



Healthy Workplace

Dear HR Leads

I don't know if you are aware but Cornwall has a higher rate of suicides than most other parts of the country and over 50% of all our suicides are amongst people who are in regular employment. Whenever there is a suicide we are aware of the impact this will have on family, friends and work colleagues and we are keen to provide support and a guide to resources that are available, should you ever need them. Hopefully the information below will never be needed in your workplace, but we felt it better to equip you for the worst case situation, just in case.

There is a comprehensive guide to dealing with a suicide of a work colleague that has been put together by an American group, The Action Alliance. The full document can be found at:

www.theactionalliance.org/sites/default/files/managers-guidebook-to-suicide-postvention-web.pdf

We have provided a summary of this document on a separate sheet for your convenience.

Post-traumatic stress (PTSD) and Secondary Trauma

We thought it would be worthwhile to alert you to the fact that a number of people in a workplace where someone has died by suicide may exhibit signs of PTSD or secondary trauma and managers need to be aware of this and support any vulnerable individuals.

The impact of suicide frequently produces symptoms of trauma in family, close friends and workplace colleagues. These may include an intrusive re-living of the death scene; avoiding places or events associated with the deceased or where the person died; insomnia, difficulties with concentration; irritability and a number of other physical and psychological symptoms. A clinical level of Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is unlikely to occur except where someone may have witnessed the death or found the body.

However, Secondary Trauma (also referred to as Vicarious Trauma) can produce similar symptoms caused by the emotional distress of hearing details about the death from other people about someone who you have known well or worked with.

It's important to understand that these symptoms are commonly experienced by people who have been exposed to a traumatic event, or heard about it through someone else's first-hand description. Symptoms of trauma normally diminish over a period of weeks. Counselling is generally not advised for at least three months following a trauma, such as suicide, as re-living the event by talking about it in therapy too soon after this type of event can make symptoms worse.

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www.behealthyatwork.org

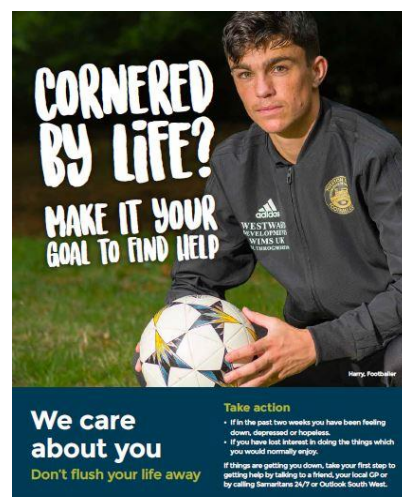
If symptoms (including those caused by secondary or vicarious trauma) continue to escalate for at least six weeks after the death, it is important to seek professional help through your GP or, in Cornwall, from Outlook South West. Specialist trauma therapy is available on the NHS which can help you to manage distressing symptoms.

You may also be interested in this guide to dealing with Post Traumatic Stress in the work place, as this is essentially what employees who have witnessed or are aware of a colleagues suicide feel.

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/problems-disorders/post-traumatic-stress-disorder

Finally, you may be interested in two campaigns we are running in Cornwall to promote mental wellbeing. You can obtain relevant resources for your workplaces free of charge by following the links included.

- 1) How are you really feeling - is designed to encourage people to look after one another and ask difficult questions
www.cornwall.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/public-health-cornwall/public-health-campaigns/how-are-you-really-feeling/
- 2) Don't Flush Your Life Away – a set of posters to encourage people to talk about their mental health, rather than keep it bottled up!
www.cornwall.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/public-health-cornwall/public-health-campaigns/dont-flush-your-life-away/



Regards

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RESPONSE TO A SUICIDE OF A WORK COLLEAGUE

Immediate response - Acute Phase

1. Ensure one person from your senior management team is responsible for coordinating all relevant actions; this provides one point of contact and avoids staff hearing things through different managers.
2. Contain the crisis (this is relevant if an employee dies by suicide at the workplace). You need to limit the number of people in the workplace who can see the suicide site and offer immediate comfort and support anyone who has witnessed the suicide or found the body
3. Offer support to the family whilst respecting their privacy
4. Ensure all staff are informed as soon as possible to pre-empt notification through social media. Being open and honest with your workforce is the best way to stop speculation and conspiracy theories. It is appropriate to use terminology such as 'possible suicide' or 'suspected suicide' in any staff communication.
5. Identify vulnerable staff and monitor their wellbeing.
6. Contact Outlook South West's Suicide Liaison Service (01208 837208) www.outlooksw.co.uk/suicide-liaison-service for advice and support if appropriate

Short Term - Recovery Phase

1. Provide comfort and support to staff who need it and promote healthy grieving
2. Identify and link affected employees to appropriate emotional and physiological support. This could be a direct or self-referral to Outlook Southwest for an assessment and appropriate psychological therapy www.outlooksw.co.uk/node or suggest they make an appointment to see their GP. Offer support through your own company's occupational health service.

Longer term

1. Prepare for anniversaries and any other milestone dates to remember the deceased.
2. Transition *postvention* to suicide prevention – in other words, now you are through the immediacy of the suicide make sure your organisation are supporting the mental and physical health needs of employees. To do this, managers need to know how to identify someone who is struggling and then be able to refer them to appropriate services. Further, staff need to know that's it's OK to admit to struggling with mental ill health and that acknowledging it is the first step to recovery.
3. Provide leadership to develop a Healthy Workplace environment, we have lots of resources on www.behealthyatwork.org
4. Identify key staff to undertake ASIST or SafeTalk training to promote a suicide safer workplace. We offer training in many locations across Cornwall so please look at www.healthycornwall.org.uk to see what is available in your area, or contact us so we can develop something to support your specific needs. www.healthycornwall.org.uk/training-programme

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