



Mental Wellbeing

We continue our series of articles by Dr Libby Artingstall and Dr Sile McDaid, Co-Founders and Directors of Team Mental Health.

World Mental Health Day, the 10th October 2019, provides a great opportunity for us to raise awareness and reduce the stigma associated with mental health. The theme selected for this year is suicide prevention.

One person dies by suicide every 40 seconds and its devastating impact is experienced across the globe. Just a few weeks ago, the Office for National Statistics published statistics revealing that the suicide rate in the UK has reached its highest level since 2013. Three-quarters of the registered deaths in 2018 were among men and there has been an increase in the number of deaths from suicide in children and young people aged 10 and 24 years, particularly in females. In the UK, suicide is the leading cause of death in men under 50 years and in young people. Now, more than ever, it is essential that we act to prevent suicide.^{1,2,3}

Suicide affects people of all age groups in all countries. No person, family or profession are exempt. In April this year, the Junior Lawyer Division of the Law Society of England and Wales published the results of their 'Resilience and Well-being Survey'. 1,803 members took part and of those completing the survey, 1 in 15 reported experiencing suicidal thoughts. Suicide prevention must be integral to every workplace, every home, every school and every community.^{1,4}

First and foremost, we must try to ensure our communities are informed and know what can be done to prevent suicide. Through learning more, talking openly, sharing, listening and knowing where to access support, everyone can play a role.

Unfortunately, stigma associated with suicide still exists. Stigma can prevent from people seeking support when they are in need. As such, it's important that we try to reduce this by addressing common misconceptions and increasing understanding.⁵

A concern many people hold is that by talking about suicide, the risk may increase. This is not the case. Asking someone about suicidal thoughts provides an opportunity to intervene and for professional support to be provided. We must encourage people who are experiencing difficulties to seek help and if we ourselves are struggling, we must ask for help. It's okay not to be okay. We must work together to build confidence across communities, so people feel able to have these conversations.⁶

It is also important for us to encourage people to recognise and respond to potential risk. The Department of Health & Social Care's suicide prevention strategy for England sets out that 'depression is one of the most important risk factors for suicide... the early identification of prompt, effective treatment of depression has a major role to play in preventing suicide across the whole population'. Research shows that prolonged stress is linked to depression, therefore it is essential for organisations to fulfil their legal obligations to identify, prevent and protect through addressing any problems with work-related stress which may be impacting on the health of those in work. Organisations should also aim to implement the 'mental health core standards' recommended in the Thriving at Work Review, particularly those relevant to developing mental health awareness among employees and encouraging open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling.^{5,7,8}

No matter what the concerns there is always help and support available. It is important that we recognise if we are experiencing problems with our mental health and manage these in the same way we do our physical health. A suicide attempt is always an emergency. In an emergency call 999 or attend your local A+E department if it is safe to do so. If it is not an emergency but you need medical help fast, call 111. In non-emergency situations you can seek advice from your GP or other health care professionals. The NHS website

provides helpful information on mental health problems and they have a post code finder for accessing support <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search>

Unfortunately, we now know that all those affected or bereaved by suicide are themselves at risk of suicide. The National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence have said that all people affected by suicide should be provided with information and offered tailored support. The NHS, as part of their 'Long Term Plan' have also committed to funding support services for families and staff affected by suicide across the country. Public Health England and the National Suicide Prevention Alliance have produced 'Help is at Hand', a helpful guide to support anyone who has been affected by suicide and it is available at <http://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/support-guides/help-is-at-hand/>.^{9,10}

It's time to look after our people and the workplace provides a great opportunity to do this. We really can make a positive difference when it comes to preventing suicide.

If anyone has been affected by the topic covered in this article there is always someone available to talk or listen. If you need help....ASK.

The Samaritans are available for everybody - 116 123

The Survivors Of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS) - 0800 111 5065

Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) is available for men - 0800 58 58 58

Papyrus is available for people under 35 years - 0800 068 41 41

Childline is available to children and young people under 19 years - 0800 1111

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Contact Team Mental Health
www.teammentalhealth.co.uk
[@GoTeamMH](https://twitter.com/GoTeamMH)



Dr Libby Artingstall



Dr Sile McDaid

