

# UNDERSTANDING SUICIDE

## What is suicide?

Suicide is the act of a person consciously (willingly) ending their own life.

## Why do people take their own lives?

There is no one reason why people take their own lives. It is thought it is usually as a result of problems building up to the point where a person can see no way out of the negative situation.

Social and family pressure, certain personality traits and mental health problems can make it more likely that someone feels suicidal. Examples include being unemployed, feeling excluded or socially isolated, and recent interpersonal life events or difficulties with parents, peers or partners.

Most people who end their life by suicide have suffered from depression (though it is not true that most people suffering from depression feel suicidal).

Young people who are bullied, as well as those who are the bullies, are at an increased risk of depression and suicidal thoughts.

Peoples who reported self-injury and those who reported suicidal thoughts were more impulsive than those who did neither.

## How common is suicide?

Every year there are 24,000 cases of attempted suicide by young people aged 10-19 years in England and Wales alone. This is one attempt every 20 minutes.

In the UK for people aged 15-24, suicide is the second biggest cause of death after road accidents.

Approximately one in three adolescents who die by suicide is alcohol intoxicated at the time of death.

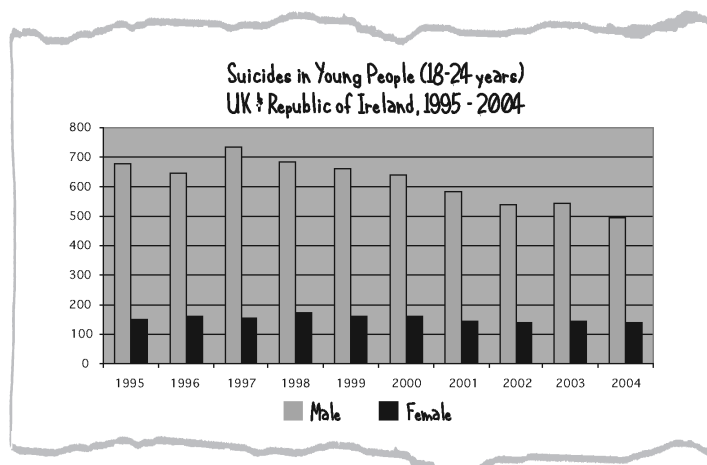
## Differences between men and women

More women than men say they have considered suicide (females 21%, male 13%), though more men actually take their own lives.

Young women talk about how they are feeling far more often than young men. Women are more likely than men to have stronger social supports, and to seek psychiatric and other medical support.

Suicidal young men are 10 times more likely to use a drug to relieve stress. Suicidal young men were also more likely to feel that they had been pressurised into taking drugs. This group also spent far more on drugs than the non-suicidal group.

Suicidal young men are significantly more likely to have a father who is absent.



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## Cultural and Social Influences

In the United States, it was found that the rate of suicide seems to differ for people of different cultures and ethnic background. White female (21%), black female (15%), and Hispanic female (23%) than white male (12%), black male (10%), and Hispanic male (13%).

Among women living in England, those born in India and East Africa have a 40% higher suicide rate than those born in England and Wales. Resiliency (protective) factors include family closeness and sometimes religious beliefs.

## Media influence

A recent study showed that young people get their information on suicide from the media, and high profile cases of suicide can sometimes lead to copy cat effects. This is where other people take their own lives using the same method they have seen in the news.

The Press Complaints Commission (PCC) has guidelines on reporting to make sure reporting is in an unsensational style.

Samaritans has also published some media guidelines: "Media guidelines - Portrayals of Suicide" available at [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) which, for example, encourages television, newspaper and radio not to publish details about methods of suicide.

## Suicide prevention programmes

Only 1 in 5 of 15-24 year olds with suicidal thoughts would seek help from a GP. Research in New Zealand found that the more suicidal young people feel, the less likely they are to seek professional help.

Suicide prevention is done by helping people to understand their own emotional health, to develop positive coping strategies and to get support when they need it.

The community someone lives in is also important. feeling safe, confident, physical, well connected to others and positive about the future is essential for good emotional wellbeing. For further information see DEAL Factsheet: Emotional Health.

## If you know someone who is feeling suicidal

If someone is talking about suicide always take it seriously. If you feel able to, offer support and encourage them to talk about how they're feeling. Ask direct questions and don't be afraid of frank discussions.

There is a lot of support out there, let an adult know and get in touch with experts like GPs and counsellors who can help.

## If someone you know has died by suicide

The death of anyone close can cause immense sadness and grief but a death by suicide is one of the most painful and complicated types of bereavement. It can raise many emotions like disbelief, anger, guilt, sadness.

A death through suicide delivers a double blow to families – not only do they have to cope with a sudden, often unexpected death, but they also have to deal with the way their relative has died and the fact that there may be media attention surrounding it.

Make sure you share how you are feeling and use the support that's out there, a few helpful organisations are listed below to get you started.



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## For further information and support...

### **Samaritans**

24/7 emotional support for anyone going through a hard time.

**Tel:** 08457 90 90 90 (United Kingdom) or

**Tel:** 1850 60 90 90 (Republic of Ireland)

**Web:** [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

**Email:** [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

**Write to:** Chris, PO Box 90 90, Stirling, FK8 2SA, Scotland

### **BBC website**

Good site with further information on emotional and mental health.

**Web:** [www.bbc.co.uk/health/mental](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/mental)

### **Childline**

Phone the free, 24-hour helpline for children and young people in the UK. about any problem, at any time - day or night. Children who are deaf or find using a regular phone difficult can try the textphone service.

**Tel:** 0800 1111

**Web:** [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

### **Young Minds**

Friendly website with information and postings about emotional health.

**Web:** [www.youngminds.org.uk/index.php](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/index.php)

### **Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide**

Aim to provide a safe, confidential environment where bereaved people can share their experiences and feelings, giving and gaining support from each other and to improve public awareness.

**Web:** [www.sobs.admin.care4free.net](http://www.sobs.admin.care4free.net)

**Tel:** National Helpline 0870 241 3337 (9am - 9pm every day)

**A full list of references for the facts above can be found on Samaritans website [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)**

DEAF FACT SHEET