

School / College Guidance

(Nov 2021 version)

Responding in the event of a young person's suspected suicide.

School/College name:	Elstow School
Date of policy:	November 2021
Policy to be updated:	November 2022

Introduction:

Suicide is a leading cause of death for young people in the UK. Sadly, it is always a possibility that a student, parent or member of staff might take their own life. In young people especially, exposure to suicide may lead to increased risk of their own suicidal thoughts.

Schools and colleges play an important role in reducing the likelihood of copycat behaviour and helping recovery by preparing and responding to the situation appropriately.

National guidance - *How to prepare for and respond to a suspected suicide in schools and colleges* recommends that schools and colleges should aim to respond to a suspected suicide within 48 hours. This is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school/college routine, while facilitating the expression of grief.

This policy has been written with representatives from local schools and in accordance with national guidance, best practice and professional advice.

Aim:

This policy aims to ensure that our school/college is prepared with a planned, effective and sensitive response that helps rebuild the wellbeing of our community and reduces the risk of further suicides.

Statement of Purpose:

- We are aware that suicide is the leading cause of death in young people;
- We play a vital role in helping to prevent young suicide;
- We want to make sure that children and young people at our school are as suicide-safe as possible and that our governors, parents and carers, teaching staff, support staff, pupils and other key stakeholders share our commitment to this policy.
- We are committed to tackling suicide stigma. In our language and in our working relationships, we will promote open, sensitive talk that does not stigmatise and perpetuate taboos.
- Our governors and leadership team will be clear about how we will respond in the event of a suicide. Each member of our named response team will have a defined responsibility within our plan

This document is intended to provide guidance to schools and colleges in the event of a suspected pupil/student suicide but can equally provide guidance in the event of a traumatic death of a pupil/student (such as by drug overdose or accident) or of a staff member. This guidance forms part of the Community Action Plan for responding to and preventing further suicide in children and young people, since in young people especially, exposure to suicide may lead to increased risk of their own suicidal thoughts.

Schools and colleges play an important role in reducing the likelihood of copycat behaviour and helping recovery by preparing and responding to the situation appropriately. National guidance recommends that schools and colleges should aim to respond to a suspected suicide within 48 hours. This is necessary to maintain the structure and order of the school/college routine, while facilitating the expression of grief.

Definitions:

At risk:

A student who is defined as high risk for suicide is one who has made a suicide attempt, has the intent to die by suicide, or has displayed a significant change in behaviour suggesting the onset or deterioration of a mental health condition. The student may have thought about suicide including potential means of death and may have a plan. In addition, the student may exhibit feelings of isolation, hopelessness, helplessness, and the inability to tolerate any more pain.

Suicide:

Death caused by self-directed injurious behaviour with any intent to die as a result of the behaviour.

Note: The coroner's or medical examiner's office must first confirm that the death was a suicide before any school/college official may state this as the cause of death. It is recommended that the term 'traumatic death' is used, until the verdict has been made public.

Our School / College Procedure

Initial Notification Received:

Notification of a suspected suicide will be made to the school principal, Sam Barlow by Bedford Borough Local Authority Director of Children's Services using the emergency contact list for all schools held by the Local Authority (updated by schools on a termly basis). **(See Appendix A)**

If the school principle is unavailable, one of the deputy head teachers will be notified

Where the pupil/ student is 17 years or younger, the Joint Agency Response process will oversee links with the family, child health services and the multi-agency Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP).

The school principal or one of the deputies will be invited to a Joint Agency Response meeting, within 48 hours. The Joint Agency Response process is not activated for students aged 18+ years.

Information sharing will be with the prior agreement of the family

School / College Coordination Group Notification:

The school principal will notify our school/college co-ordination group, consisting of the following school/college staff:

- Vicky Maples – Deputy Head – Send and Inclusion
- Sarah Ciantar – Deputy head
- Liz Polson- Safeguarding and Family Support
- Liz Maker – KS1 co-ordinator

Notification will follow guidance at **Appendix A**

The school principal and members of the co-ordination group will liaise with the Public Health Suicide Response Lead at the Local Authority who will co-ordinate a Suicide Response Team involving all relevant agencies.

School / College Staff Notification:

The school Principal will notify other staff members and Governors.

This will initially be made directly to those involved with the deceased, followed by other staff members.

This will be done accounting for the context.

The following guidance will be used:

- Only include the pertinent facts about the suspected death by suicide, without the details of the method of death as agreed with the family;
- Normalise the emotions experienced in response to the death;
- Encourage caring for each other and letting staff know if anyone has concerns about other students/pupils;
- Encourage positive ways of managing distress;
- Share useful resources with staff/students/pupils via printed cards, the school website or on notice boards: see **Appendix D**
- Refer to the death as a 'traumatic death' until the Coroner's verdict has been made public

We will notify our school administration team to ensure standard student / pupil correspondence to the family is stopped.

Student / Pupil Notification:

Depending on the context, a whole school approach to notifying other students will be put in place.

Students/pupils close to the deceased will be informed by a familiar member of staff individually - ideally face to face where possible.

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- Encourage caring for each other and letting staff know if anyone has concerns about other students/pupils;
- Encourage positive ways of managing distress;
- Share useful resources with staff/students/pupils via printed cards, the school website or on notice boards.
- Refer to the death as a 'traumatic death' until the Coroner's verdict has been made public.

Identifying those students/ pupils at heightened risk of suicide

CAMHS and other specialists will liaise with the School Pastoral lead to identify those most at risk. These may include:

- Those closely involved;
- Students who identify with the deceased (same club, class, team or interests);
- Close friends, relative or partner;
- Those affected by depression, substance misuse, who self-harm, who have already experienced suicide, who have had adverse childhood experiences or who lack family or social support.

(Also see additional guidance at **Appendix B**)

Working with Services and Partners:

The Principal will liaise with the Public Health Suicide Response Lead at the Local Authority as part of the Suicide Response Team, and will plan appropriate action and support.

(see Appendix A)

The Suspected Suicide lead for Public Health will liaise with the Principal to discuss available support for the school/college and its community. A Whole System Suspected **Suicide Response meeting** will be arranged in agreement with the Principal to be held at the school/college, within 3 days of notification, to coordinate the support required

in partnership with relevant services which include:

- The CHUMS Suicide and Bereavement Service - 01525 863924
- Bedfordshire Samaritans (Step by step service) – 0808 1682528 educationeast@samaritans.org
- Our Educational Psychologist (*name and contact details*)
- Our School Nurse *Laura Russell* - 07912496401
- Bedford Borough Local Authority Social Care -01234 718700
- The LSCB representative
- Bedford Borough Early Help

Follow up meetings will be arranged by the Public Health Suspected Suicide Lead in agreement with the Principal as required.

A 6-month learning review meeting will be arranged by the Public Health Suspected Suicide Lead in agreement with the Principal and a timeline of future support will be agreed in response to the needs of the school/college.

The Public Health lead or Bedford Borough staff (in consultation with the Principal) will notify the following school(s) to enable increased vigilance and awareness:

- our feeder school(s)
- schools attended by deceased's siblings/ relatives
- any other relevant educational setting school within the local community, whether in County or over the border

Parent / Carer and Community Group Communication:

Good practice would suggest that a letter would be appropriate. This letter should be carefully considered to include:

- Brief pertinent information about the death(s) including what year the student / pupil was in;
- Confirmation of when and what the students were told
- Encouragement to the parents / carers to let their son/daughter know that the letter has been received and that they (parents / carers) will listen to concerns
- Acknowledge any parental concerns about son/daughter's reaction to the news, and normalise grief reactions
- Information on how the school is responding and supporting students, including provision of 'Drop-In' support and specific counselling to those who need it
- Details of staff member to contact if there are any specific concerns/questions
- Acknowledgement that the school will be carrying on their normal routines as far as possible
- Add links to relevant websites
- Refer to the death as a 'traumatic death' until the Coroner's verdict has been made public

Media Notification and Social Media Coverage:

We will liaise with the Suicide Response Team and family of the deceased to consider the need to respond to the press.

We will direct all media enquiries to the school Principal and we will inform all other staff and students not to respond to journalists.

Suggested Media Response:

- A young person's suspected suicide may attract attention from the media – this could be from either local or national news organisations.
- Social media platforms mean that news of such incidents can travel quickly, and you may find yourself being contacted by a journalist seeking a comment within a short period of time.
- Whether you are contacted by email, telephone or face to face, it is important that you don't feel under any obligation to make any statement without having a chance to properly consider your position.
- Two key issues need to be thought about before issuing any communications:
 - a. *Whether information about the death is in the public domain and whether the family would be content for you to make any statement that will essentially confirm the death;*
 - b. *Whether the death could be subject to any police investigation, in which can you may be restricted in making any comment.*
- Assuming that these key issues have been considered, it would be prudent to prepare a statement and to run this past the family as soon as possible.
- If you have not had an opportunity to do so when approached for a comment, it is entirely appropriate for you to say that you are not yet able to share a statement but will do as soon as possible, committing to get back to them directly.

In drafting a statement, you may wish to consider:

- Acknowledging the tragic loss of the young person's life and explaining that the thoughts of the teaching staff and governing body are with their family at this very difficult time;
- Reflecting on the unique qualities of the young person, perhaps referencing any particular characteristics or contributions they have made to school life;
- Explaining the support that you will be giving to the pupils of the school (particularly relevant for direct communications with parents/carers).
- Avoid details of the method used or the location;
- Avoid speculation about the 'trigger' for the death;
- Avoid making the deceased appear heroic or brave or that his/her death was a solution to a problem;
- Avoid endorsement of myths around suicide;
- Bear in mind the language used;
- Do not over emphasise the school/college community's expressions of grief;
- Be sensitive to the beliefs and feelings of family and friends;
- Encourage sharing helplines and support organisation details;
- Bear in mind that interest is sometimes generated by campaigning groups/bereaved families, with the aim of raising awareness of the issues.

Samaritans Media Guidance:

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- Bear in mind the language used;
- Do not over emphasise the school/college community's expressions of grief;
- Be sensitive to the feelings of family and friends;
- Encourage sharing helplines and support organisation details;
- Bear in mind that interest is sometimes generated by campaigning groups/bereaved families, with the aim of raising awareness of the issues.

Social Media Statement:

If you or someone you know is feeling desperate, help is always available. The best way to honour (*person's name*) is to seek help if you or someone you know is struggling. If you're feeling lost, desperate or alone, please contact:

- **Samaritans**
Telephone: 116123
www.samaritans.org
- **CAMHS Crisis Pathway**
Dial 111 option 2
- **Papyrus (Hopeline UK)**
Telephone: 0800 068 41 41
Text: 07786 209 697
www.papyrus-uk.org
- **Childline**
Telephone: 0800111 11
www.childline.org.uk
- **Young Minds**
Text: YM to 85258
www.youngminds.org.uk
Parents/carers helpline: Telephone: 0808 802 5544
Web chat: www.youngminds.org.uk
Email: go to website
- **CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)**
Telephone: 0800 58 58 58
www.thecalmzone.net
- **Harmless**
www.harmless.org.uk

Supporting Pupils / Students and Staff:

We will

- Support and respond in collaboration with the Suicide Response Team.
- Provide facilities for students/colleagues who require a quiet area and will be offered opportunities for further support.
- Ensure that relevant support resources are communicated to all staff and to our school community (see **Appendix D**).
- Reassure our students/pupils that grief is a normal response to death, and there is no wrong or right way to grieve. We will believe everyone's expression of grief and offer support.
- Recognise that student/pupil distress might manifest in their behaviour and/or performance.
- Continue the conversation about suicide in a reassuring and safe way to reduce stigma and encourage openness. We will use helpful language when talking about suicide, following the guidance at **Appendix B & C**.
- Liaise with our support agencies including CAMHS, CHUMS and our School Nursing Service to develop a plan to support colleagues and students/pupils.
- Debrief colleagues and 'check in' with students/pupils and encourage an ethos of care and support throughout the school/college.
- Ensure that staff are familiar with this policy and receive relevant training on
- what to do if there is a concern about a colleague or student/pupil.
- Ensure that staff know what risk factors and signs to look out for in colleagues and students/pupils including self-harm.
- Remember our student/pupil who has died.
- Consult with the family about disseminating the funeral arrangements.
- Consult with the family about an assembly memorial or short-term memorial site, but will avoid romanticising suicide with a prolonged site.
- Be aware that longer term issues may arise, particularly for those at risk and at the anniversary of the young person's death, and we will facilitate appropriate discussion and support.

Sharing and Updating the Policy:

This policy will be brought to the attention of all staff and Governors immediately, or at induction and annually thereafter by the school Principal

The policy will be updated annually or when contact information changes, by our nominated Emotional Health and Wellbeing Lead in collaboration with:

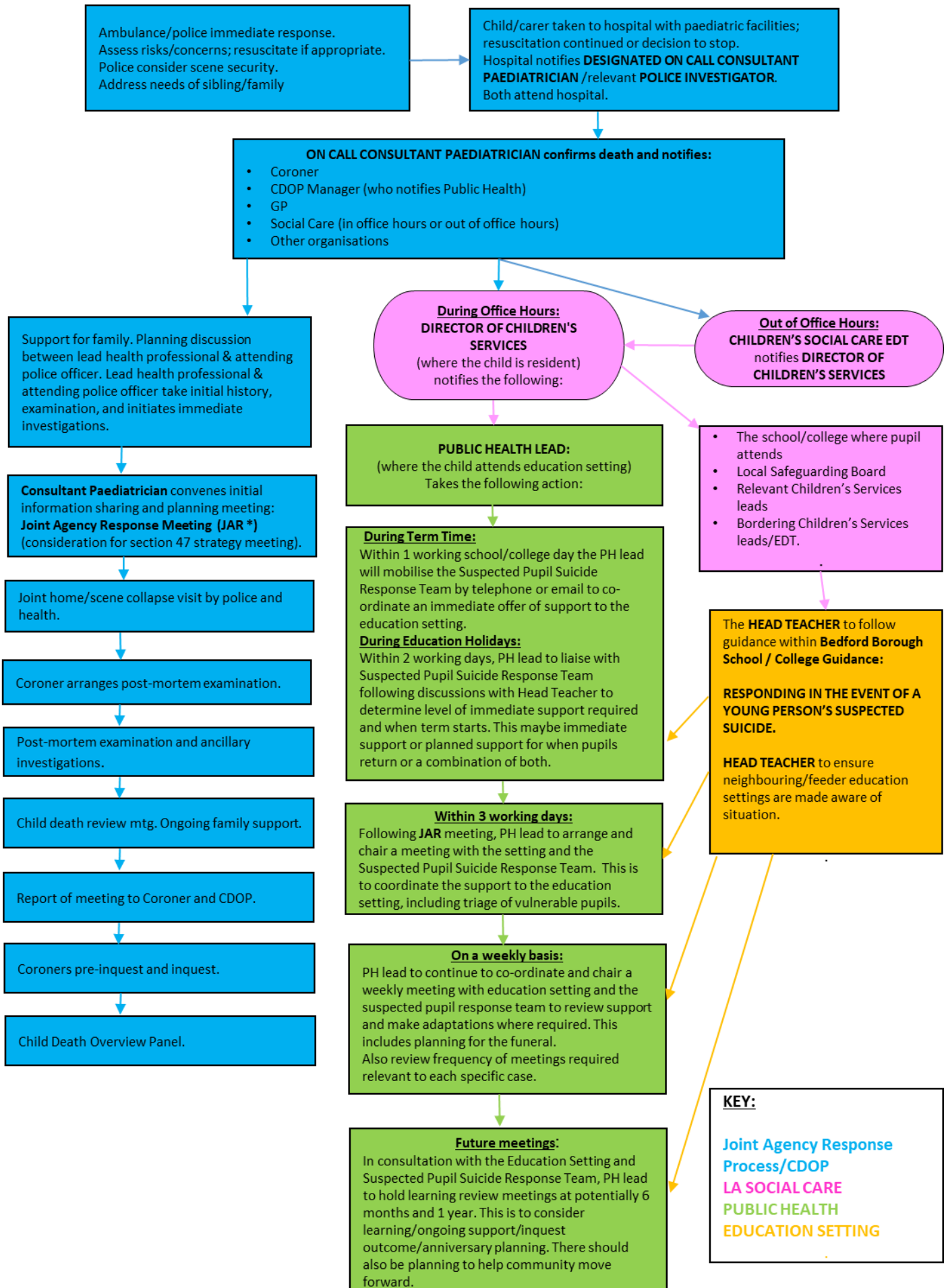
- Our Safeguarding Lead
- Our Vulnerable Learners Lead (Designated Teacher)
- Members of our senior leadership team
- Our School Nurse
- Our pupils/students
- Our parents and carers.
- Governors

Links to Our Other Policies:

- Safeguarding
- Emotional wellbeing and mental health
- Critical Incident Policy
- Supporting pupils with medical conditions
- SEND
- PSHE
- Behaviour and attendance (disruptive, withdrawn, anxious behaviour may be related to unmet emotional or mental health need)

Appendix A

Suspected Pupil Suicide Community Action Plan Bedford Borough: Response Notification Pathway



Appendix B

Additional guidance when talking to your children / young people.

Professionals have given us the following advice and guidance when talking to your children and we hope this will be helpful.

- Children can react very differently to news of a death, some may appear to carry on almost without reacting, while others may cry and be completely overcome by their feelings. It is good to remember that there is no right or wrong way to grieve and no rule book to follow.
- Be honest when talking about the death and use sensitive but honest language such as “died by suicide” and “took their own life”.
- Try not to overwhelm your child with information or give more information than asked for. Children may, when receiving news of a death, ask a few questions at a time in order to process the information. Like adults, children may need to hear the story more than once and ask the same questions again.
- It is ok to say that you don’t know why the young person took his/her life, rather than to speculate on things that may have been said, especially on social media.
- Reassure your children that you are available to listen and talk about the death.
- If your child is concerned and upset by how they are feeling it can help to know that other people often feel shocked, numb, angry, sad and overwhelmed by the death.
- Encourage your child to ask for support in school if needed.
- If you are concerned about the emotional and mental health of a child or adult contact a professional. If not school, contact your GP or take them to an A&E department.
- If they or you are worried about them harming themselves, ask them direct questions, such as “sometimes when people feel like you do, they think about suicide and harming themselves, is that what you are thinking about”?
- We have urged children to be especially sensitive when using social media and instant messaging and to respect the family’s privacy at this very sad time.

(Also see Appendix D for sources of support)

Appendix C

Additional guidance when talking to children / young people, (language)

Helpful Language (around suicide or attempted suicide)	Unhelpful Language (around suicide or attempted suicide)
Ended their life	Successful suicide
Died by suicide/ attempted suicide	Committed suicide (it isn't a crime)
Took/attempted to take their own life	Attention seeking/ A cry for help (belittles the pain they are in)
Killed themselves	Doing something silly (suggests the person's thoughts are stupid)
<i>Whilst the right language is helpful, the most important response is one which is non-judgemental, caring and calm.</i>	

Appendix D

SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Organisation	Tel	Website / Email address	About
The Bedfordshire School Nursing Service	0300 555060	www.cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk https://www.cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk/Bedfordshire/services/health-hub ccs.bedsandlutonchildrenshealthhub@nhs.net	The 5-19 School Nursing Service works in partnership with children, young people and their families in Bedfordshire to ensure that children's health and wellbeing needs are supported within their school and their community. They lead on the delivery of the 5-19 Healthy Child Programme and play a key role in addressing public health issues such as emotional health and wellbeing, sexual health, obesity, asthma and other health related issues.
Samaritans	116 123	www.samaritans.org www.samaritans.org/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/help-a-friend-in-need.pdf Samaritans Media Guide (2013) www.samaritans.org/media-centre/media-guidelines-reporting-suicide	A national charity: "There for people when they need us, which could be any time of day or night. People talk to us for as long as they like, as many times as they like. We don't rush, interrupt or push anyone out of the door. We let people lead the conversation at their own pace. There's no waiting lists, and no assessments."
Papyrus (HOPELINEUK)	Call: 0800 0684141 Text: 07786 209 697	www.papyrus-uk.org admin@papyrus-uk.org	Papyrus is the national charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide. They exist to reduce the number of young people who take their own lives by shattering the stigma around suicide and equipping young people and their communities with the skills to recognise and respond to suicidal behaviour.
Childline	0800 1111	www.childline.org.uk	Childline is here to help anyone under 19 in the UK with any issue they're going through. Whether it's something big or small, our trained counsellors are here to support you. Childline is free, confidential and available any time, day or night. You can talk to us:
Young Minds	0808 802 5544 (Parents helpline)	www.youngminds.org.uk	The UK's leading charity fighting for children and young people's mental health. Leading the fight for a future where all young minds are supported and empowered, whatever the challenges. To make sure they get the best possible mental health support and have the resilience to overcome life's difficulties.
CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)	0800 58 58 58	www.thecalmzone.net	The Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) is an award-winning charity dedicated to preventing male suicide, the single biggest killer of men under the age of 45 in the UK. In 2015, 75% of all UK suicides were male.
Harmless		www.harmless.org.uk	Harmless was established to respond to the needs of people who do or are at risk of self-harm and suicide. It is a national voluntary organisation for people who self harm, their friends, families and professionals.
Open Door	01234 360388	www.bedfordopendoor.org.uk	Bedford Open Door is a charity providing FREE and confidential counselling to young people. Counselling is provided by a team of fully trained, experienced and friendly volunteer counsellors.

Organisation	Tel	Website / Email address	About
CHUMS (Emotional Wellbeing Service)	01525 863924	www.chums.uk.com	CHUMS Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing Service for Children and Young People provides therapeutic support in a variety of ways. CHUMS has developed a unique service delivery model to ensure that children and young people are able to access a service that supports their individual needs.
Bedfordshire Wellbeing Service	01234 880400	www.bedfordshirewellbeingservice.nhs.uk	The Bedford Wellbeing Service offers a range of free and confidential talking therapies and specialist support to help you feel better (for adults).
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	01234 893301/ 893300	CAMHS - Home (elft.nhs.uk)	The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provides outpatient assessments, support and treatment for children and young people up to the age of 18 experiencing moderate to severe mental health problems. The service works to provide them with a greater knowledge of their condition and improve coping techniques.
Autism Bedfordshire	01234 350704	www.autismbedfordshire.net	Autism Bedfordshire's services help break down the barriers to social participation for autistic people and their families by providing places where they can go and feel comfortable, accepted and not judged by society. With the encouragement and support of specialist trained staff we help autistic people build their confidence, self-esteem, and social skills through taking part in social activities and mixing with other people
Child Bereavement UK	0800 0288840 helpline	www.childbereavementuk.org	Child Bereavement UK supports families and educates professionals when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement. Every year we train more than 9000 professionals, helping them to better understand and meet the needs of grieving families

OTHER USEFUL SOURCES

Calm Harm		www.stem4.org.uk/calmharm/	Self-help app to prevent self-harm
PSHE Association	020 7922 7950	https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/ info@pshe-association.org.uk	We are the national association for PSHE education professionals. Providing members with dedicated support, resources, training & guidance.
DEAL (Developing Emotional Awareness and Listening)		www.samaritans.org/your-community/samaritans-education/deal-developing-emotional-awareness-and-listening	A free teaching resource aimed at students aged approximately 14 and over and inclusive of all abilities and learning styles. It has been developed by Samaritans in consultation with young people and schools across the UK
Public Health England		https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/459303/Identifying_and_responding_to_suicide_clusters_and_contagion.pdf	A practical toolkit, based on our understanding of suicide clusters, however incomplete. It provides a framework for action, together with some step-by-steps, that we hope local authorities will adapt to their own particular needs, resources, and strengths