

# Suicide and Risk Intervention Staff Guidance

October 2021

Also available in large print (16pt)  
and electronic format.

Ask Student Services for details.

[www.perth.uhi.ac.uk](http://www.perth.uhi.ac.uk)

Perth College is a registered Scottish charity, number SC021209.



## Trigger Warning:

This document includes references to suicide, suicide attempt, death and serious mental ill health.

We are warning you about this because if you feel your mental health could be affected by reading this, or that reading the document might remind you about a time when you were struggling, we suggest you read this with a friend or colleague. Of, if after reading the document you would like to talk to someone, please contact:

- If you are a student – your local student services team.
- If you are a staff member – speak to your line manager.

Alternatively, anyone can sign on to Togetherall for advice and peer support:

<https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/students/support/support-to-keep-you-safe/togetherall/>

Lead Officer (Post):	Head of Student Experience
Responsible Office/ Department:	Student Services
Responsible Committee:	CASE (CQM)
Review Officer (Post):	Student Services Manager
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Accessible versions of this policy are available upon request. Please contact the Governance and Policy Officer on 01463 279000.

# Suicide and Risk Intervention Staff Guidance: Protecting Our Students from Harm

## 1 Purpose

- 1.1 This document has been developed in supplement to the University of the Highland and Islands Suicide and Risk Intervention Policy: Protecting Our Students from Harm.
- 1.2 This guidance has been created for staff to refer to when faced with a high-risk situation in relation to supporting our students to keep them safe from harm, where possible.
- 1.3 Additional support can be sought from the Mental Health and Counselling Manager who is responsible for the coordination of the provision of mental health and counselling services across the partnership.

## 2 Prevention

### 2.1 Support for Students

- 2.1.1 Perth College, UHI aims to provide specialist support from practitioners (mental health, counselling, disability, and wellbeing specialists), who offer a range of ways to access services eg drop-ins, individual appointments, group support and proactive training and awareness sessions on topics such as stress, anxiety, sleep etc. These practitioners will use proven risk/safety strategies to assess students in crisis and identify the appropriate support requirements.
- 2.1.2 Practitioners will continue to collaborate with academic colleagues, who often play an important role in identifying students at risk. Student Services and academic staff will work collaboratively on processes such as Fitness to Study to ensure each student receives the most appropriate support from the University.
- 2.1.3 We consider the needs of international students who may have requirements to feel supported, welcomed and valued within our university and wider community. Staff working in the Universities International Office, provide help and support to students to facilitate settling in and familiarising themselves with the University and local area. These staff also offer on-going support with issues related to visa and immigration advice.
- 2.1.4 We are aware of the potential mental health difficulties arising if students feel isolated or lonely. There are numerous and varied societies available to students through Highlands and Islands Students'

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Association (HISA). These are promoted at Freshers events and students are able to explore options and join societies and activities through their academic partner's website.

- 2.1.5 We continue to promote healthy living including the benefit of regular exercise, healthy eating, reducing screen time, optimising sleep routines, drinking within government recommended alcohol limits and avoiding substance misuse.
- 2.1.6 We regularly evaluate student support protocols eg managing a wellbeing crisis, support following a suicide attempt, student fatality etc.
- 2.1.7 We provide a range of training to suit and reflect the differing roles of staff within the University and its Academic Partners, eg Student Support and Wellbeing training and Mental Health Awareness training for academic, Student Services and other Professional Services staff. More detailed training will continue to be provided for specific staff groups through the ASIST model (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training). Several other staff training modules run regularly throughout the year enabling us to train both academic and professional staff on key activities, eg Personal Academic Tutor training.
- 2.1.8 Any student identified as being at particular risk, may be asked to attend a Fitness to Study meeting. This is a multidisciplinary meeting involving relevant university staff involved with a particular student's care. The meeting is scheduled on a regular basis and is aimed at assessing and supporting the particular needs of an individual in both their physical and mental wellbeing and academic and social functioning.

### 3 Intervention

#### 3.1 Seeking mental health support in a crisis

- 3.1.1 Students presenting in crisis should access assessment at the GP surgery where the student is registered. Urgent same day appointments with the duty doctor are available when required.
- 3.1.2 In situations where the student is at more immediate risk or requiring urgent medical attention (such as following overdose or if actively suicidal), emergency services should be called (999).
- 3.1.3 Emergency mental health care can be assessed through the Accident and Emergency Department at Hospital.
- 3.1.4 Out of hours, the on-call GP service, 111 would be able to provide advice, or the student may be advised to attend A&E in an emergency

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situation. The Police could also be contacted (101) and asked to do a welfare check.

- 3.1.5 The Samaritans offers anonymous telephone support, 24 hours a day. Tel: 116 123 or email: jo@samaritans.org, there may be a wait time using email.

### 3.2 Consent to contact

- 3.2.1 We work in partnership with individual students who are at risk of completing suicide to identify those people or services that are best place to support and keep them safe. When deemed beneficial, we support the student to make contact themselves or we seek their consent to make contact on their behalf.
- 3.2.2 We will only contact people or services, without a person's consent, when there is a significant safety concern, and it is believed that this action will protect the person from risk of death or serious harm. This action will only be taken if the person will not provide consent, or they are assessed as not having the mental capacity to consent.
- 3.2.3 This relies on effective judgement made by trained practitioners, working with each individual person, to identify the appropriate service or person to protect them from risk of death or serious harm.
- 3.2.4 The decision to share data, without consent, will only be made by a senior professional services manager or appointed designee, and/or with further consultation with the university's professionally qualified and registered Mental Health and Counselling Manager.

### 3.3 Available support

- 3.3.1 A range of support information and advice can be found on the University's webpage:  
<https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/students/support/health-and-wellbeing/mental-health/>
- 3.3.2 You can find your Student Support Contact details here:  
[www.uhi.ac.uk/en/students/support/disability-matters/accessing-learner-support/student-support-contacts/](http://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/students/support/disability-matters/accessing-learner-support/student-support-contacts/)
- 3.3.3 Please use the flowchart below for supporting a student in crisis.

This guidance document will help you support a student who is experiencing a mental health crisis. It is important that you ensure that all information regarding student welfare is fed back to appropriate student service staff, in line with the UHI (University of the Highlands and Islands) process, and to ensure the students privacy. **No personal details about the student and/or their situation should be shared with anyone other than appropriate student service staff or the UHI's Mental Health and Counselling Manager**, this information should only be shared on a 'need to know' basis with the appropriate members of staff.

### **IMPORTANT NOTE:**

If you are concerned about the safety of a student or those around them, the student needs to give consent for you to contact the relevant help eg emergency services, NHS Community Mental Health Team, family member or friend.

In a situation where the University has grave and justifiable concerns for the life of a student, it may be necessary to contact emergency services without the consent, this can either be in verbal or written form.

### **FOLLOWING AN INTERVENTION:**

- Dealing with a student in crisis can be incredibly challenging. It is important that you ensure that you debrief by talking the situation over with either your Line Manager (where appropriate), Academic Partner Student Services Staff, the university's Graduate School Office or the UHI's Mental Health & Counselling Manager.

Record the key details of the incident and provide them to the appropriate member(s) of staff.

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### Is the problem urgent?

Do you think the student:

- Has stopped functioning academically or in other areas of life.
- Has stopped looking after themselves.
- Is seriously physically ill.
- May be a serious risk to themselves or others.
- Is at risk of suicide.

NO

### Can you help?

Do you have the time right now to deal with this issue appropriately? Have you undertaken any mental health training such as Scottish Mental Health First Aid or similar that could inform your response?

NO

YES

### Appropriate support might include:

- **Listen** to the student's concerns.
- **Advise** by offering practical advice if appropriate.
- **Support** the student by advising of the network of support available through Student Service/Academic Departments/HISA.
- **Record** a log of the main issues.
- **Sharing concerns** with only those that need to know.

Will the student accept help?

YES

NO

YES

### Consult one of the following:

- Line Manager/ **Student Services**
- Mental Health First Aider.
- **or UHI's Counselling & Mental Health Manager**

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.....  
**If the situation is escalating call 999 for emergency services**

Important note about confidentiality:

#### Initial Advice

You can seek initial advice, without breaching confidentiality, by withholding the student's identity.

- **Seeking permission**  
Before consulting someone about a student's welfare, the student's permission should be sought if possible.
- **Refused permission**  
If a student has refused permission but you feel that they are a risk to themselves or others this information can be shared as a duty of care.

**Make the student aware of this fact.**

- 1 **Has the student been in contact with the Student Services department?** Can this person be contacted, or an urgent appointment arranged?
- 2 **Contact local Academic partner duty support.**
- 3 **Contact student's GP for an urgent appointment.** You or the student might make the appointment as appropriate.
- 4 **If above is unavailable,** contact Student Services Manager.

### OUT OF HOURS CONTACT INFORMATION

**Samaritans** - 116 123  
jo@samaritans.org

**Breathing Space** – 0800 838587

**NHS 24** – 111

**Shout** (crisis messenger) - Text Shout to 85258

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### 3.4 Available support

3.4.1 Working in an online environment is different than physically being in the same space. If you are concerned about a student's wellbeing or safety, please contact the Student Services Team, at your local academic partner, to discuss this concern. Some of these concerns may be:

- A student has stopped engaging meaningfully or completely with their study, and you believe that this may be due to health and wellbeing issues.
- A student has shared suicidal feelings with you, and you need to ensure they receive the appropriate support.
- A student's behaviour is disrupting the learning process in class, and you believe that this may be due to a health or wellbeing issue.

3.4.2 If a student discloses information of suicidal intent during a class, the following steps should be applied:

- If possible open a breakout room and place the student into this along with yourself.
- Discuss openly with the student if they are intent on taking their own life.
- Contact Student Services Team for support or in the absence of this, UHI's Mental Health and Counselling Manager.
- Reassure the wider group that the student is being supported and offer 1-1 support with any student who may wish to discuss this further.

### 3.5 Guidance for Practitioners offering mental health support online

3.5.1 It is important to be open and transparent about risk during early contracting, naming it clearly and explaining to the student what the limitations to confidentiality are.

3.5.2 Ensure you obtain, before engagement commences, a clear referral point for the student should you be concerned about their immediate safety, ideally a GP who can trigger mental health services in their locality, especially if the student lives geographically distant from you.

3.5.3 Think about the student's 'space' – can they talk freely, or will they be overheard? Be clear about the extent of confidentiality as it applies to student's context – you are not in control of it as you would be your own office.

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- 3.5.4 Always be willing to ask the 'suicide question': eg 'How difficult does this get for you? Are there times when you consider ending your life?' However you phrase the suicide question (which will be informed by you, your student, your relationship, and the working context), ensure you name it explicitly and clearly, without using euphemisms, such as, 'Do you think about getting out of people's way?' These can be misleading and end up in confusion.
- 3.5.5 Talk to your student about how they might take care of themselves at times of crisis, to help them identify their own protective factors to draw on at difficult times. Developing a keep-safe plan (examples of which can be found through this link and also <https://www.every-life-matters.org.uk/safety-planning/> and through Mind and Students against depression) can really help your student support themselves at times of crisis.
- 3.5.6 Draw up a list of sources of online self-help that you can recommend for people at times of crisis, such as Mind , Samaritans, CALM and the Charlie Waller Trust.
- 3.5.7 Do your research – source information on crisis support in your client's locality, should you need it. It is better to have it and not use it than scabble around looking for it at a time of difficulty.
- 3.5.8 If in doubt, act – always with your student's consent, if that is possible to obtain. Do not delay if waiting would increase the risk. It is always preferable to defend action than non-action when faced with immediacy of risk.
- 3.5.9 If providing counselling online, use BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) resources such as the Good Practice in Action 047 Fact Sheet Working online in the counselling professions, and BACP's competencies for telephone and e-counselling.

### 3.6 Recognise signs and vulnerabilities

- 3.6.1 It is essential for all of the university community to be alert and communicate effectively if there are concerns about a student's welfare. Possible signs that a student may be having difficulties may include:
- Poor attendance, poor engagement, or reduced attainment in academic studies.
  - Self-isolation or lack of involvement in social activities, peer or parental concern.
  - Problems within the accommodation including not paying rent.
  - Disciplinary issues.
  - Change in behaviour or physical appearance.

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- 3.6.2 Parents, carers and friends may often be aware of early warning signs of a deterioration in a student's mental health. Academic or support staff may become aware of a change in a student's behaviour, presentation, or level of engagement. If staff have a concern this should be reported to the Student Services Manager/Team at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.6.3 Where appropriate, students could be supported in completing personal safety/crisis plans if significant risks are identified.

### 3.7 Staff Training

- 3.7.1 All student-facing staff should have an awareness of how to respond to a student in distress. Non-clinical staff should support students in accessing clinical assessment and advice (from Student Support Staff, GP, or through the crisis intervention).
- 3.7.2 ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) and SMHFA (Scottish Mental Health First Aid) training has and will continue to be delivered across the University.
- 3.7.3 We should continue to promote ASIST and SMHFA training and display the ASIST and SMHFA posters and logos in all student-facing areas, to make staff and students aware they can speak out if they have concerns for their own or others welfare.
- 3.7.4 This policy and published resources should be made available to the wider university community ie
- The Art of Conversation - <http://www.healthscotland.com/documents/2842.aspx>
  - it is ok to talk about Suicide <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/-/media/files/campaigns/des00793--suicide-prevention-booklet.pdf>
  - Ask, Tell, Save a Life <http://www.healthscotland.scot/news/2019/september/ask-tell-save-a-life>

### 3.8 Disclosure and consent

- 3.8.1 All information relating to a student remains confidential. As per usual guidelines and ethical codes of practice, in exceptional circumstances, clinicians can breach confidentiality for any student if their clinical judgement is that not doing so would represent significant risk to the student or others.

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### 3.9 Reduce ways and means

- 3.9.1 Whenever there is concern regarding suicidal planning and risk, attempts should be made to reduce or remove means, thereby minimising risk.
- 3.9.2 Doctors are likely to provide only short-term prescriptions for medication if there are concerns regarding the risk of overdose. This reduces the amount of prescribed medication readily available to the patient, and also increases the frequency of attendance for assessment and review.
- 3.9.3 We endeavour to be aware of areas of potential increased risk within university premises and environment, and to take steps to minimise this risk.
- 3.9.4 We are committed to involvement in discussion and collaborative working with wider community services in order to improve awareness and minimise potential risk in the local community.

### 3.10 Establish clear and collaborative local care pathways

- 3.10.1 The University maintains positive working relationships with local support providers across the Highlands and Islands.

## 4 Postvention

### 4.1 Contact

- 4.1.1 A pre-agreed member of the postvention team is responsible for contacting the bereaved family, offering to meet and provide support. A compassionate approach is required in order to offer relatives both practical and emotional support. The level and duration of input required is personal and individual to any situation, and would require flexibility, empathy, and clear advice regarding practical arrangements.
- 4.1.2 The family will be given a named contact from the postvention team who they can contact if required.

### 4.2 Consider who will be affected and require support

- 4.2.1 Consider support needs for individuals within the University community including but not limited to: friends, peers, other residents in shared accommodation; colleagues in extra-curricular activities; staff: academic and personal tutors, accommodation services, wider

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community members; anyone who had contact with the student in the lead up to the death including who discovered the deceased.

4.2.2 Ensure individual approaches for anyone considered to be at risk of contagion, including rapid response mental health input if required (see section 3.1).

4.2.3 Provide clear guidelines on who to refer and where to refer to, including consideration of staff and non-students affected. Consider length of time support may be required – this may vary between individuals.

#### 4.3 Internal communications

4.3.1 A named member of the postvention team has responsibility for internal communications within the university: appropriate and sensitive sharing of information with staff and students regarding a suspected suicide. The Mental Health and Counselling Manager can assist with internal communication, if required.

#### 4.4 External communications and the Media

4.4.1 A senior member of the communications team has responsibility for supporting the media in delivering sensitive reporting of a death which may be linked to suicide. The team would not confirm the death in the early stage of an incident like this and would only confirm we are cooperating with the police regarding an incident. Even once the cause of a death is known, it is not generally something we would talk about in relation to the incident. Consideration should be given to the bereaved, to family, friends and colleagues affected, and to the wider university and local community. Acknowledgement that the risk of contagion may be increased, particularly if the situation is poorly or insensitively reported.

4.4.2 This communications team member will also liaise with social media colleagues to ensure they are aware of any incident so they can monitor social media posts regarding the suspected suicide, to clarify false information, be receptive to others expressing distress, and monitor response.

#### 4.5 Provide information on support available

4.5.1 Verbal and written advice to be offered, providing clear guidance on how and where to access appropriate support. The Mental Health & Counselling Manager can assist with internal communication, if required. Consider the need for open meetings or the offer of specific tailored support for particular groups affected such as classmates, members of shared accommodation or residencies.

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## 4.6 Consider legacy, anniversaries

- 4.6.1 The bereaved and those experiencing feelings of loss and sadness may want to openly remember and celebrate the life of the deceased - particularly at times of anniversaries or significant dates. Consideration and time should be given to how to most appropriately meet the needs of the bereaved in terms of respecting the deceased's legacy, whilst taking care not to increase or perpetuate the level of distress within the university community.

## 5 Related Policies, Procedures, Guidelines and Other Resources

### 5.1 Related Policies and Procedures

- Perth College, UHI Support for Study Procedure
- Perth College, UHI Safeguarding Policy and Procedure

### 5.2 Guidelines and Other Resources

- Alliance of Suicide Prevention Charities and University of Exeter (2014): It's safe to talk about suicide
- Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)
- Grass Roots Suicide Prevention: Stay Alive app
- Harmless: a user-led organisation providing a range of resources about self-harm and suicide prevention.
- Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training
- Mind: Mental health charity offering information and support.
- Emma Nielson (2016): Mind your 'C's and 'S's: the language of self-harm and suicide (and why it matters)
- Royal Society of Edinburgh and Mental Health Foundation (2017): Health, happiness and wellbeing in the transition from adolescence to adulthood
- Samaritans (2016): Help when we need it most: how to respond to suicide
- Universities UK (2017): Stepchange Framework
- Universities UK (2018): Minding our Future
- Universities UK and Papyrus (2018): Suicide-Safer Universities
- World Health Organisation (2014): Preventing suicide: a global imperative
- Zero Suicide Alliance: Suicide prevention training

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0	Mar 2021	Endorsed by Partnership Council	New guidance to accompany Suicide and Risk Prevention Policy.	Suicide and Risk Prevention Group
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