

A Guide to understanding and coping with common mental health issues.

Issues covered in this guide include:

- Warning Signs of a Mental Health Crisis
- Coping With Anxiety
- Coping With Depression
- Coping With Stress
- Coping With Bullying & Cyber-bullying
- Active Listening and how it can help

#### Help And Assistance

If you are concerned about yourself, friends or family get immediate support and information 24/7 by FreeTexting **HELP** to **50015**. Texting 50015 is free of charge from any network and you can text this number even if you have no credit.

For information on Emergency Contacts, National Helplines, Local Support Groups and your nearest Places of Safety visit [www.ineedhelp.ie](http://www.ineedhelp.ie)

Always call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured, and their life is at risk.

Gardaí / Ambulance / Fire call 999 or 112

#### Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland

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# Coping *with* SUICIDAL CLUSTERS



**WARNING SIGNS OF A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS**  
Short guides to coping with common mental health issues

# Coping *with*

## SUICIDAL CLUSTERS

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The occurrence of a suicide cluster is incredibly worrying for teenagers, parents and healthcare professionals.

If you are aware of a suicide, whether locally or elsewhere in the world, it can affect the way that you feel. In this article, we will look at what suicide clusters are, and what you can do to cope when someone ends their life.

## What Are Suicide Clusters?

A suicide cluster refers to multiple suicides or suicide attempts that occur following an initial suicide in either:

- The same geographical location as the initial suicide, or
- A different location but within a short period of time following the initial suicide.



The initial suicide could be a friend or classmate, or it could be the death of a stranger or celebrity reported on the news or on social media.

Any suicide is devastating, but when multiple suicides occur, it causes distress throughout entire communities or populations. Whereas a cluster of suicides might previously only have occurred in one geographic location, such as a university campus or small town, the reporting of suicides around the world has meant that clusters can be separated by many miles. Suicide clusters tend to affect adolescents more than adults.

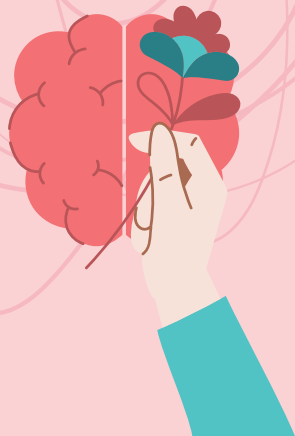
## Why Do Suicide Clusters Happen?

Before social media and widespread news coverage, suicide clusters were more likely to occur within a small sector of the population. An initial suicide might lead to others becoming distressed, and having suicidal thoughts, too.

Today, suicides can be reported instantly on social media where adolescents may learn of a suicide within minutes of the initial post. Whereas reporting by news outlets is more strictly governed, social media updates may include detailed information about the suicide or the person who has ended their life, whether accurate or not. This intensity of information can be distressing for anyone to read, including teenagers. The portrayal of self-harm or suicide can be triggering, leading to an individual's own thoughts about dying in a similar way.

In some cases, the suicide of someone else may act as a 'suicide suggestion' for those who might be feeling low, but would not otherwise have acted on suicidal thoughts. In other cases, the reporting of a suicide might appear to glorify the act. This might be particularly true in the case of celebrities, for whom there is often an outpouring of love following their death.

The use of alcohol and drugs may increase the risk of suicide clusters within a geographic location, particularly within a peer group who feel directionless or disaffected. This may be because of underlying low mood or despondency, in which more than one member of the friendship group had already had suicidal thoughts.



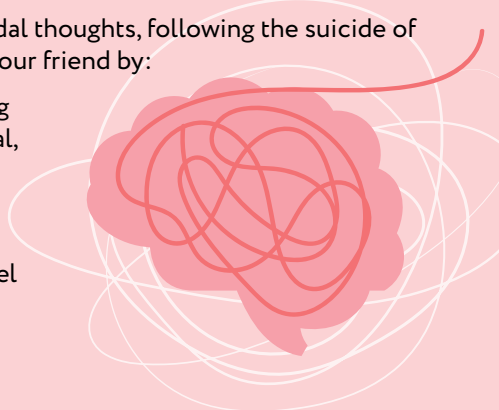
## How Can I Protect Myself or My Friends From the Impact of a Suicide Cluster?

If there has been a suicide locally, or you have heard about the suicide of an individual or a celebrity on the news, you may be worried about how the news has made you feel.

It is natural to feel shocked, upset, distressed, worried or numb when you hear the news. It is also normal if the suicide makes you think about whether you might die this way, or if it causes changes to your mood or how well you feel in yourself. It is important to remember that those who decide to end their lives do so from a very distressing place in which they have lost hope and have been unable to see a different option. Even if you are feeling distressed, there is always someone available for you to talk to and to help you work through your worries or emotions.

If you or a friend feel distressed, or have suicidal thoughts, following the suicide of someone else, you could protect yourself or your friend by:

- Seeking help by visiting your doctor, going to the emergency department of a hospital, or calling a crisis helpline (see list at the end of this article)
- Talking to a friend, parent, teacher, or another responsible adult about how you feel
- Asking for counselling via your doctor or from your school counselling service.



There is always an alternative to suicide. If you are feeling low, you may wish to try the following to support your mental health while you are managing the feelings around someone else's suicide:

- Go for a walk
- Find a form of exercise that you enjoy – swimming, running, team sports, or cycling
- Talk with a friend on the phone
- Write in a journal
- Practice mindfulness or breathing exercises
- Write positive affirmations
- Listen to music
- Make a list of things you are looking forward to
- Spend time with your friends
- Take up a new hobby.

## Final Thoughts

Suicide clusters are unusual, but they are incredibly worrying. The unofficial reporting of suicides on social media may increase the risk of adolescents considering suicide. If you have thoughts of suicide, are worried about a friend who appears to have poor mental health, or have been exposed to a suicide or suicide cluster, you should consider seeking help from a medical professional. Professionals can support you in managing your feelings and finding ways to enjoy your life again.



## My friends are talking about a suicide cluster, what should I do?

If there has been a suicide or a suicide cluster, it is natural that people want to talk about. Talking to others is one of the ways that we process an event and try to deal with our feelings around it.

If your friends are simply talking about a suicide, then there may be nothing to worry about. However, if you find it upsetting or triggering, you could ask to change the subject to something else. If you are worried that others are talking about a suicide cluster, and that it may be affecting their mental health or your own wellbeing, you should speak to a teacher, your parents or another adult about your concerns.

# There has been a suicide cluster, should I worry about my child?

If there has been a suicide or a suicide cluster, it is natural that people want to talk about. Talking to others is one of the ways that we process an event and try to deal with our feelings around it.

If your friends are simply talking about a suicide, then there may be nothing to worry about. However, if you find it upsetting or triggering, you could ask to change the subject to something else. If you are worried that others are talking about a suicide cluster, and that it may be affecting their mental health or your own wellbeing, you should speak to a teacher, your parents or another adult about your concerns.

Sadly, there are some suicides that could not have been prevented as there were no signs that the person had any intention of ending their own life. However, there are some warning signs to look out for in adolescents who may be having thoughts of suicide:

- A very low mood, or a mood that is getting worse
- More risk-taking behaviours, such as unsafe sex or illegal drug use
- Alienation from friends and family
- Becoming socially withdrawn
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling tired and sleep difficulties
- Change in eating patterns, with weight gain or loss
- Poor personal hygiene or neglect of appearance
- Pessimism about the future
- Poor academic performance or truancy
- Episodes of self-harm
- Giving away prized possessions
- Excessive alcohol use
- Lack of interest in hobbies
- Talking about dying or suicide.

If your child begins to show any signs that make you worry about poor mental health or suicidal thoughts, you must seek advice from a doctor straight away.

You may also find the following crisis helplines useful:

- |                     |                      |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| • The Samaritans    | <b>116 123</b>       |
| • Pieta House       | <b>1800 247 247</b>  |
| • Aware             | <b>1890 30 33 02</b> |
| • ISPCC Childline   | <b>1800 66 66 66</b> |
| • Teen-Line Ireland | <b>1800 66 66 66</b> |



# Help and Assistance

If you are concerned about yourself, friends or family you should contact your GP or Out of Hours Service immediately.

You can also get immediate support and information 24/7 by

 **FreeText HELP to 50015**

Texting 50015 is free of charge from any network and you can text this number even if you have no credit. This service is fully confidential and YSPI has no information on mobile numbers that use the FreeText service



For information on:

- **Emergency Contacts**
- **National Helplines**
- **Local Support Groups**
- **Directions to your nearest GP or out of hours clinic**
- **Directions to your nearest safe place or refuge**

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