



香港職場互助聯盟
City Mental Health
Alliance HK

Supporting Employees After a Suicide Loss, Attempt, or Crisis

A brief evidence-informed guide for managers



A death by suicide, suicide attempt, serious mental health crisis, sudden loss, or distressing media coverage can affect employees in different ways.



Managers are not expected to be counsellors or clinicians. Your role is to communicate clearly and calmly, protect privacy, reduce speculation and connect people to support.



Say enough.
Say it safely.
Make support easy to access.

Best Practice Principles

When talking to employees

1



Share only what is necessary.

Use confirmed and approved information only. Avoid rumours, assumptions or unnecessary detail.

2



Avoid private and location details.

Do not share how, where, or other explicit details.

3



Avoid speculation and blame.

Do not suggest that one person, event, workplace issue or life stressor caused what happened. Suicide is complex and rarely has a single cause.

4



Use calm, non-sensational language.

Avoid dramatic, graphic or emotive descriptions. Do not romanticise suicide or present it as understandable, inevitable or a solution to distress.

5



Protect privacy.

Respect the privacy of the person, their family and colleagues. Do not share medical, family, personal or investigation details.

6



Include support every time.

Every communication should make clear where employees can get help, including crisis support if someone may be at immediate risk.



When an employee takes leave after a serious mental health crisis

When an employee is away following a suicide attempt, serious mental health crisis, or other sensitive personal matter, any workplace communication must remain brief, practical and highly confidential.

Do not disclose the nature of the absence unless the employee has explicitly agreed what can be shared and there is a clear work-related reason to share it. Do not share clinical, personal, crisis-related or speculative details in team communications.



Note: These points serve as best-practice guidance. Your organisation's official internal policies and communication protocols must always take precedence.



Before communicating, consider:

- What has the employee agreed can be shared?
- Who needs to know that the employee is on leave to ensure work continues appropriately?
- Who will cover the employee's urgent tasks?
- Who will be the single point of contact during this time, and how often?
- Who will coordinate with HR regarding the future return-to-work plan?

What managers could say

Keep communication brief and practical.

You can say:

[Name] is currently away from work. To respect their privacy we will not be sharing any further details.

If needed, add:

Work will be covered by [person/team]. If you have work-related questions, please contact [contact person].

If colleagues are concerned, add:

We know some colleagues may be concerned. Please avoid speculation and be thoughtful about what you discuss. Support is available through [EAP], [HR/wellbeing contact], or [manager/contact person].



Key reminder

Your primary focus is to protect the privacy and recovery of the employee, while maintaining a supportive, stable, and routine environment for the rest of your team.

Language: what to say and what to avoid

Your words matter. Use clear, calm and compassionate language that supports your team and protects privacy. Use "suicide" only where confirmed and agreed as appropriate to share; otherwise use "died unexpectedly" or "died suddenly."



AVOID

Committed suicide / Successful suicide

Failed suicide attempt

Suicide victim

Suicidal person

Cry for help

Caused by stress



SAFER LANGUAGE

Died by suicide

Suicide attempt

Person who died by suicide

Person experiencing suicidal thoughts

Person in distress / expression of distress

Suicide is complex and rarely has a single cause



Communicating After a Suicide Loss

It can be difficult to know what to say after a suicide loss. This guidance is designed to help managers respond with care: communicating calmly and factually, protecting privacy, avoiding speculation, and connecting employees to personal support if needed.

Where available, follow your organisation's postvention or crisis communication protocol. Before sharing any message, confirm through the appropriate organisational channel what the family or nominated contact has agreed can be shared, and ensure the message aligns with internal policies, legal and privacy obligations.

Phase 1: Verification & Clearances

- ✓ Confirm the official facts: verify the news directly through HR or leadership. Never react to workplace rumors.
- ✓ Through the appropriate organisational contact or family liaison, confirm what the family or nominated representative has agreed can be shared.
- ✓ Align internal leadership: ensure HR, Legal, and Executive teams are aligned on a single message before communicating.

Phase 2: Audience & Support Logistics

- ✓ Map out the audience: notify close teammates and direct reports privately before making a broad announcement.
- ✓ Prepare support contacts: gather working links and numbers for internal EAP and local 24/7 crisis hotlines.
- ✓ Set external routing rules: confirm exactly who will handle media, public, or client inquiries if they arise.



Script for Managers

Where appropriate, consider sharing this news verbally first in a closed team setting. Use the scripts below as your talking points or as the immediate email follow-up.

Adapt this message in line with your organisation's protocol, privacy requirements, legal obligations and, where appropriate, the wishes of the family or nominated contact.

Choose one opening statement, then continue with the message below.

OPTION A – If the cause of death is not being shared

We are deeply saddened to share that [Name], our colleague and part of our workplace community, has died unexpectedly.

OPTION B – If the family consents to sharing the cause of death

We are deeply saddened to share that [Name], our colleague and part of our workplace community, has died by suicide.

Continue with:

Our thoughts are with [Name]'s family, friends, and colleagues. We ask everyone to respect the family's privacy at this difficult time.

News like this affects people in different ways and it is understandable to feel a range of emotions, including shock, sadness, confusion, anger, numbness, or overwhelm. Please prioritise your personal wellbeing and look out for one another. You can access immediate support through the following services:

- Internal Support (EAP): [Phone Number & Link]
- HR / Wellbeing Contact: [Insert Name, Email, and Phone]
- National 24/7 Crisis Hotline: [Insert Local Crisis Hotline Name and Number, e.g., suicide and crisis hotline]

Phrases: what to say and what to avoid

Avoid phrases that minimise, speculate, blame or unintentionally increase distress. Use language that is clear, calm and support-focused.

What Not To Say

We need to move on.

They seemed fine.

No one saw this coming.

There was nothing anyone could have done.

This happened because of...

They are in a better place.

At least they are at peace.

Everyone needs to talk about how they feel.

Let's discuss what happened in detail.

Please keep this to yourself.



Supportive Phrases

This is difficult news, and we all respond in different ways.

There is no single right reaction or response to this.

We will not discuss private details or speculate about what happened.

Support is available today and in the coming days and weeks.

If you are worried about yourself or someone else, please reach out.

You can speak privately with me, HR, EAP, occupational health or another support person.

Please be thoughtful about what you share online or in messages.

If you are concerned that there may be immediate danger, call 999.



Next Steps and Resources for Managers

You do not need and are not expected to have all the answers. Stay calm, protect privacy, listen with compassion and connect people to support.

Manager Checklist

- ✓ Check in with employees who may be particularly affected.
- ✓ Consider temporary workload adjustments.
- ✓ Remind staff that support is available.
- ✓ Continue check-ins in the days and weeks after.
- ✓ Avoid private details, speculation or blame.
- ✓ Escalate immediate safety concerns according to your organisation's crisis protocol. If there is immediate danger in Hong Kong, call 999.
- ✓ Use available support and take care of your own wellbeing.

Share the employee resource

A separate employee-facing resource is available. Share it with your team if needed:



24/7 Crisis and Mental Health Support Hotlines

Number

Mental Health Support Hotline (情緒通)

18111

The Samaritans (撒瑪利亞會)

2896 0000

Suicide Prevention Services

2382 0000



Hong Kong Emergency services: 999



References

- American Association of Suicidology, National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, Carson J Spencer Foundation, & Crisis Care Network. (2013). A manager's guide to suicide postvention in the workplace: 10 action steps for dealing with the aftermath of suicide. Carson J Spencer Foundation.
- Business in the Community. (2017) Crisis management in the event of a suicide: A postvention toolkit for employers.
- Centre for Suicide Prevention. (2026). After a suicide in the workplace.
- Chartered Institute of Public Relations. (2021) Helping organisations when they need to communicate suicide.
- Jami. (2024). Coping after suicide: A guide for organisations.
- Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand. Suicide postvention support for a workplace
- Samaritans. (2026). Media guidelines for reporting suicide.

Further Information

MindForward Alliance's Suicide Postvention Toolkit provides practical workplace guidance to help organisations prepare for, respond to and learn from a suspected suicide or suicide attempt.

The New Normal Hong Kong offers Suicide First Aid Training in English and Cantonese, online or in person, giving participants practical tools to recognise when someone may be thinking about suicide, have compassionate conversations, help them stay safe and connect them to further support.



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**City Mental Health
Alliance** HK

The City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong (CMHA HK) is a not-for-profit membership organisation and a registered charity in Hong Kong (91/19956). We are an alliance of businesses, working together with mental health experts and partner organisations, to achieve our vision that every workplace will protect, support and create positive mental health for their people.

We provide training, events, resources, research and practical support for companies wishing to create mentally healthy workplaces.

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