Parent/carer information

If you are receiving this information, it is because your young person’s school has recent concerns of exposure to youth suicide.

*Exposure* occurs when a young person has received information, either in person, via social media, or through rumours, about a suicide of a peer.

*Exposure* can increase a young person’s distress and personal thoughts of suicide. The young person does not necessarily have to have known the person who has died in order to be affected. They may perceive themselves as connected to the young person and be at risk through *Exposure* because they:

1. Are aware of the death by suicide and have knowledge of the method by which the young person died
2. Feel connected because they believe they share experiences with the young person who died or identify with their distress
3. Experience significant distress and grief as a result of the young person’s death and be unsure/unable to process and cope with what has happened
4. Be experiencing their own unrelated distress/suicidal thinking and think about suicide more as an option because they know of someone who has acted upon this thinking

*Why would a young person have thoughts of suicide?*

There is no single explanation/reason as to why a person thinks about/expresses suicidal thoughts, and/or demonstrates suicidal behaviour. Contributing factors can include *exposure*, trauma, stressful life events/issues, mental illness, and significant levels of drug/alcohol use. These issues are treatable/manageable with support, counselling, and in some cases medication.

*Is it safe to talk about suicidal thoughts/behaviours with my young person?*

Asking your young person about suicide can be challenging but it is an important first step when you are trying to support someone you care about. It encourages the young person to talk about how they are feeling and who or what may help. It lets them know you are there to listen and support them, and that they are not alone in their struggle.

Asking about suicide *will not* put the idea into a young person’s head or make suicidal thoughts worse. When a young person talks about suicide they are not attention seeking but in fact expressing their distress and inability to see how to make things better. Any thoughts/ideas/behaviours or talk of suicide should be taken seriously and professional help sought. Do not assume it will get better by itself.
What can I do as a parent/carer?

1. Talk with your young person about how they feel and how they have been affected (if at all) by recent exposure to suicide. For example: “I am aware that there has been information about a young person dying recently and it is thought that they ended their own life. Has this been affecting you? Are there any questions that you might have? I am wondering if you have ever thought about suicide.”

2. Show support to your young person if they disclose their suicidal thinking by responding in a non-judgemental way and by making suggestions about how together you might engage in “help-seeking” actions that young people can take when they are struggling. This includes talking to a trusted adult or getting professional help through counselling. Let your young person know that you want to be involved however they feel comfortable during this time and ask if there is anything you can do that would help.

3. “Ask for help” is an important message to share with young people in any discussion about suicide. Encourage your young person to seek help if they suspect their friend/peer might hurt themselves and for them to identify persons they might talk with if they have concerns about their friends or they themselves are struggling.

4. It’s important to talk to your young person about social media activity and how it might be impacting them. If you are concerned about messages on social media, let someone know. This could be the young person’s parents, local police, or emergency services.

What can I do if I am really concerned?

Seek professional and emergency support. This may include phoning for immediate assistance (000), taking your child to the local hospital emergency department, seeking an urgent GP appointment, or phoning a telephone/crisis helpline (e.g. Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467; Lifeline 13 11 14). All these options are OK to do if you are concerned for your young person.

Removing easy access to means of suicide is an important safety precaution. This may include medications, sharp objects, and ropes/cords. If you are concerned about your young person, try not to leave them alone for periods of time without supervision.

What can I do to look after myself as a parent/carer?

When looking after a young person who is distressed about suicide, it is important that you also have support and look after yourself. It is important to find someone you can talk to - partner, friends, relatives, your GP/Doctor, or a phone support line (e.g. Parentline 13 22 89)