



Opening Hours

Monday to Friday

9.00am - 8.00pm

Saturday and Sunday

10.00am - 3.00pm

Worried about self-harm or suicide?

Being in prison can be a very difficult time for some people, who may find it hard to adjust to the restrictions and regimes of the prison system. Some prisoners may feel that their problems are magnified and possibly more than they feel they can cope with.

Sometimes a prisoner may feel so desperate that they may feel like harming themselves and it is important that they get the help and support they need.

What is self-harm?

Self-harm is when somebody intentionally damages or injures their body. It is a way of coping with or expressing overwhelming emotional distress. It's often a way of communicating what someone feels they cannot express in words, or even in thought. People who self-harm may injure themselves by cutting or burning their skin, by hitting themselves against objects, by deliberately starving themselves (anorexia nervosa or binge eating), misusing alcohol or by taking a drug overdose. Afterwards, the person may feel better able to deal with their situation for a short time.

Who may be particularly vulnerable?

- Those new to the prison system
- The recently bereaved
- People who have recently suffered a broken relationship

- Substance misusers
- Anyone with a history of harming themselves or attempting suicide
- People finding it difficult to adapt with other inmates etc. (victim of bullying, threatened, vulnerable)

What signs could you look for?

The family or friends of a prisoner are often able to identify that there is something wrong with the prisoner by noticing a change in mood or a lack of interest in something they might normally take pleasure from. The prisoner may even disclose feelings of self harm or suicide and if they do then it is vital that the prison is informed as soon as possible so that they can ensure the wellbeing of the prisoner.

- The prisoner may be unusually quiet, uninterested in things or have withdrawn into themselves
- They may have a disregard for their appearance and personal hygiene
- They might display different emotions i.e. anger, despair or hopelessness
- They might feel isolated and lonely
- They might be showing difficulty in adjusting to their situation
- They might express a wish to die

How can I let the prison know my concerns?

This can be done by:

- Telephoning the prison and asking to speak to a member of the Safer Custody Team or the Duty Manager (you have a right to speak to the Duty Manager)
- Speaking to a member of the prison staff on visits or the Visitor's Centre
- Speaking to a member of the Visitors Centre staff who will speak to the prison on your behalf
- Asking the Prisoners' Families Helpline to contact the prison on your behalf
- Some prisons run specific systems for raising concerns about individual prisoners. These may be telephone or email-based and allow you to leave a message explaining your concerns. Such systems will be advertised when you visit the prison or you can ask a member of staff for details.

What will happen if I tell the prison?

Every prison has a broad, integrated and evidence-based prisoner suicide prevention and self-harm management strategy that seeks to reduce the distress of all those in prison. Once the prison is aware that a prisoner is at risk of self-harm or suicide a member of staff will speak to the prisoner to determine what further actions are required.

Any prisoner identified as at risk of suicide or self-harm is cared for using the Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) procedure. If information reflecting a concern for a prisoner who may be at risk of suicide or self-harm is received from outside the establishment, it will be shared with staff responsible for their care. The information provided will not affect a prisoner's general treatment by staff neither will it impact on a prisoner's sentence length.

What help is available in prison?

To help identify and care for prisoners at risk of suicide or self-harm, the Prison Service uses a care planning system called ACCT (Assessment, Care in Custody, and Teamwork).

ACCT aims to improve the quality of care offered to prisoners by introducing flexible care-planning that is focused on the individual, supported by staff training to improve assessment and understanding of at-risk prisoners. During the ACCT process the problems leading the prisoner to feel suicidal or to self-harm will be identified and specific actions will be taken to address them.

Who else can a prisoner talk to?

Other support options available within the prison estate include:

- prison staff, including those responsible for Safer Custody issues
- access to 'listeners'* , prisoners selected and trained by the Samaritans to provide confidential support to 'at risk' prisoners
- 24 hour access to the Samaritans telephone helpline
- help with substance misuse issues
- access to the chaplaincy and healthcare professionals

**Listeners not available to those under the age of 18.*



Who can I talk to?

If you feel you would like to talk to someone about your own feelings, you can ring the Samaritans on their national number 08457 909090 at any time of the day or night. Alternatively you can call the Prisoners' Families Helpline on 0808 808 2003.

