

Adolescent suicide

Reference guide for practitioners

To help identify, understand and respond to suicide risk in adolescents.

Risk builds over time



Suicide is rarely the result of a single event.

- Look beyond the most recent concern
- Consider cumulative harm and adversity
- Understand the child's experiences over time

Signs of increasing risk



Earlier concerns often precede a death.

- Self-harm or suicidal thoughts
- Missing episodes, exploitation or substance use
- Withdrawal from school, relationships or support

See the whole child



Understand the wider picture.

- Consider mental health, family, education and identity together
- Use chronologies and historical information
- Keep the child's voice central

Distress can look different



Not every child shows distress in expected ways.

- Neurodivergent and disabled children may present differently
- Trauma can influence behaviour and communication
- Remain professionally curious

Change can increase risk



Transitions can reduce visibility and support.

- Leaving school or changing education setting
- Moves between children's and adult services
- Changes in living arrangements or support networks

Question assumptions



Receiving support does not mean risk has reduced.

- Avoid assuming improvement based on reduced visibility
- Continue to review risk over time
- Looked-after children may remain vulnerable

Children needing particular attention



Children experiencing bullying, discrimination or social isolation, including some LGBTQ+ children



Children with SEND, neurodiversity or additional needs



Young carers and children affected by family adversity



Children with low attendance or who are not in education



Children known to children's social care

What practitioners should do



Treat self-harm and suicidal thoughts as safeguarding concerns



Build and use multi-agency chronologies



Share information to develop a shared understanding of risk



Avoid withdrawing support where concerns remain



Maintain consistent, trusted relationships



Understand risk in the context of the child's experiences over time



Access the full range of adolescent suicide resources

Scan the QR code or visit:

childsafeguarding.independent-panel.uk/hub-topic/adolescent-suicide

THE CHILD SAFEGUARDING
PRACTICE REVIEW PANEL