



Spread your wings, learn new things, fly as high as you can.

Suicide Intervention Policy

Approval Date: October 2024

Review Date: October 2027

1. Statement of Purpose

Dovecotes Primary school community is aware that:

1. Suicide is the **leading cause of death** in young people;
2. We play a vital role in helping to **prevent** young suicide.
3. 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 themselves and other key stakeholders are aware of our commitment to be suicide-safer aware.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies:

Child Protection and Safeguarding

Online Safety Policy

Mental Health and

Wellbeing Policy

Anti- Bullying Policy

Health & Safety Policy

2. Underlying Principles

Dovecotes Primary School community is aware of/that:

1. **Improve connectedness**. A child or young person who is contemplating suicide may not feel able to access the support of those around them. This may be because of fear, perceived rejection, a sense of shame or embarrassment, or because they fear that they may need to share whatever is causing their thoughts of suicide. They may find this difficult to open up about.
2. It is important to provide **safe spaces and alternative opportunities** for school children to **share their story**. It is important to use language that protects and provides safety and to **cultivate an environment** where nothing is so secret that it can't be shared.
3. **Reduce access to means**. It is important to ensure that the physical environment of our school is as safe as possible. The removal of potential ligature points, restricting access to places which facilitate jumping. Making sure classroom items such as scissors/compasses/pencil sharpeners are monitored when in use and safely secured when not in use. Also the removal of harmful substances from public areas. All these are considerations of how **to reduce access** to potential means of suicide, and this will form part of any health & safety risk assessment.

3. Our Beliefs about Suicide

We acknowledge that:

1. Suicidal thoughts are **common**
2. **We acknowledge** that thoughts of suicide are common among young people.
3. Suicide is **complex**
4. We believe that **every suicide is a tragedy**. There are a number of contributory factors surrounding a suicide and the reasons are often complex and individual to that person. However, we believe that there are lessons that may be learned from each death that may help prevent future deaths.
5. Stigma inhibits learning- **stigma can kill**. We recognise that the stigma surrounding suicide and mental illness can be both a barrier to help seeking and a barrier to offering help.
6. Dovecotes Primary School is 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.
7. **Suicide is everyone's business**. We recognise that pupils may seek out someone who they trust with their concerns and worries. We want to facilitate the reporting of any risks or concerns.
8. **Safety is important**. We know that pupils who are having thoughts of suicide may or may not also be behaving in a way that puts their life in danger (suicide behaviours).
9. School children experiencing suicidal thoughts are potentially at risk of acting on these thoughts. We want to support our pupils, sometimes **working in partnership** with family, caregivers, external agencies and other professionals where this may enhance suicide-safety.
10. **Suicide is a difficult thing to talk about**. We know that a pupil who is suicidal may find it very difficult to make their feelings known and speak openly about suicide. We will provide trained adults who are able to identify when a pupil may be struggling with thoughts of suicide.
11. **Talking about suicide does not create or increase risk**. We will provide our pupils with opportunities to speak openly about their worries with people who are ready, willing and able to support them.
12. This school recognises that **suicide bereavement has been described as "grief with the volume turned up"** the effects on families, communities and society as a whole are devastating and tragic. This school will support in any way we can and the link below will be signposted as appropriate; http://www.petesdragons.org.uk/Bereavement_Support_2369.aspx

At Dovecotes Primary School, we recognise that pupils may seek out someone whom they trust with their concerns and worries. **We want to play our part in supporting any pupil** who may have thoughts of suicide.

5. Our Team Responsibilities

1. Our governors and leadership team at Dovecotes Primary School will be clear about how we will respond in the event of a suicide. This commitment and reporting for assistance from outside agencies, when needed, will go hand in hand with our main Child Protection & Safeguarding School Policies.
2. We will have a clear policy about how staff should work together where thoughts of suicide or suicide behaviours are known among our young people. Our Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and Deputy DSL's will support any staff who have concerns about thoughts of suicide in our children. We will manage the sharing of information in a way that enhances safety.
3. Staff will have regular training regarding suicide intervention. Extra staff will be trained as Mental Health First Aiders and as such will receive additional suicide awareness training.
4. The Headteacher will ensure that a programme is in place to raise awareness of mental health and signpost pupils to the identification of who they can talk to in school if they have a concern or are worried about themselves or others.
5. The curriculum Lead for PSHE will ensure that the curriculum addresses pupils needs and awareness of mental health.
6. We will endeavour to ensure that all staff are suicide aware. This means that all staff training will include suicide awareness, i.e. how to spot signs, what to do and how to escalate any concerns to the Safeguarding Team and Mental Health Lead.
7. The Designated Safeguarding Lead will endeavour to put in place mechanisms which allow staff to flag or review any concerns about individual pupils including suicidal thoughts. Concerns will be flagged immediately using CPOMS. The necessary steps will then be put in place to keep them safe, such as engaging with external services, including hospital A&E departments or crisis centres as appropriate.

6. Ongoing Support and Development of our Policy and Practice

Our Governors and Leadership Team at the Dovecotes Primary School will keep our practice up to date by maintaining contact with best practice and on-going training.

Appendix A – Papyrus advice for staff

As staff we will do our best to support pupils but we are not experts. Our aim as a school is to keep pupils “safe for now” while that young person, their parents/carers and school work to secure specialist help for them.

What do I do when I have concern about a school child?

Q: What do I do when I have a concern about a young person?

A concern is just that. It is not a judgement or an outcome; it's a concern. Whatever it is that makes you worried or questioning about the young person, may well be worth exploring. This may include a conversation with other adults (staff/parents/carers) but it is very important that the young person is your central focus. Check out how the young person is by communicating directly with them. Let the young person know what you are concerned about. What have you seen (do they seem sad or not their usual self?) What have you heard them say that makes you concerned? Is your instinct telling you that something is concerning?

Q: How will I know if a young person is suicidal?

If young people are having thoughts of suicide, they will usually find a way to communicate this. This is unlikely to be an explicit verbal communication about suicide. Few young people feel that they can be open about suicidal thinking or tell someone when they are struggling with their emotional health and wellbeing. When suicide is part of a young person's thinking, they usually show this in their behaviour, in how they interact and in how they communicate. It is not possible to provide a definitive checklist of things to look out for to help to identify a young person who is thinking about suicide.

Every young person is different. However, when you notice changes in the way a young person is behaving or communicating, and it is causing you concern, you must explore your concern with them.

In order to find out if a young person is suicidal the most effective way is to ask the pupil directly if they have thoughts of suicide and, if they do, you should ask if they have any specific or firm plans to take their own life. If you do not feel able to ask this question, or you know that there is already concern/knowledge about the pupil, then please liaise with/seek assistance from the safeguarding team.

What things can I look out for?

The first step in talking about suicide is recognising that a young person may be at risk. There is no definitive guide on how to know if somebody is thinking about suicide because anybody can be at risk – however there are some things you can look out for.

Often young people thinking about suicide will have experienced a stressful event associated with a feeling of loss. This might be something others might consider to be small but hold great meaning for them, for example the loss of a family pet, or they might have experienced a life event such as parent separation, bullying or domestic abuse.

People who are experiencing thoughts of suicide give out ‘invitations’ to ask for help. Invitations are signs of distress that invite help. Anything the person at risk says, does or makes you feel might be an invitation. Accept invitations: follow your intuition; explore the meaning of things you see and hear. Invitations could be:

Actions:

- Giving away possession;

- Withdrawal (family, friends, school);
- Loss of interest in sports and leisure;
- Misuse of alcohol, drugs;
- Impulsive/reckless behaviour;
- Self-harm;
- Extreme behaviour changes.

Physical

- Lack of interest in appearance;
- Disturbed sleep;
- Change/loss of appetite, weight
- Physical health complaints

Words:

- "All of my problems will end soon."
- "No one can do anything to help me now."
- "Now I know what they were going through."
- "I just can't take it anymore."
- "I am a burden to everyone."
- "I can't do anything right."
- "I just can't think straight anymore."

Feelings:

- Desperate;
- Angry;
- Guilty;
- Worthless;
- Lonely;
- Sad;
- Hopeless;
- Helpless.

Almost anything could be an indicator and often the key is that if something feels not quite right it is worth trusting your intuition and exploring what might be happening for the young person.

How do I ask about suicide?

Ask them directly, "Are you thinking about suicide?" By using the word suicide, you are telling them that it's OK to talk openly about their thoughts of suicide with you. You could also say:

- "Are you telling me you want to kill yourself/end your life/die/die by suicide?"
- "It sounds like you're thinking about suicide is that right?"
- "Sometimes, when people are feeling the way you are they think about suicide. Is that what you're thinking about?"
- "It sounds like life feels too hard for you right now and you want to kill yourself, is that right?"

If they are not having thoughts of suicide, that's OK. They will tell you so. If you are still concerned, then keep exploring why your concerns remain until you are clear that suicide is not part of their thinking. If they are not having thoughts of suicide, nothing is lost by having the conversation; you will have developed suicide-safety for and with that pupil now and for the future. You may have other actions to follow up on which help them with other issues arising from the conversation.

If a young person indicates that they have been thinking about suicide, listen and allow them to express their feelings. They will likely feel a huge sense of relief that someone is willing to

hear their darkest thoughts without judgement. Reassure them that they are not alone and you can look for support together. Let the young person know that there is help and hope. NOTE not everyone is ready to open up straightaway.

Don't ask about a suicide plan until you have explored their thinking. Be patient. Don't suggest "what about..." Be persistent but wait for their turning point. You will feel it.

How do I talk about suicide safely?

Here are some ways you can continue a conversation about suicide in a reassuring, safe way:

- "It's not uncommon to have thoughts of suicide. With help and support many people can work through these thoughts and stay safe."
- "You've shown a lot of strength in telling me this. I want to help you find support."
- "There is hope. There is help available and we can find it together."
- "It sounds as though things are really hard at the moment... Can you tell me a bit more?"
- "Things must be so painful for you to feel like there is no way out. I want to listen and help."
- "Take your time and tell me what's happening for you at the moment."
- "It's hard and scary to talk about suicide but take your time and I will listen."
- "Can you tell me more about why you want to die?"
- "I am so sorry you're feeling this way. Can you tell me more about how you are feeling?"
- Think about the tone of voice you use and allow plenty of time for the young person to answer and also for there to be periods of silence.
- Be led by the young person and the pace that they want to have the conversation.
- Ask if they have any active plans to take their own life.
- Ask if they want to die or whether they just want whatever is happening in their life to stop/feel better. A positive answer to the latter can be very reassuring for staff and parents alike.

How are self-harm and suicide related?

Q: "I know that a young person has self-harmed but how do I know whether it is suicide-related?" Self-harm is often a precursor to suicide but usually isn't. Those who engage in self-harm do not all go on to take their own life. Those who die by suicide do not always have a history of self-harm. If you have a concern about a young person because of self-harm, you should treat it like any other concern. You may need to explore with the pupil what is happening for them and if you think that suicide may be part of their thinking, ask them directly about suicide.

Q: "I know that a young person is having thoughts of suicide – what do I do?"

A: So, the person has told you they are thinking about suicide. You may have asked them or they may have told you. This can be a challenging space for you and you may feel ill-equipped here. Be assured that you cannot make things worse by asking the suicide question.

Sometimes pupils will tell you or others that they are thinking about suicide during a class. If this happens you should respond in a calm and sensitive way. Don't dismiss what they are saying. The pupil is asking for help, and you need to respond. You might be

feeling unprepared for the disclosure, but your calm and sensitive response will let the young person and others in the class know that they can talk about suicide openly and non-judgementally with you. As soon as possible encourage the pupil to move to a more private place, where you can have an open conversation about their disclosure. You should also check in with the class and let them know where they can find sources of support.

The focus here is on hearing the pupil and ensuring that you do what you can to reassure and support them. If you can, give the pupil space to tell their own story. Avoid questioning them or interrupting their story. They will feel a sense of relief having been able to say that suicide is part of their thinking.

Make no promises to keep what they say a secret or 'just between us'. Be clear from the outset that you may need to get some help in keeping them suicide- safe. The young person's parents/carers need to be informed of any concerns relating to the young person's thoughts of suicide or suicidal behaviour; the reason for suicidal thoughts (if known by the pupil) does not, however, need to be explicitly shared with an adult at this point. We will also keep them informed of what happens after a disclosure has been made to us, e.g. we will tell the pupils when we will be telling parents/carers and talk them through what will happen next.

Helpful and unhelpful language when talking about suicide with young people

Be kind and supportive but also be direct. Do not leave room for misunderstanding. Language can help as well as harm. Using sensitive and appropriate language can help build awareness and understanding to increase empathy and support. You could say:

- "Ended their life."
- "Took their own life."
- "Died by suicide."
- "Killed themselves."

Unhelpful Language when talking about suicide:

- **"Successful suicide."** Talking about suicide in terms of success is not helpful. If a pupil dies by suicide it cannot ever be a success. We don't talk about any other death in terms of success: we would never talk about a 'successful heart attack'.
- **"Commit suicide."** Suicide hasn't been a crime since 1961. Using the word 'commit' suggests that it is still a crime (we 'commit' crimes), which perpetuates stigma. Pupils will be less likely to talk about their suicidal feelings if they feel judged.

Unhelpful language when asking about suicide:

- **"You're not thinking of doing anything stupid/silly are you?"** This language is judgemental and suggests that the person's thoughts of suicide are stupid or silly and, furthermore, that the young person is stupid or silly. When faced with this question, most pupils will deny their thoughts of suicide, for fear of being viewed negatively.
- **"Unsuccessful or failed suicide"** Pupils who have attempted suicide often tell us, "I couldn't even do that right... I was unsuccessful, I failed". In part this comes from unhelpful language around their suicide behaviour. Any attempt at suicide is serious.
- **"It's not that serious."** Every suicide attempt is serious. By definition: they wanted to

take their own life. All suicide attempts must be taken seriously as there is a risk to life. An attempt tells us that the young person is in so much pain they no longer want to live.

- **“Attention seeking.”** This phrase assumes that the pupil’s behaviour is not serious, and that they are being dramatic to gain attention from others. Pupils who attempt suicide need attention, support, understanding and help.
- **“It was just a cry for help.”** This phrase dismisses the young person’s need for help. They may feel they are not being taken seriously, which can be dangerous.

Once you have had a conversation with a pupil who has said they are having thoughts of suicide, you will need to accompany them to a member of the Safeguarding Team. However, don’t underestimate the importance of what has been established by your asking the question or receiving the information that a young person has been thinking about suicide. That they have shared this with you means there is an increased level of trust. You need to tell the pupil that you must share information with others in order to help keep them safe. You have to share with others that a young person is at risk of suicide and why they are having suicidal thoughts.

What do I do if there is imminent risk of death or harm?

Q: “I know that a young person has engaged in suicide behaviour – what do I do?”

If you determine that a young person has acted in a way that puts their life in danger, act quickly to keep them safe and ensure that there is no imminent risk. If they have taken an overdose you need to contact a School First Aider, immediately, providing him/her with as much information as possible. They will decide whether to contact the emergency services. They will then inform the DSL/Headteacher and the pupil’s parents/carers. If the parent/carer is unable to attend school immediately, an appropriate member of staff will accompany the child to A&E and wait there with them until their parent/carer arrives.

If the young person has taken steps to end their life it is important that the young person does not feel judged or shamed for their suicide behaviour. Try to remain calm, even though you might be feeling scared, confused, upset or frustrated. It is helpful to ask the young person whether they are having thoughts of suicide. It may seem obvious in light of their behaviour, but asking clearly about suicide allows you to have an open and non-judgemental conversation about suicide. Ensure that you are able to have a conversation confidentially and that other pupils are not around. You may have called for help from a Mental Health First Aider but, in the meantime, you might be best placed to stay with the young person and to talk about how they are feeling. Once you have determined that suicide is their focus – just listen. Ask them to tell you about how they are feeling. They might not want to talk, but you can let them know that you will remain with them in supportive silence, and if they do want to talk you are there to listen. Your reassurance will help the young person to feel understood and supported.

If you determine that the young person’s behaviour has not put their life in danger, but there has been an injury, you must seek support from First Aid (either by taking the pupil immediately to them, or asking them to meet you where you are with the pupil). You must also log on CPOMS. This will be picked up automatically by the DSL in school. If the behaviour in question is historical behaviour, then the focus will be on what the

young person has learned from this behaviour and using that learning to keep them safe. All information and conversation logs need to be put onto CPOMS immediately.

How do I support a young person with their return to school?

Q: "How do I support a pupil back to school after they have engaged in suicidal behaviour?" Before the young person who attempted to take their own life returns to school, the Pastoral Leader and DSL will meet with them and their parents/carers. When they meet they will explore what support is in place, and also what further support the school can provide including what the young person thinks they need.

The young person who attempted to take their life may not currently be suicidal, however suicide may still be an option for them, or become an option again in the future. It is important that the young person has a Suicide-Safety Plan: a plan that they have created with support that details how they want to stay safe from suicide. The plan will be created immediately on the return to school with the young person – with them at its centre. It must be created before the pupil returns to lessons to safeguard staff and pupils. The plan must be something that the pupil feels they are able to agree to.

The Suicide-Safety Plan will include the following:

- Safety Contacts: people and organisations that the pupil can contact when they feel they can't keep themselves safe, including a safety contact for when they are at school.
- The Pastoral Leader will arrange for regular 'check-ins' with the young person once they have returned to school to see how they are doing. The DSL will be prepared to amend the Suicide-Safety Plan based on the pupil's needs. It is a live document and may change over time. The Suicide-Safety Plan might also include professional support from a counsellor or therapist during school time.

Appendix C – How adults can support young people bereaved by suicide

[Cruse.org.uk/for-schools/suicide](https://cruse.org.uk/for-schools/suicide)

- If a child or young person has been bereaved through suicide this can place them under enormous emotional pressure. They may become entrenched in the belief that the person who has died ended their life as a result of something they perceive they did or not do.

Feelings following a suicide

- Feelings of intense anger directed towards the person who has died for abandoning the child or young person can also be common when the death resulted from suicide.
- Some young people who have been bereaved through suicide might be struggling with questions pertaining to why the person took the decision to end their own life. It is essential that the school liaises closely with the bereaved young person's family to ensure that the known facts relating to the death are clearly understood by the school staff.

Questions and guilt

- It is also vital that staff members are aware of how much the young person knows regarding the circumstances of the death. The bereaved young person may spend time contemplating "What if" and "If only" in an attempt to try and understand what caused

the person close to them to take their own life. It is essential that school staff reassure the bereaved pupil that the death was in no way their fault or as a result of arguments or inaction.

- For example, a young person might believe that their mother ended her life because they argued about cleaning her bedroom. Try not to underestimate the bereaved young person's feelings of guilt and try not to dismiss them. Rather, explore with the young person why they feel guilty and what is it that they believed they said/didn't say, did/didn't do, that they feel caused the death. If you know why the bereaved young person feels guilty then you can begin to gently challenge this and reassure the young person that they were not responsible for the death.

Stigma and bullying

- Death through suicide can result in social stigma and many families can feel isolated within their communities. Similarly, young people who have been bereaved through suicide can also feel excluded from school life and may also feel shame over the suicide of someone close. It is difficult for children and families left behind to try and understand why the person they were close to ended their life.
- Young people bereaved through suicide can sometimes be bullied by classmates as a reaction to the death and school staff should be mindful of this happening.
- Similarly, if the person who has died had a history of mental illness, the bereaved young person might become subject to comments about the person they were close to.

How can school staff help?

- School staff should liaise closely with the bereaved young person and their family prior to the pupil's return to school and whilst they are at school.
- Allocate the young person a "go to adult" in school, preferably chosen by or with their consent.
- Reassure the bereaved young person that the suicide was not their fault and wasn't a result of anything they said/didn't say or anything that they did / didn't do.
- If the bereaved young person talks about ending their life their family will need to be told. Encourage the bereaved young person to seek help from Cruse and introduce them to the Hope Again website which is Cruse Bereavement Care's specialist website designed for bereaved young people. The family of the bereaved young person may want to discuss matters with their GP.
- Let the bereaved young person know that you/your colleagues are there to support them and that you will be available to them if they need to talk or vent their feelings.
- Be alert to the possibility of bullying.

"How can I support my pupils after a suicide at our school?"

Here are some examples of what not to say:

Avoid clichés such as:

- "Life goes on."
- "Time heals everything."
- "They are at peace now."
- "They are in a better place."
- "They are looking down on you."
- Avoid assuming you understand how they are feeling, they may not understand how they feel:
- "I know how you feel..."

Support Services

The Lullaby Trust: www.lullabytrust.org.uk

Edwards Trust: www.edwardstrust.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care: www.cruse.org.uk

Child Bereavement: www.childbereavement.org.uk

Beyond the Horizons: www.beyondthehorizon.org.uk

PAPYRUS HOPELine UK www.papyrus-uk.org

Samaritans 24 hour listening support 116 123

NSPCC <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

Young minds <https://youngminds.org.uk/>