

# SUICIDE & SELF HARM

## Introduction

If you are worried about a prisoner who has suicidal feelings or is in danger of harming themselves, please speak to someone straightaway. You can ask to speak to someone in the Visitors Centre at the prison. They are there to support you and help with any concerns. You can also telephone the prison and ask for the Duty Governor and talk to them directly. They might refer you to a Suicide Prevention Co-ordinator.



## What is self-harm?

Sometimes people cause physical damage to themselves. This is a sign of distress and they need support and understanding. Tell the prison if someone you know is harming themselves.

If you know that the person has experienced suicidal feelings or has self-harmed in the past you also need to tell someone at the prison.

## Who may be particularly vulnerable?

Prisoners with the following characteristics tend to be particularly vulnerable:

- First time and remand Prisoners
- Anyone who has suffered a recent bereavement
- Those who have recently suffered a broken relationship
- Someone who has made a previous suicide attempt
- Substance misusers
- Victims of violence or sexual abuse

## What signs could you look for?

Signs of suicide and self-harm include but are not limited to:

- they might be unusually quiet, withdrawn or just not interested in things
- they might stop taking care of themselves
- they might seem lonely and isolated

- they may be finding it very difficult to come to terms with their situation
- they might feel despair and that things are out of their control
- they may feel many different emotions – anger, despair, hopelessness
- the person might say they want to die

### **When might it happen?**

People can have these feelings at any time but a transfer or a change of status, e.g. remand to convicted can sometimes make things worse. This can also happen if they are particularly worried or upset about something or are having problems in prison.

### **What will happen if I tell the prison?**

If the prisoner is thought to be at risk of suicide or self harm the prison will make sure that they are correctly supported and monitored until a time when the situation changes.

### **What help is available in prison?**

Each prisoner has a Personal Officer assigned to them. Some prisons also have Listeners – prisoners trained and supported by the Samaritans – who will listen in confidence and are available 24 hours a day.

### **Who else can a prisoner talk to?**

The prisoner can ask to see a member of the Independent Monitoring Board who visit the prison often or ask to speak to a Prison Chaplain. Most prisons also have a direct confidential telephone link to the Samaritans which can be used at any time and cannot be listened in to.

### **Who can I talk to?**

If you feel you would like to talk to someone about your own feelings, you can ring the Samaritans either at your local branch or on their national number **08345 909090** at any time of the day or night.

### **Family Support**

Visits and contacts with the family are extremely important to all prisoners, particularly those who are finding things very difficult. If you think that someone close to you is in danger of harming themselves please tell the prison as soon as you can.