniversaries, events and milestones

For those affected by the suicide, anniversary or milestone reactions might emerge. Employees should be reassured that this is a normal response.

Due to the complicated nature of suicide, some employees may still struggle with the experience months or years after many others have come to terms with their loss and are coping better. In preparation for this, the postvention group and line managers could consider working with those who are directly affected to discuss how to mark these occasions respectfully and supportively.

Postvention leads should be alert to an anniversary or birthday. This time could be used to check in and offer quiet space or a chance to come together and share memories and stories.

Some colleagues may be expected to be part of a coronial process. If this is the case, make sure that they are supported as needed. Being involved as a friend and colleague of the person who has died will differ hugely from any previous experiences in a coroner's court.



SECTION 3 – When suicide happens

➤ Getting back to normal

A colleague's suicide can affect everyone, although the impact might be different, and each employee will respond in their own way.

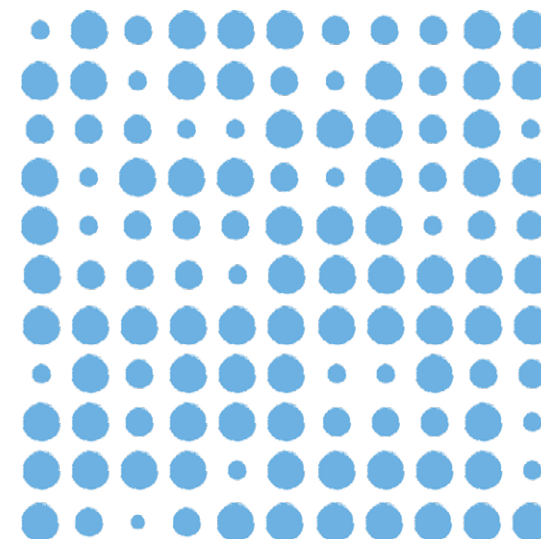
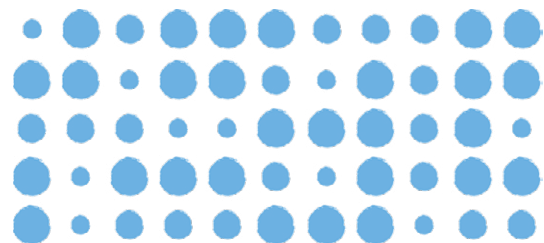
Even when work appears to have returned to 'normal', some will still feel the loss deeply. The challenge, particularly for line managers, is to help employees move on while being respectful of their feelings.

“ I didn't realise I was affected until I was being filmed about suicide for another project a couple of years later and I had a bit of a breakdown. ”

Of course, police will continue to respond to suicides as part of their daily work. They will be coming into contact with grieving and shocked relatives and any one of those experiences might lead them to return to the loss of a colleague and the grief and painful emotions of that loss.

Being mindful of these possible reactions and checking in after difficult jobs are simple ways that managers can remain aware of their teams' needs.

“ We can't tell DCs what the next job on the radio is going to be and it might just be the final straw. They then get told they are either well enough to come to work or perhaps they can be restricted to the office. The sergeants, inspectors and above have to look at those two things - dealing with grief of the staff and carrying on business as usual. ”



Reflection and learning time

Effective crisis management is the result of constant evaluation and appraisal. The same applies to suicide postvention. It is important for the senior management, at the appropriate time, to reflect on how the service responded following a suicide and what lessons can be learned and shared with others.

Reviewing your postvention plan and response

All police forces are different and the appropriate time to reflect is also likely to be influenced by the circumstances of the suicide. The timing should also be sensitive to any external investigations that may be ongoing.

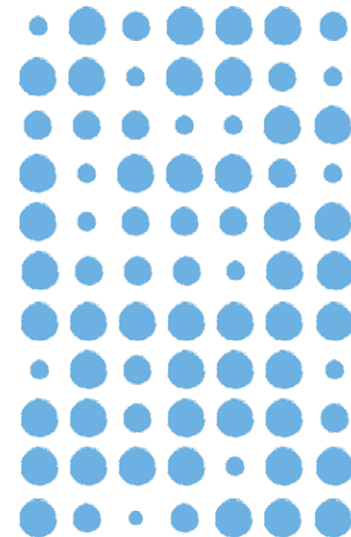
This reflection should have two main aims:

- 1. To consider whether the plan was appropriate and effective in supporting affected colleagues.**
- 2. To ensure that there are suitable measures in place to effectively manage colleagues' mental health to minimise the possibility of future suicides.**

It is important that this reflection takes place in an atmosphere of constructive and mutually supportive engagement, with its purpose to ensure that employees receive the support they need, and not to attribute blame at any level.

The views and experiences of employees must be central to this reflection. It might be appropriate to invite an external facilitator to oversee this process, particularly if people are still affected by the suicide.

Keep in mind that policy decisions or changes made in the near aftermath of a suicide at work should be considered carefully because it continues to be a sensitive time that may impact judgment.



SECTION 4 – Reflection and learning time

Postvention plan review: key questions

- » Were support resources adequate and appropriate? Were staff supported? Was there a unified response across the force?
- » Was the communications process effective, consistent, and coherent?
- » Were external partnerships (e.g., bereavement support partners) effective in their response?
- » How quickly were activities 'normalised'? Could this be improved? How can the plan be strengthened?
- » Were there any system-wide issues that affected efficient implementation of the postvention plan?
- » Who is responsible for implementing any recommendations following the review?
- » How can learnings be shared across the force, and with other organisations and external agencies?

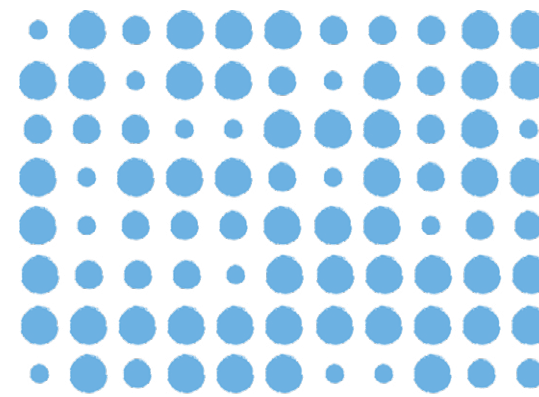
Learnings from this process should help inform and shape ongoing mental health and suicide prevention policy work within your force.

The circumstances that led up to the suicide may never be fully established, and it is likely that no single event precipitated the death. It might not be possible to determine the extent to which work contributed to the suicide. Despite these uncertainties, it is of paramount importance for the organisation to review the effectiveness of its policy on mental health at work.

Consideration must be given to how written policies are implemented, so any disconnect between aspiration and reality can be addressed as a priority.

Consider too how you can effectively and sensitively share your learnings with other police forces, so that practice across the country can become even more effective in supporting those in need.

The death of a colleague by suicide has a huge impact on everyone in the service, regardless of seniority. Remain mindful of this while reflecting on lessons learned. Everyone will have tried to do their utmost to support each other through a difficult time, which must be recognised by all involved.



SECTION 5

Further information and resources

[Samaritans website](#) has a range of useful resources, training programmes, and a Media Advisory Team who can advise on concerns around media interest and involvement.

Suicide bereavement support

[The Support after Suicide Partnership's website](#) has information and resources on bereavement after suicide.

[Help is at Hand is a downloadable resource](#) for people bereaved by suicide or other unexplained death, and for the people supporting them.

[Finding the Words](#) offers advice on how to support someone bereaved by suicide.

[Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide \(SOBS\)](#) is a national charity providing dedicated support to adults who have been bereaved by suicide.

[Winston's Wish](#) is the UK's childhood bereavement charity, supporting children and their families after the death of a parent or sibling.

[At a Loss](#) can signpost you to local support groups and services, including those that specialise in support after suicide.

[Blue Light Together](#) is the place for UK emergency services staff, volunteers, retirees and friends and family to find information, ideas and support to help look after your mental health.

[Visit Oscar Kilo website](#) for further information on its work to prevent suicide.

[The College of Policing has sources](#) of support for mental and emotional wellbeing.



SECTION 5 – Further information and resources

Acknowledgements

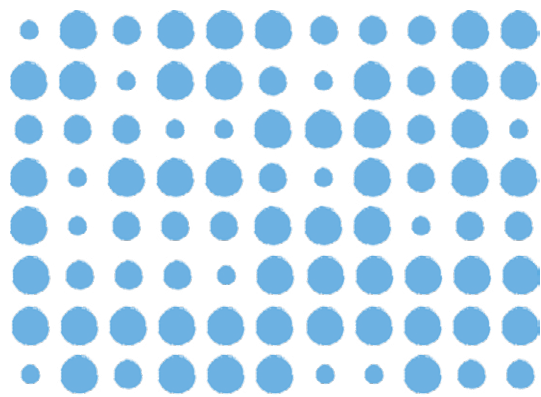
This toolkit has been funded and co-ordinated by the National Police Wellbeing Service.

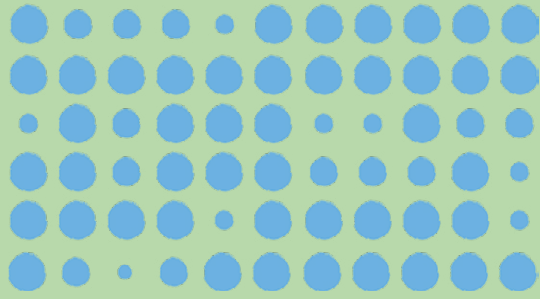
Special thanks must go to all the officers and staff who shared their experiences in order to help develop this resource. In addition, thank you to our colleagues from;

- » Home Office
- » College of Policing
- » National Police Wellbeing Service
- » National Police Chiefs' Council
- » Association of Police and Crime Commissioners
- » Chief Police Officers Staff Association
- » Police Superintendents' Association
- » Police Federation of England and Wales
- » UNISON

“ This postvention toolkit represents a milestone in our journey to improve the support we provide to our people in the aftermath of a colleague’s suicide. Although it is designed for this purpose, by its very existence it adds value to the service’s consensus commitment to work collectively to prevent and reduce suicide. Whilst working through the toolkit, you will gain more knowledge and understanding about the impact suicide can have on those close to it and you will have more confidence to talk openly about this sensitive subject. These conversations will contribute towards your workplace becoming a compassionate, psychologically safe place which in turn will contribute to reducing deaths by suicide. ”

Andy Rhodes, Oscar Kilo





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