



SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

WITH DR SANDRA WISEMAN

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What schools need to know: Supporting young people experiencing suicidal thoughts

Insights from Childline: Listening without judgement

The NSPCC's new briefing, based on Childline counselling data, sheds important light on how pupils experience and express suicidal thoughts when seeking help, not necessarily crisis situations or active plans. While not always at imminent risk, these young people are voicing deep distress and schools play a crucial part in hearing and supporting them early.

How young people describe it

Examples from the briefing reveal the silent struggles behind the words:

- *I keep having these thoughts about suicide... it feels like they're always there and I'm alone with them* – age 16.
- *This is my first time talking to anyone... I start thinking about suicide. It's scary. I'll look at the resources you send me... I think these will help* – age 13.

These illustrate how pupils may feel isolated or misunderstood even by those closest to them.

The role schools can play

- Recognise and respond rather than dismiss. Suicidal thoughts are not to be trivialised, and educators must treat them as potential safeguarding concerns. Swift, empathetic responses and following safeguarding protocols is essential.
- Choose your words carefully. Language shapes how pupils understand their feelings and how others respond. Avoid terms like "committed suicide," "failed attempt," or labelling a young person as "suicidal." Instead say "having suicidal thoughts" or "tried to end their life." This helps reduce stigma and encourages honest conversations.

Prevention begins with connection and coping

Schools are uniquely placed to foster protective environments:

- Build trust by listening without labeling or blaming.
- Teach and reinforce coping strategies, such as mindfulness, breathing exercises, or other healthy activities. School counsellors and PSHE curriculum can introduce these.
- Learn early warning signs, withdrawal, talk of worthlessness, preoccupation with death and treat them seriously.
- Know local support systems. For serious concerns, referral to CAMHS (formal NHS Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services) or other therapeutic support may be needed. The school should guide this.

The numbers that speak volumes

- In 2024-25, Childline delivered over 162,000 counselling sessions, with suicidal thoughts among the top reasons children reached out, right alongside general mental and emotional health concerns.
- Importantly, 80%+ of suicide-related sessions were about thoughts, feelings, and coping not active planning. This points to intervention opportunities well before crisis.

Read:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2025/young-people-experience-suicidal-thoughts-feelings/>
utm_campaign=20250908_KIS_CASPAR_September08&utm_content=Young%20people%27s%20%20experiences%20of%20suicidal%20thoughts%20and%20feelings&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Ad Astra

What schools must know: Insights from CyberSafeKids 2025

"A Life Behind The Screens" is based on responses from over 9,000 pupils aged 8-15 during the 2024-25 school year. It gives a detailed picture of how young people are using digital devices, what risks and harms they face, and where schools, parents, and policy could better support them.

Key findings

1. Cyberbullying is common

- About 22% of 8-12-year-olds said they had experienced at least one cyberbullying behaviour in the past year.
- Secondary-age pupils report even more frequent negative interactions.

2. Use of social media and age restrictions

- A large portion of children under 13 are using social media apps despite official age restrictions.
- Similar concerns with privacy settings, many pupils aren't clear what their settings are, or they have private accounts but limited understanding of how that protects them.

3. Exposure to harmful content

- Violence, sexual content, threats, and other upsetting or inappropriate material are being encountered by a substantial number of children.
- Many children report being contacted by strangers online.

4. Lack of reporting or help-seeking

- A growing number of young people don't tell anybody when something online upsets them. Family or trusted adults are often not informed.
- There's also evidence that children feel under-prepared to handle risks, or unaware of full rights, or how to report harms.

5. Rising engagement with AI and chatbots

- More children are using AI chatbots, which presents new benefits but also new risks, particularly around data, inappropriate responses, or exposure to harmful content.

What this means for schools

Schools are often on the front line: pupils spend a lot of time in digital environments through school, at home, or socialising. Here are some of the implications:

- Even younger children (8-12) are encountering online risks. Schools must ensure online safety education begins early and is age-appropriate.
- It's not enough just to teach technical safety (passwords, privacy settings). Social, emotional, ethical aspects matter: how to respond when something is upsetting, how to reach out for help, what safe behaviour looks like.
- Teachers and school staff need to feel confident delivering online safety content. If pupils feel adults don't understand or are not trustworthy, they may not share or seek help.
- Clear policies around device use, social media, reporting online abuse or harassment are crucial. Also, being proactive rather than reactive—building safe, supportive digital school culture.

Practical steps schools can take

- **Embed Digital Safety/Online Citizenship in the curriculum:** So pupils learn gradually and consistently, not just one-off "assembly" sessions.
- **Train staff:** Teachers need up-to-date knowledge of online risks: cyberbullying, stranger contact, harmful content, AI/chatbot features.
- **Provide safe reporting channels:** Ensure pupils have trusted ways to report online harms, both through school and external services.
- **Parental engagement:** Workshops, information mails or resources so parents understand the online world and know how to support children.
- **Review school policies:** Device use, social media, online behaviour, privacy: making sure school rules are clear and consistently enforced.
- **Promote media literacy and critical thinking:** Helping pupils understand algorithms, what content they are shown, how to verify sources.
- **Support emotional wellbeing:** Digital harms often affect more than just online behaviour—*anxiety, shame, isolation.* Schools should have pastoral support systems.

Read:

<https://www.cybersafekids.ie/report2025/>

What schools need to know: Supporting pupils back to school

What schools can do: A support checklist

- **Acknowledge anxieties:** Validates children's feelings and opens the door for honest conversation.
- **Encourage expression:** Use tools like writing lists of worries and hopes to help pupils articulate concerns.
- **Listen closely:** Take time to listen before advising—understanding is key to effective support.
- **Collaborate on solutions:** Ask pupils what might help, small changes can make a big difference.
- **Communicate with teachers:** Alerting classroom staff can ensure proactive support and understanding.
- **Prioritise enjoyment and balance:** Make time for positive, stress-relieving activities, both in and out of school.
- **Remind them it's okay to adjust:** Normalise growing pains, a new term can take time to feel normal.

Why this matters for schools

- **Early support makes a difference:** By anticipating and addressing concerns early, schools can reduce longer-term emotional distress and avoid escalation.
- **Builds a culture of care:** Demonstrating empathy and preparedness helps pupils feel safe and valued, key ingredients for wellbeing and learning.
- **Eases transitions:** Whether it's concerns about appearance, peers, or authority figures, clear, caring strategies help all students settle better.

Forward-thinking strategies

- **Share Childline's 24/7 availability:** Promote Childline's helpline (0800 1111) and online chat services as trusted, confidential resources.
- **Host 'welcome back' check-ins:** Offer informal drop-in sessions or wellbeing briefs during the first weeks of term.
- **Empower staff:** Refresh staff awareness of signs of anxiety and the school's mental health support pathways.

Read:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/about-us/news-updates/2025/09/08/the-urgent-need-to-ensure-children-with-concerns-about-gaming-back-to-school/>
utm_campaign=20250908_KIS_CASPAR_September08&utm_content=Childline%20urgent%20need%20to%20ensure%20children%20with%20concerns%20about%20gaming%20back%20to%20school&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Ad Astra

Forthcoming free safeguarding webinars for Autumn term 2025

Pupils mental health - Tuesday 16th September

Depression - Tuesday 23rd September

Anxiety - Tuesday 30th September

Self harm and suicidal ideation - Tuesday 7th October

Anti-bullying - Tuesday 14th October

Domestic abuse - Tuesday 21st October

Just a reminder that all resources will be available in our **Safeguarding CPD Library**, where new recordings will be uploaded each week throughout this term.

Dr Sandra Wiseman

S4S Safeguarding Lead/Specialist

Sandra.Wiseman@services4schools.org.uk
07786 582266