Suicide First Aid®:
The Role of Suicide First Aider®

A comprehensive guide for embedding Suicide First Aid® training into organisational wellbeing strategies, promoting a supportive and proactive mental health culture.

Suicide First Aid®

Suicide First Aid® (SFA) is a highly recognised training programme that equips Learners with the skills to identify the signs and indicators of potential suicide and intervene with practical support. Similar to physical first aid, SFA teaches participants how to recognise key warning signs and respond confidently by guiding someone toward the appropriate resources and support. Integrating SFA training within organisations or communities promotes open conversations about suicide, reduces stigma, and fosters a more supportive and understanding environment.

Becoming a Suicide First Aider®

To become a certified Suicide First Aider®, you must complete a Suicide First Aid (SFA) programme. This comprehensive training combines presentations, discussions, and practical group activities, providing a robust foundation in suicide intervention skills. For more information on the course content, please visit our website.

Each SFA course is delivered by an experienced and quality-assured Tutor, accredited through rigorous training and assessment and assured by City and Guilds. Anyone with an interest in suicide prevention and mental wellbeing is welcome to attend. Upon completing the course, you can receive a certificate of qualification (optional qualification route) and a handy reference card summarising the SFA suicide safety guide for quick guidance in real-world situations.

Outcomes and Benefits

This Suicide First Aid® (SFA) programme will:
- Provide a deeper understanding of the factors affecting thoughts of suicide
- Equip you with practical intervention skills, including how to identify signs of suicide and confidently guide individuals to appropriate support

Independent research and evaluation of SFA training show that it:

- Increases awareness and understanding of suicide prevention
- Reduces the stigma surrounding suicide and mental health issues
- Enhances knowledge and confidence in responding to individuals with thoughts of suicide
- Decreases the anxiety for the person who is helping (Suicide First Aider®)

The Role of a Suicide First Aider®

In the workplace, a Suicide First Aider® serves as a key point of contact for anyone experiencing thoughts of suicide or emotional distress. Their role ranges from having an initial supportive conversation to helping connect the individual with appropriate professional help. In addition to responding in crisis situations, Suicide First Aiders® play a critical role in early intervention, supporting individuals who may be at vulnerable to thoughts of suicide.

While they are not therapists or psychiatrists, Suicide First Aiders® are trained to provide immediate support through non-judgemental listening and practical guidance.

Suicide First Aiders® are trained to:
- Recognise the early warning signs of suicide
- Initiate a supportive, non-judgemental conversation with someone who may be in distress
- Encourage access to professional support or self-help strategies, including internal support like Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) or counselling services
- Escalate the situation to emergency services, if necessary
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality
- Protect their own well-being while fulfilling this role

The role of a Suicide First Aider® operates within company policies and does not override any established procedures—first and foremost, they are employees of the organisation.

Considerations

Just as your company likely has policies in place for managing situations where someone may be at risk (such as procedures for escalating concerns for advice and support), it's recommended to develop a policy document outlining your organisation's approach to Suicide First Aid® (SFA).

Who should attend an SFA programme?

While SFA programmes are open to all, your organisation may want to consider the following factors when selecting employees for the training:

- Do they have an interest in learning more about suicide prevention and supporting others when needed?
- Will they be given the necessary time and support to attend the training and effectively perform their role afterward?
- Do they hold line management or leadership roles where the training could enhance their ability to support team members?

Supporting Your Suicide First Aiders®

Internal support is crucial for successfully integrating Suicide First Aiders® within an organisation. While each organisation will approach this differently, here are some proven support strategies:

- Establishing a support network (with a clear purpose) for sharing experiences and ideas, potentially overseen by someone with an HR or wellbeing background
- Creating a defined Suicide First Aider® role and policy document to ensure clear expectations and responsibilities
- Empowering Suicide First Aiders® to keep their skills current through regular refresher training, ideally every two years, in line with physical first aid guidelines

- Developing and promoting clear referral pathways to help Suicide First Aiders® effectively guide individuals to appropriate support services
- Increasing suicide prevention awareness and mental health literacy across the organisation to foster open conversations and reduce stigma

Promoting Your Suicide First Aiders®

It's important to make employees aware of who the trained Suicide First Aiders® are, so they know who to turn to if they are in distress or need support. Different organisations may take various approaches, but here are some effective ideas:
- Display the identities of Suicide First Aiders® alongside physical first aiders at prominent locations, such as near photocopiers or in kitchen areas
- Include a list of Suicide First Aiders® with names, photos, and contact details on the company intranet
- Provide Suicide First Aiders® with lanyards or badges for easy identification around the workplace

Measuring Impact

It's important to establish key performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate the impact and outcomes of your investment in Suicide First Aid® (SFA) training. These KPIs can include both anecdotal evidence and measurable data, such as:
- The number of employees accessing Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) or other support services within the organisation
- Sickness absence rates and return-to-work rates, ideally tracked before and after the implementation of SFA training
- Feedback from staff surveys and evaluations conducted after SFA training sessions

- The percentage of individuals trained who have applied their SFA skills in real-life situations
- The percentage of managers who feel more confident discussing suicide prevention and mental health with employees
- The percentage increase in employees who feel comfortable discussing mental health concerns with their line managers

Strategic Approach

Suicide First Aid® (SFA) training is most impactful when integrated into a broader, strategic approach to workplace wellbeing. To ensure this, consider how you can:

- Elevate suicide prevention and mental health to a board-level priority, on par with physical health
- Promote employee wellbeing as a key factor in driving productivity and optimising performance
- Make staff wellbeing a core responsibility for line managers, providing them with the time, resources, and training necessary to support their teams effectively
- Recruit and develop line managers with strong interpersonal skills, and promote those who demonstrate a commitment to staff wellbeing
- Ensure line managers have support for their own mental health and wellbeing
- Develop and communicate clear referral or assistance pathways, enabling managers to take appropriate action when supporting employees in need