

PREVENTING SUICIDE:

information for people
working in jails
and prisons



People who are serving time in prison or who are detained in jail have higher rates of suicide than the general population. It is therefore important that effective suicide prevention strategies are implemented in correctional facilities.

Signs to look out for or to be aware of among people detained

- Expressing thoughts or feelings about wanting to end their life or talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live;
- a history or evidence of current alcohol or substance abuse;
- high levels of shame, guilt or worry;
- signs of depression or fear of the future;
- prior or recent suicide attempts;
- a diagnosed mental health condition; and/or
- poor relationships with other prisoners or staff and/or a lack of family or other social support outside of prison.

Factors elevating suicide risk in prisons

- Being held in an isolation or segregation cell;
- unavailability of staff, e.g. there may be fewer staff available in the evenings and during weekends; and/or
- experience of bullying or violence whilst in detention.

Pay particular attention at times of elevated distress such as just before and during court hearings, or when there are changes in family relationships.

What jail and prison directors and other staff in management roles can do

Put in place a comprehensive suicide prevention plan which includes the following elements:

- suicide prevention training (including regular refreshers) to help staff recognize the warning signs and appropriately and sensitively respond to crisis situations;
- remove access to means of suicide and provide a safe environment such as cells and dormitories without hanging points or unsupervised access to materials which could be used for attempting suicide;
- attention to bullying and violence, with strategies for managing such situations when they occur;
- screening during admission and ongoing screening during detention to identify and monitor people at high risk;
- mechanisms for regular communication between staff members regarding the welfare of people who are at high risk, and good communication channels between medical and mental health workers working within the prison or jail as well as with outside entities such as arresting agencies, court employees, probation officers, and family members;
- fostering of trusting relationships between staff and prisoners to maximize the likelihood that prisoners will talk to staff if they are thinking about suicide;
- written procedures for minimum requirements for housing people at high risk that includes psychosocial support and regular observation;
- access to internal and external mental health services for detainees with mental health conditions; and
- a strategy for reviewing procedures on a regular basis, and particularly following a suicide or suicide attempt.

**More
information**



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