

Worried about Self Harm or Suicide

If you have serious concerns about the welfare of a relative or friend in prison or they have expressed suicidal feelings or threatened to harm themselves in any way, please voice your concerns immediately to the Duty Manager or the person in charge at the prison.

Families often prefer to speak to someone independent of the prison and staff at the Families Outside Support & information Helpline can help guide you through some of your concerns. The Helpline is a free and confidential service and will not pass on any details of the caller unless agreed beforehand.

In an agreement with the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), staff at the Helpline can intervene and speak with the prison on the family's behalf, with the family member's permission. If the caller does not want the Helpline to contact the prison but has already given details of the person they think may be in danger, it should be explained that Helpline staff are duty bound to forward the information to the appropriate person at the prison but will not pass personal details of the caller on when doing this. The Support & Information Helpline can be contacted on 0500 839383.

What will happen if I express my concern to Families Outside or to the prison?

If you express your concerns to Families Outside and give them a prisoner's personal details they have a duty of care to contact the prison directly.

If they or yourself contact the prison, the information provided will be treated sensitively and in confidence and will at all times be used to help and support the person you're concerned about. The prison may hold a case conference within 24 hours if they feel it is necessary. Those attending a case conference can include: the prisoner, the prisoner's Personal Officer, a member of the Health Team, usually the Mental Health Nurse, a residential manager and, if invited, a member of the prisoner's family.

The team will assess the level of risk and decide what support and help the prisoner may need. An individual care plan will be drawn up and will show the prisoner's needs and level of risk. Individuals who are deemed at risk will be cared

for in a safe environment and any decisions taken will be agreed by the whole team, including the prisoner.

I want to express my concern but I do not want the prisoner to know I called the prison or spoke to Families Outside about them.

You do not have to give your own name to the prison or to Families Outside. However, your confidentiality will be respected if you ask the people you speak to, not to divulge your name.

Who may be particularly vulnerable?

- First time and remand prisoners
- Anyone who has suffered a recent bereavement
- Those who have recently suffered a broken relationship
- Someone who has made a previous suicide attempt
- Substance misusers
- Victims of violence or sexual abuse.

What signs do you look for?

- The person expresses a wish to die
- They are quiet, listless and withdrawn
- They take no trouble with their appearance, looking dirty and unkempt
- The person has no friends
- They are finding it very difficult to come to terms with their situation.

What can trigger suicidal feelings?

- Anger
- Despair
- Hopelessness
- Isolation and loneliness
- Helplessness
- Victimisation
- Change in status, eg remand to convicted
- Transfer

What about self harm?

This should not be dismissed as being manipulative, but rather taken seriously and the prisoner given every available support and understanding. Do inform the prison if you know that your loved one is harming themselves.

Does the prison care?

Yes, very much. The prison service has made it a priority to reduce self harm and suicide in prisons.

Will the prisoner be punished?

No. If the prisoner is felt to be at risk of suicide or self harm the prison will ensure that they are correctly supported and monitored until such time that they are no longer considered to be at risk.

What help is available in prison?

Each prisoner has a Personal Officer assigned to them who they can talk with. If the prisoner prefers to talk to another prisoner,

almost all Scottish prisons have Listeners – prisoners trained and supported by the Samaritans – who will listen to their fellow prisoners in confidence and are available 24 hours a day.

Who else can a prisoner talk to?

Your relative can ask to speak with one of the prison chaplains. This is a service provided by the Scottish Prison Service and the chaplains and they are able to offer support and provide a link to others in the prison or in the community.

Who can I talk to in confidence?

Ring the Samaritans, either at your local branch or on their national number (08457 909090) at any time of the day or night. They also offer an e-mail service (jo@samaritians.org) Alternatively you can contact Families Outside Support & Information Helpline on 0500 839383 or e-mail admin@familiesoutside.org.uk to talk over any concerns you may have.

What else is available for me?

▪ Breathing Space

Tel: 0800 83 85 87

Mon-Thurs 6am-2am

Fri-Sun 6pm – 6am

www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk

A free confidential phoneline providing advice and guidance when you are down.

▪ Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)

Information Service Tel: 0800 917 34 66 or

email info@samh.org.uk

www.samh.org.uk

Information line about mental health, mental health problems and benefit issues.

The importance of family ties

Visits and contacts with the family are of paramount importance to all prisoners, particularly those who may be feeling vulnerable. **Your intervention may be crucial in alerting the prison, so please do tell someone.**