

Step by Step

Information for students 

This guidance forms part of Samaritans' Step by Step resources for communities working with and supporting young people. Step by Step is a Samaritans service offering support, resources and practical advice for adults who work with young people and their communities, that have been impacted by an attempted or suspected suicide.

If you would like to find out more about this service:

 stepbystep@samaritans.org  0808 168 2528

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Suicide is a tragedy. The loss of a life through suicide has a ripple effect on everyone that had a connection with the person who has died. It can affect the whole school community and beyond; even if the person who has died wasn't someone you knew very well.

Such a sad event can bring up a range of feelings and questions that you may never have experienced before. You may find it hard to explain how you are feeling to others or to ask for help. This leaflet will explain some of these feelings and what to do if you think you or one of your friends might need help.

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Is how I'm feeling normal?

When there has been an event as traumatic as someone you know taking their own life, it can throw up all kinds of feelings. Everyone acts or reacts in their own way.

It's important to know that there's no right or wrong way of feeling.

How you may feel:

- ◉ Anger
- ◉ Betrayal
- ◉ Confusion
- ◉ Detached
- ◉ Disbelief
- ◉ Fear
- ◉ Guilt
- ◉ Hurt
- ◉ Isolation
- ◉ Numbness
- ◉ Shock
- ◉ Tearful

You may experience one or more of these emotions and that's ok. Feelings vary from person to person.

You may also have lots of questions. That's also common but often there are no clear answers or reasons. It may be that many of your questions cannot be answered.

It is important to express how you feel in a safe way. Talk to someone you can trust; someone who will listen and won't tell you how you should be feeling.

How can I help my friends?

If you are worried about how a friend is feeling, the best thing you can do is listen and be there for them. You may not know exactly what to say or do – most people don't.

You don't need to have ready answers or solutions. Being there for them and listening to them is often enough.

It's hard knowing that a friend is hurting, and you may find yourself struggling to cope.

Make sure that you have support yourself if you're trying to help a grieving friend. It can be very difficult if your friend changes from the person you know into someone who's expressing difficult, unusual or intense emotions.

Try to:

- give them time to cry when they need to
- listen without judging. Let them know you are there for them. They may go over the story time and time again. That's fine – it's part of the healing process
- remember that if they're showing anger it is because of the pain they're going through, not because of you.

There may be days when they seem fine and days when they don't. That's all part of coming to terms with what's happened. Suggest doing things that you know they enjoy. They might not feel ready, but it's important to make them feel included.

Even if they seem to have lots of family and close friends around, your friend might still need support. It's important that they know they can talk to you about their grief, so they don't feel alone with it.

If you think they need it, offer to help them get support by contacting a teacher, GP, school counsellor, bereavement specialist or talk to us at Samaritans.

Make sure you're supported too. Don't feel like you're carrying responsibility for their support all on your own shoulders. Helping someone come to terms with the loss of someone close to them isn't easy.

Can online memorials help?

It's important to remember that anything posted on social media sites can reach many people, very quickly.

It can be helpful to share memories of the person who has died and to send messages of support to others. However, please be aware that using social media comes with the risk of online rumours and unkind messages about the person who has died or their friends and family. Please tell your parents or school about any messages that concern you. You can ask for offensive messages to be removed by contacting the site.

You may be concerned about how someone else is coping because of their messages online. If so, tell someone you can trust and try to help them get the support they need.

Memorial pages should always be respectful and honour the person who has died. It's not helpful to post messages about how the person died or discuss the possible reasons why. This can be damaging and hurtful to the family and those who were close to the person who has died.

Why do people take their own lives?

Suicide is complex and often there isn't a single reason why someone takes their own life. Sometimes people get to a point where they are unable to see any other solutions to their problem. There are always solutions and people who will be there until you feel better. Problems are usually temporary but death is permanent, so it's a tragedy when someone is unable to reach out for help. Sadly, most people thinking about suicide don't really want to die but just want the pain they are feeling to stop.

When and how to seek help

It's important not to struggle with difficult emotions on your own. If your feelings become overwhelming or it's difficult to cope with small everyday events, find someone to talk to. No matter how awful things seem, there is always someone you can reach out to. Counsellors, family members, teachers or support staff can be of great help when you are feeling low. If you start having thoughts about suicide tell someone. It might feel scary and confusing but others can help you through this difficult time. You are not alone.

If you'd prefer to talk to someone in confidence who is not part of your school or family, you can contact Samaritans. We are there at any time of the day or night to help you. You can also contact us by email or text or by visiting one of our branches.

Talking can help

Everyone faces challenges in their lives and sometimes we all need someone to talk to, to help us cope. There is no shame in asking for help when you feel like coping on your own is too difficult. Samaritans know from experience how important it is that you feel able to talk about things that are troubling you. Be kind to your fellow students and teachers during this difficult time, as others will be hurting too.

Other things that can help:

- try and have a routine, meal times, getting up
- eat and sleep well
- do some physical exercise, walk or play a sport
- try and be outside for some time every day
- be with people you enjoy spending time with.

Further information

Breathing Spaces Scotland is a free, confidential phone and web-based service for people in Scotland experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety: www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk

Child Bereavement UK provides support to families grieving the loss of a child, and advice for professionals working with bereaved families: **01494 568900**, www.childbereavement.org.uk

ChildLine provides support services to children and young people: **0800 1111**, www.childline.org.uk

Samaritans are available round the clock, every single day of the year. We can help you talk through whatever is troubling you, find the answers that are right for you and offer support: **116 123** (this number is free to call), email jo@samaritans.org

Young Minds offers advice and support to parents worried about their children's emotional or mental wellbeing: **0808 8025544**, www.youngminds.org.uk

Someone to talk to – people contact us when things are getting to them. They don't have to be suicidal.

We're always here – round the clock, every single day of the year.

A safe place – as volunteers we're ordinary people, and keep all our conversations private.

People can be themselves – whoever they are, however they feel, whatever life's done to them.

We're a charity – it's the public's kind donations that help fund our service.

 [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)

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