

Learning Objectives

- ✦ To be able to identify when someone may be seriously considering suicide (knowledge).
- ✦ To learn about some of the ways that students may be able to help someone who is feeling suicidal (skills).
- ✦ To dispel some of the myths and misunderstandings about suicide (attitudes/values).

Total Time
45 mins
+15mins
extension
activities

Teacher's Notes

- ✦ **Samaritans STRONGLY RECOMMEND that due to the sensitivity of this topic you do not attempt to teach this lesson without first having done Lesson 1 – Emotional Health Awareness.**

DEAL DVD section 'Dealing with it' is relevant to this lesson. If students have not already seen it this can be used as an extension activity (15 mins).

Ground rules: Please read this statement out at the beginning of the lesson: "In this lesson we will be covering a very sensitive issue. You may be affected personally by the topic that we are discussing today, or you may know someone else who is. Please be respectful and thoughtful of others, and treat the subject responsibly. If you would like to talk to someone after the lesson, you can go to... (please either give the contact person in the school, for example a school counsellor, or an outside number, for example Samaritans)

Resources

- ✦ Worksheet 1 – My Support Network (photocopy enough for each student)
- ✦ Worksheet 2 - Core Activity – Message Board (photocopy enough of both sheets for groups of 5/6 students)
- ✦ Core Activity – Message Board Statement Cards (enough for 1 set of cards for each group of 5/6 students)
- ✦ [optional] Worksheet 3 – TALK Helps (photocopy enough for each student)
- ✦ Fact Sheet – there is a Suicide Fact Sheet that accompanies this lesson for your information
- ✦ [optional] order posters, pens, wallet cards etc with Samaritans contact details to distribute to students and/or display around school

Time
5 mins



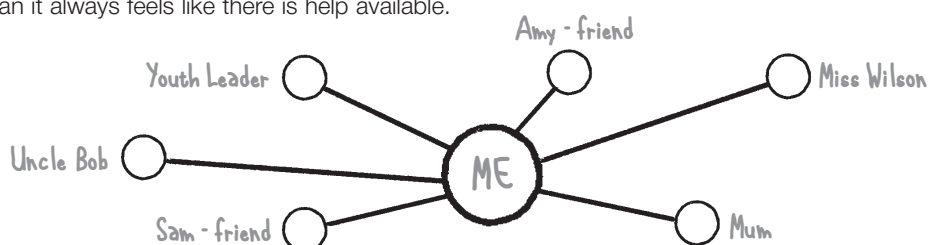
Introduction

Explain that today's lesson will be about understanding suicide, and to look at some ways that you might support or help someone if they appeared to be feeling suicidal or were talking about killing themselves. You will already have taught lesson 1 – Understanding Emotional Health. It is important to quickly recap on the lessons learned about keeping life in perspective, and about maintaining an emotional 'balance' before you get into the detail of this lesson.

My Support Network

Ask each student to find a piece of blank paper and a pen (or use Handout 1). Now ask the group to work on their own and draw a circle in the middle of the paper to represent themselves. Ask them to create a spider diagram identifying people who might be available to help or to talk to if they were ever in a situation where they felt really 'down' or had some major problems in life. Tell them they will not be asked to share their diagrams; this exercise is just for them.

Ask them to think about whether any of these relationships are 'blocked' at the moment, in other words there is a reason you might not go to them for support (they are away on holiday, you have had an argument with them) and highlight that although most people have people around them, it does not mean it always feels like there is help available.



Starter Exercise - Fact or Fiction Quiz

Ask students what words they know to describe someone ending their own life. **Highlight** suicide used to be illegal. People no longer use the phrase 'committing suicide' because it is not 'committing a crime'. Instead say dying by suicide.

Ask: Why do people take their own lives? **Explain:** There are many reasons why people get so low they feel they can't go on living. Sometimes it can be a big life event like a death in the family. However, often it is a series of little things that knock a person's emotional health lower and lower. Remind students of the emotional health line (Lesson A1).



If one thing after another goes wrong people may already feel very low and at the end of their line. When that happens even a relatively small thing can push someone over the edge emotionally.

Tell the class you are going to read out a series of statements. Tell them they have to decide whether they are Fact or Fiction. Ask them to raise their hands as to whether they think each statement is fact, fiction or they don't know. Make each statement in turn and give the answer after each.

Statement 1. People who talk about it don't take their own lives

Fiction: Most people who kill themselves have given warnings of their intentions, they talk about it and will often give other indications through their actions.

Statement 2: Suicidal behaviour is a sign of mental ill-health

Fiction: Suicidal behaviour indicates deep unhappiness but not necessarily mental ill-health.

Statement 3: You are either suicidal type of person or you aren't

Fiction: Anyone of us can have suicidal thoughts; it doesn't just happen to certain types of people.

Time
10 mins



Core Activities:

Message Board

Ask students to read Dee's diary entries (individually or as a class). Briefly list on the board what feelings Dee is experiencing (down, lonely, isolated, unloved, self-conscious). Split class into groups of 5/6. Give out diary sheets, instructions sheets and statement cards to each group. Ask the group to make a note of their decision about whether or not the comment on each statement card was a good response to Dee.

Tell the groups to discuss the statements on the cards and ask them to consider:

- ✿ How would the Dee feel if someone used this phrase or communication with them?
- ✿ Why would the person who said or used this phrase or communication have done so?
- ✿ If you were feeling as low as the Dee would you want someone to use these phrases or communications with you. How would you feel?

Ask the groups to be prepared to give a couple of minutes feedback on their discussions.

After 10 to 15 minutes, bring the groups back together to feedback what they have talked about.

Ask each of the groups to give a couple of minutes feedback – How hard was it to agree about the statements? What was the hardest phrase to decide about? What thoughts did they have about the person who made the statements?

The following notes are provided to assist discussion:

- ✿ When someone is feeling very low telling them to get over it or they will grow out of it is not very helpful – it can make them feel unable to talk more about how they are feeling because it makes them feel unvalued and not listened to.
- ✿ Likewise all of the judgemental phrases like 'you are absolutely useless' etc are likely to stop the person feeling safe talking to you. You may not agree with how they are feeling but by encouraging them to talk we can help them to explore just how low they are feeling and if there are any other options they may wish to consider, or haven't even thought about.

20 mins



- ✿ Asking about Mum and how she might feel could turn the focus away from Dee and onto Mum – this could make Dee feel even worse because it will add to the low feelings she is already experiencing. It could put additional guilt onto Dee. On the other hand asking about whether Dee feels she might be able to talk to Mum and encouraging her to think about what she might say to Mum could help her to find the right words to let her family know just how bad she is feeling.
- ✿ Asking someone if they actually want to die can help them to think about whether what they really want is for the situation they find themselves in to be over – it gives Dee permission to be really honest about how she feels.
- ✿ Words of encouragement help someone feel valued and listened to. By feeling valued Dee might start to feel more secure in talking about her feelings to people who can help her.

15 mins



Optional Extension Activities

1 Lines of help

Ask the group to work in twos/threes and give out blank sheets of paper (or photocopy Worksheet 1 again). Ask them to draw a circle in the middle of the piece of paper. The circle is Dee. Ask them to create a spider diagram identifying people who might be available in Dee's life to help her during the crisis she is going through. Nearest should be the people who are close at hand. Ask them to think about who else might be able to offer support to Dee. What about school, extended family, friends, any organisations etc that they know of.

Take a brief feedback from the small groups to the whole class. Who did they identify – take a couple of suggestions from each group. Did anyone come up with someone no other group did? Think about whether there were any similarities with the spider diagram for your own support network. Did it give anyone any ideas about other people that they could talk to that they hadn't put on their own diagram to start with?

OR

2. Responding to Suicide

Young people sometimes hear of suicide on the news, or may have heard of someone locally or even within the school community who has taken their own life. This can be quite shocking and distressing. Research shows that young people who knew someone took their own life will have an empathy with that person that makes them particularly vulnerable to suicidal thoughts themselves. [Hill, K, 1995, The Long Sleep: Young People and Suicide, Virago].

Anyone coping with this stressful time needs a great deal of emotional support, but asking for help is not always easy. Without anyone to confide in, stress, anxiety and fear can be unbearable. The main point of this exercise is to encourage young people to find someone to talk to about how they are feeling and not to bottle it up inside.

TALK Helps

Give out Worksheet 2 which has some extracts from young people who found contacting Samaritans really helpful.

15 mins
each
activity

Karen: "I wasn't speaking to my parents, I had all these powerful emotions inside of me that I couldn't bring myself to talk to my friends about. I felt like I was being destroyed by what was going on inside of me. I was just at the end of my line. I didn't know where to go, what to do, I thought I'd gone insane, I just wanted some peace. The only way I thought I could get it was by topping myself. I was totally messed up, out of control. If I hadn't rung Samaritans and got help I think I might have done the most stupid thing that anyone could ever do."

Gary: "I'd like to say how great Samaritans are. I recently phoned them and the bloke I talked to was really calm and friendly. He gave me the time that I needed to say difficult things and he called me back so that the call wouldn't appear on the itemised phone bill. No-one there could magically make my life better and totally happy, but talking really did help. People reading this who are depressed might not believe that; I know because I was the same. But I'd like to say give it a try - it can't make things worse can it? I also know that there will always be someone at the end of the phone."

Talking openly about how you really feel can be like opening a door. Talking puts you back in control and reveals the choices you have. Many people feel pressured into hiding their feelings out of embarrassment or concern not to burden family or friends. But hiding under a calm exterior only saves the problem for later and stress can build up until it becomes unbearable.

Ask students to respond to the two quotes from Karen and Gary by highlighting the 3 key elements to the process;

1. Before talking to someone - How they felt and what they were thinking
2. What they did - who they called, who they spoke to
3. After talking to someone - How they felt and what they were thinking

Reflect and Discuss

✿ Draw together all the lessons learned today about understanding suicide. Run through the following bullet points with the group.

If we think someone close to us may be feeling suicidal there are some things that might be helpful:

- ✿ Offer time to talk about feelings, but don't feel you have to be the one to support them if you don't feel able to
- ✿ Try not to offer false reassurances, phrases like 'look on the bright side', 'you have everything to live for' etc
- ✿ Don't be afraid or embarrassed to talk with someone who is tearful - a lot of people might be avoiding them because they find it hard to deal with other people's emotions
- ✿ Be supportive and try not to be scared of asking them how they are feeling
- ✿ If you are worried about them try to encourage them to seek help or, if you feel able to, go with them to see someone like a tutor or school counsellor
- ✿ Look after them when they are out and about as they may appear vulnerable

Summary

Closing discussion and feedback.

- ✿ Ensure that students know where to go for help if they want to talk further about any issues in their life that may be causing them concern at the moment. Make sure that they have the phone number and e-mail contact details of Samaritans before they leave, and that they know that they can call any time of the day or night.

5 mins

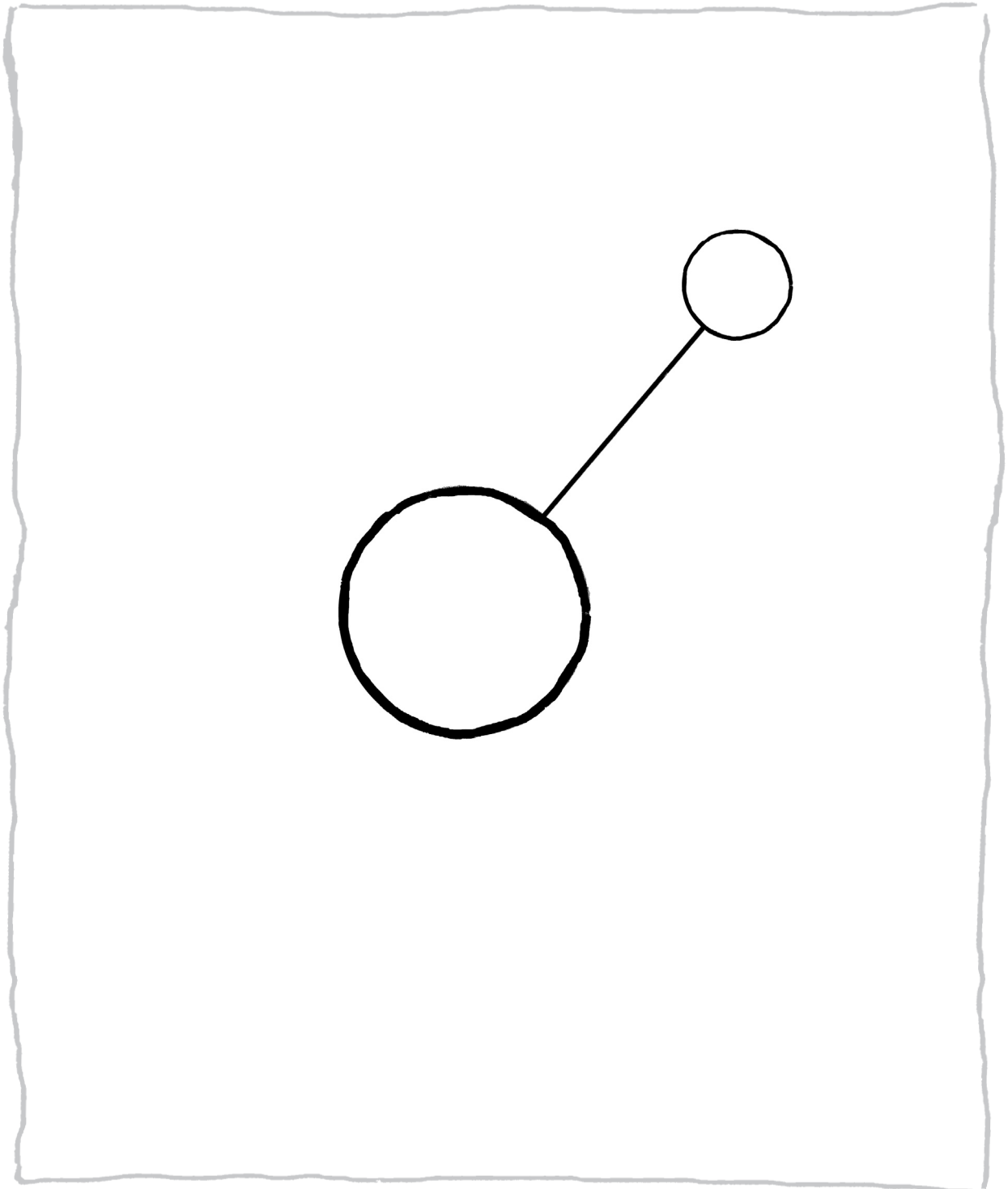


5 mins



Suicide Lesson: Worksheet 1 - My Support Network

Put yourself in the middle circle. Then create a spider diagram of all the people in your life that you might be able to turn to for help or advice, or just to talk to if you had a problem or were feeling 'down'. You could put on there external sources of help such as Samaritans phone line or e-mail.



WORKSHEET

Suicide Lesson: Worksheet 2: Core Activity - Message Board

Diary Consequences Activity Instructions

The diary sheets are entries made by Dee, a 15 year old girl, on a website message board, all posted on the day of her last entry - Friday. The statement cards represent the responses given by other message board readers.

Please discuss and consider:

- ✿ How would Dee feel if someone used this phrase or communication with her?
- ✿ Why would the person who said or used this phrase or communication have done so?
- ✿ If you were feeling as low as Dee would you want someone to use these phrases or communications with you. How would you feel?

Please make a brief note of the decisions you reached and be prepared to give a couple of minutes feedback at the end.

Monday

Dear Diary, Hello – thought I'd let you into what my life's like. It's been a bad day. Shelley my so-called mate had a party Saturday night and I was the only one not invited.

Every time I walked past her or one of her mates they stopped talking. Mum and her boyfriend are arguing all the time and neither of them want to talk to me. I've been pulling my hair out more and more and it's starting to show - I'm struggling to cover up the patches. Nothing is going right. Nothing seems to matter, I don't seem to matter. *Dee*

Tuesday

Dear Diary, Guess what? Another bad day. They're all still going on about Shelley's party, turns out Ben was there with someone else, I knew he was lying when he said his Nan was visiting. Ben's also meant to be my mate but he can't be if he's lying to me. Mum's boyfriend stormed off last night after another row. He hasn't come back yet and Mum just keeps on crying. She still won't talk to me though. Hair's getting worse, but Mum wouldn't notice anyway. *Dee*

Wednesday

Dear Diary, Really down. Things are getting worse. I can't remember when I last laughed or felt good. Phil's back but Mum and he are fighting again and still no-one seems to care how I feel. I didn't go to school today cause Bee rang late last night and told me exactly what happened Saturday at Shelley's. Big discussion about me!!!! They all think I'm weird, different, not like them. Maybe I am. I just couldn't face them. Spent the day hiding out. More arguments this evening. I wish there was someone, anyone who thought about me. I wish I wasn't here. *Dee*

Thursday

Dear Diary, Don't think there's much I can say today. Spent most of last night thinking about not being here anymore. Would anyone even care? Don't think so. Don't think they'd even notice for a while anyway. My hair looks so bad now that I'm scared people are right and I am really weird. Can't stop crying. *Dee*

Friday

Dear Diary, Didn't go to school. Told Mum I was ill, guess I look ill anyway. Keep thinking about taking something or doing something to stop all this pain. Phil's taking Mum away for the week-end to make up for all the fighting. No-one has called or sent a text to see how I am.

There really is no-one who cares. Maybe this week-end will be the right time to do something. Is there anyone out there? What can I do? *Dee*

MESSAGE BOARD STATEMENT CARDS

Suicide Lesson: Core Activity - Message Board Statement Cards

Photocopy and cut out 1 set of cards per group of 3-5 students

You should be ashamed of yourself	Is there anyone else who you think might help you?	I'm so glad you've looked for help
Tell me more about how you are feeling	You're being selfish	What would you like to happen?
Don't do anything stupid	Do you want to die?	What about your Mum?
Have you told your friends how you are feeling?	You'll grow out of it	You're absolutely useless!
Do you think if you said something to your Mum she'd listen?	It's fantastic you've felt able to share how you're feeling	Get over it

WORKSHEET

Suicide Lesson: Worksheet 3 - TALK Helps

Talking openly about how you really feel can be like opening a door. Talking puts you back in control and reveals the choices you have. Many people feel pressured into hiding their feelings out of embarrassment or concern not to burden family or friends. But hiding under a calm exterior only saves the problem for later and stress can build up until it becomes unbearable. Don't leave it that long. Remember, Samaritans is there to help whatever time of the day or night.

The following quotes are from young people who called Samaritans, and found that talking really helped.

Karen: "I wasn't speaking to my parents, I had all these powerful emotions inside of me that I couldn't bring myself to talk to my friends about. I felt like I was being destroyed by what was going on inside of me. I was just at the end of my line. I didn't know where to go, what to do, I thought I'd gone insane, I just wanted some peace. The only way I thought I could get it was by topping myself. I was totally messed up, out of control. If I hadn't rung Samaritans and got help I think I might have done the most stupid thing that anyone could ever do."

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For Karen and Gary think about three things

1. **Before talking to someone** - how they felt and what they were thinking.
2. **What they did** - who they called, who they spoke to.
3. **After talking to someone** - how they felt and what they were thinking.

	Karen	Gary
Before		
What		
After		