

Worried about self harm or suicide?

If you have serious concerns about a prisoner who has expressed suicidal feelings or threatened to harm themselves in any way, please voice your concerns immediately. If you are unable to speak to someone in the Visitor's Centre who can pass on the information, contact the Duty Governor in the prison personally as soon as possible to let them know of your concerns directly. If the prison has a Suicide Prevention Co-ordinator, the Duty Governor may refer you to him/her.

Who may 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 and bullying.

What signs do you look for?

- ◆ The person expresses a wish to die
- ◆ They are quiet, listless and withdrawn
- ◆ They take no trouble with their appearance, looking dirty and unkempt
- ◆ The person has no friends
- ◆ They are finding it very difficult to come to terms with their situation.

What can trigger suicidal feelings?

- ◆ Anger
- ◆ Despair
- ◆ Hopelessness
- ◆ Isolation and loneliness
- ◆ Helplessness
- ◆ Victimisation
- ◆ Change in status, eg. Remand to convicted
- ◆ Being turned down for parole or home detention curfew
- ◆ Transfer

What about self harm?

This should not be dismissed as being manipulative, but rather taken seriously and the prisoner given every available support and understanding. Do inform the prison if you know that your loved one is harming themselves.

Does the prison care?

Yes. The Director General himself has made it a high priority to reduce suicide and self harm in prison.

Will the prisoner be punished?

No. If the prisoner is deemed to be at risk of suicide or self harm the prison will ensure that they are correctly supported and monitored until such time as the prisoner is no longer considered to be at risk.

What help is available in prison?

Prisoners can approach officers on the wing with problems and concerns – if the prison assigns personal officers, their personal officer would be the person to speak to in the first instance. If the prisoner prefers to talk to another inmate, many prisons have Listeners – prisoners trained and supported by the Samaritans – who will listen to their fellow prisoners in confidence and are available 24 hours a day.

Who else can a prisoner talk to?

Members of the Board of Visitors will visit the prison frequently and the prisoner can request to see one. Most prisons have a direct telephone link to the Samaritans and this can be accessed at any time. They can also ask to speak with one of the prison Chaplains.

Who can I talk to in confidence?

If you feel you would like to talk in confidence to someone outside the prison about your own feelings, you can ring the Samaritans either at your local branch or on their national number 08457 909090 at any time of the day or night.

Importance of Family Ties

Visits and contacts with the family are of paramount importance to all prisoners, particularly those who may be feeling vulnerable. Your intervention may be crucial in alerting the prison, so please tell someone.

The information provided in this factsheet is intended for information purposes only. It does not constitute legal advice. Prisoners' Families and Friends Service (PFFS) recommends that professional legal advice should always be sought. The information contained in this factsheet is subject to change and may not be up-to-date or accurate. PFFS gives no guarantee of the accuracy or completeness of this information.

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Prisoners Families and Friends Service
20 Trinity Street, London SE1 1DB
Tel: 0207 403 4091/9359
Helpline: 0808 808 3444
Registered Charity no. 251847
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