

# Self-harm and Suicide Prevention Competence Framework

**What does the  
competence framework  
mean for my care?**

National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health

Self-harm and Suicide Prevention Competence Framework: What does the competence framework mean for my care?

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## Background

This document describes the self-harm and suicide prevention competence framework. The framework sets out the skills and knowledge that professionals or other staff can use to support people who self-harm or who have suicidal thoughts. It is also relevant to the families, carers and significant others. Overall, it identifies the support and care that you can expect to receive.

The framework has been developed to help people, services and local authorities<sup>1</sup> reduce the number of people taking their own lives and improve the way care is delivered.

The competence framework for self-harm and suicide prevention is made up of three individual frameworks:

- One focuses on supporting adults and older people in health and social care settings
- One focuses on supporting children and young people in health, social care and educational settings.
- One focuses on support for all people in more general community and public settings.

All the frameworks and their competences can be accessed from:

[www.ucl.ac.uk/pals/self-harm-and-suicide-prevention-competence-framework](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/pals/self-harm-and-suicide-prevention-competence-framework)

## What is a competence framework and what is it used for?

A competence framework describes some of the important things that a skilled professional, or member of staff, needs to have to be able to support people who self-harm or have suicidal thoughts. Broadly, these things include:



<sup>1</sup> The bodies responsible for public services and facilities in a specific area.

Together, these components describe what a competent professional, or member of staff, needs to know about, what they should do, and when and how to do it.

Setting out these competences is important because it helps professionals and staff members reflect on how they work with people. It also helps them to see how they can improve their way of working to give the best possible care.

In addition, the competence frameworks can help organisations who train people in self-harm and suicide prevention identify the skills and knowledge that need to be taught. Organisations can also use the framework to review training courses that already exist or to develop new training courses.

*I would like the framework to be a starting point to break down the fear of the unknown of how to speak with someone in a very fragile mental state. [...] I hope this framework encourages people to act with kindness, hope, compassion and humanity.*

Amanda Tuffrey  
Expert by Experience, 2018

## Which professionals do the frameworks apply to?

The frameworks are intended for people in both professional and non-professional roles. Although parts of the frameworks focus on specialist skills for professionals working in mental health services, not everyone who needs support will be in contact with mental health services. For this reason, the frameworks can be used by a range of people who are offering support to someone who self-harms or has suicidal thoughts. This includes:

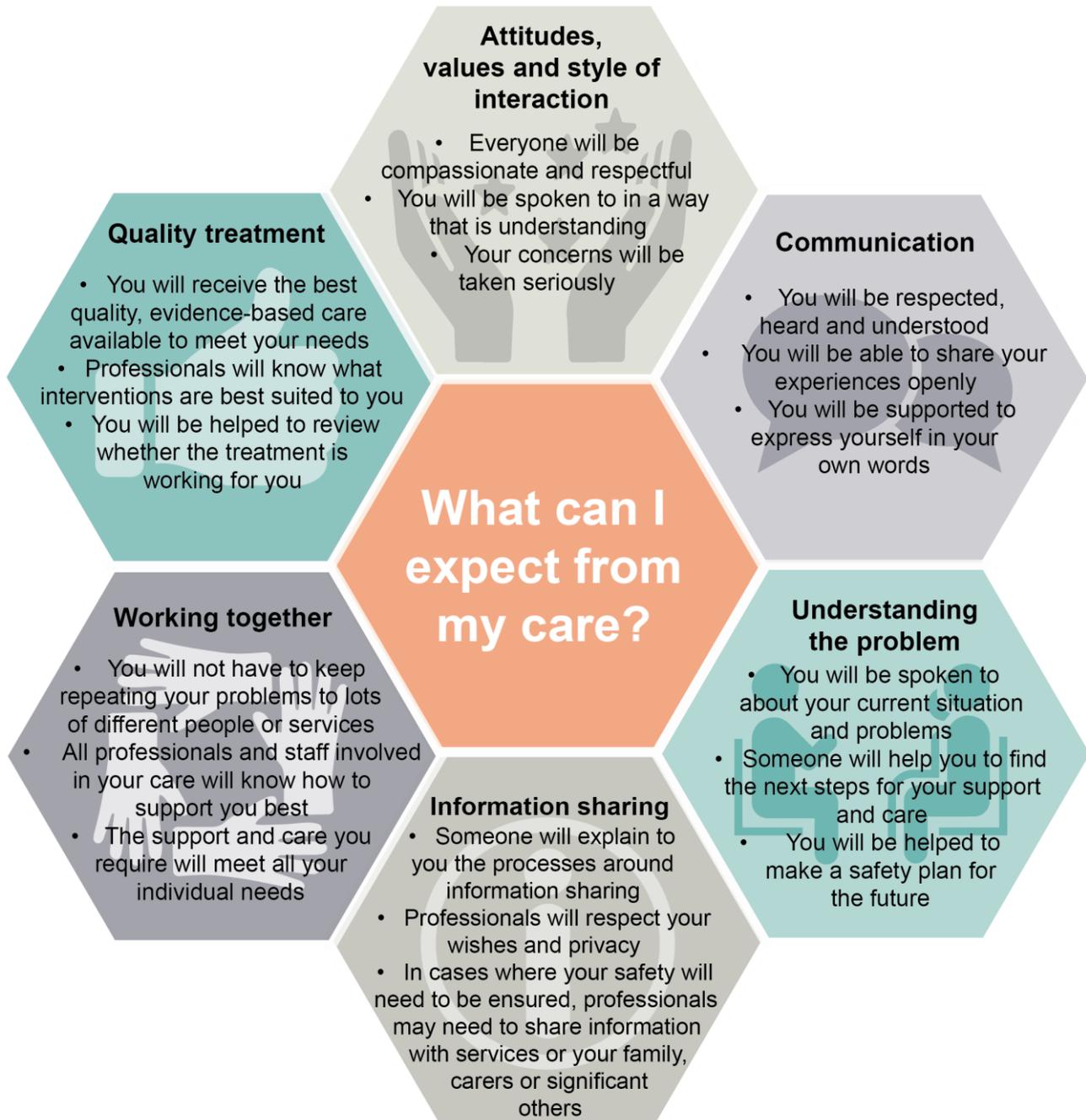
- People working in other health, social care and welfare settings (such as physical health care services, drug and alcohol services, pharmacies, homeless shelters and care homes); this also includes people working in the voluntary and community sector
- People working in occupational health or those with responsibility for the wellbeing of staff in an organisation
- People working in educational settings, such as schools, colleges and universities (including adult education)
- Local authorities who implement suicide prevention plans
- People who are bereaved by suicide, including family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances
- Members of the public.

*I would like to have guidance or frameworks as something to point to when something isn't going right with my care... I want to know that, when I am not treated well, it is not my fault and I don't blame myself.*

Rachel Rowan  
Expert by Experience, 2017

## What does the framework mean for my care?

This section describes some key parts of the competence framework and how they relate to the support, care and treatment that you might expect to receive. The full competence frameworks and detailed competences can be accessed at [www.ucl.ac.uk/pals/self-harm-and-suicide-prevention-competence-framework](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/pals/self-harm-and-suicide-prevention-competence-framework)





### *Attitudes, values and style of interaction*

Staff can sometimes lack confidence when supporting or caring for someone who self-harms or is suicidal, especially when they have not been trained in self-harm and suicide prevention, or in mental health. During the development of this work, people with lived experience of mental health services told us about unhelpful beliefs that some staff hold. For example, staff worry that asking directly about suicide might make a person more likely to later die by suicide - which we know not to be the case.<sup>2</sup> So, one aim of this

framework is to help all staff to become confident and capable enough to provide support in any situation.

To ensure that support and care is always delivered compassionately and respectfully, the most important part of this framework is about having the right attitude and values.

This includes making sure that staff speak to you in a way that is understanding and respectful. The person you speak to should take your concerns seriously, and help you to feel in control of your own care by involving you (and your family, friends or carers) in any conversations about your care. They should also make sure that you understand everything that is happening while you are being supported, and they should put your care and needs first, rather than following checklists or processes.

*I want those looking after me, including my teachers and first responders, to be compassionate and non-judgemental.*

Stella Branthonne-Foster  
Expert by Experience, 2018



### *Communication*

Closely related to attitudes, values and style of interaction is 'communication'. Anyone who speaks to you should be able to communicate in a way that encourages you to speak openly and feel that you are:

- being respected, heard and understood
- able to share your experiences openly
- able to express yourself, using your own words, and
- able to talk freely about what could help you.

<sup>2</sup> You can find the evidence for this in: Dazzi, T., Gribble, R., Wessely, S. & Fear, N.T. (2014). Does asking about suicide and related behaviours induce suicidal ideation? What is the evidence? *Psychological Medicine*;44:3361-63.



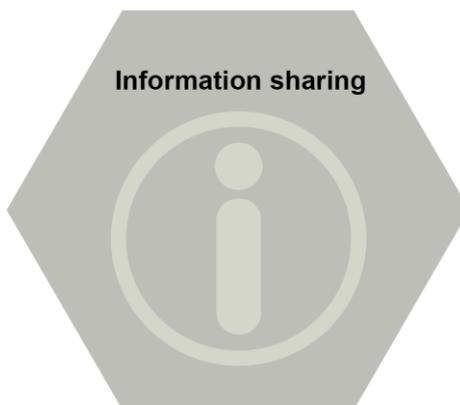
### *Understanding the problem (assessment and planning)*

Professionals or staff members should help you to begin to understand your experience, using their knowledge of self-harm, suicide and mental health problems, as well as the social circumstances that can lead to self-harm or suicidal thoughts. They should also know about mental health legislation and other laws to make sure that you are cared for in line with your rights.

If you are seen in a healthcare setting, the first steps might include:

- A care professional talking to you about your current situation and problems, as well as anything troubling that might have happened to you recently or in the past. During this conversation, you might discuss the next steps for your support, care and treatment. This conversation is called an 'assessment'.
  - During this assessment, the professional should help you to talk about anything that might be a risk to your wellbeing, as well as your needs and any strengths that can be helpful during this difficult time.
- The care professional should then work with you to develop a plan for your care. This should include details of any treatment, how long you might need it and who should be involved. You should also be helped to develop your own 'safety plan'. This should identify ways you can stay safe when you feel the need to self-harm or feel suicidal.
- If your circumstances change, your plan might need changing or you may need to be seen by professionals from another service. If this happens, the service that is currently caring for you should support you throughout this move. They should make sure that you are settled with the new care team before you stop seeing them.

In any environment, a compassionate and collaborative understanding of your situation is important. For example, although a teacher might not be trained to do an assessment as described above, or to complete a safety plan, they should still know where to ask for help and be able to support you to get that help.



### *Sharing of information*

While you are being cared for, you should be asked about who you would like to tell about your situation and what they should know. Professionals and staff should respect your wishes, but in some situations, information may need to be shared in order to keep you safe. Before this is done, the professional should carefully consider whether sharing information is in your best interests, and should let you know who the information is being shared with (unless immediate

action needs to be taken, meaning that they have to act first).

Services and professionals should respect your privacy and ensure confidentiality (unless they need to share information in order to keep you safe). They should:

- securely store your personal information and only share it with people who are involved in your care and who you agree for information to be shared with
- with your agreement, involve your family, friends and carers. They should continue to ask you whether you would like them to be involved in your care, in case you change your mind.



### *Working together*

Sometimes, to ensure that you are cared for as well as possible, a number of different services and professionals may need to be involved. When lots of different people are involved in supporting someone, there is a chance that services do not communicate well with each other. The framework encourages close working between services and members of staff to make sure that:

- you do not have to keep repeating your problems to different people
- all services and professionals know what care and treatment you need, as well as what keeps you well
- there are fewer misunderstandings between services about who is caring for you
- you are supported and cared for by all the right services and people and not forgotten about
- you receive the best possible care to meet all of your needs.



### *Quality treatment*

The frameworks set out the skills that professionals involved in your treatment should follow when delivering your care. If professionals follow this guidance you should receive the best quality care in line with the evidence on care for self-harm and suicidal thoughts.

## Helpful resources

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### Resources for people of all ages

[Big White Wall](#) – an online community for people who might be feeling low, stressed or anxious. There is 24/7 support from trained professionals on the live forum. People can engage anonymously with other members and take part in group or one-to-one therapy.

[CalmHarm app](#) – an app that helps you to resist or manage the urge to self-harm. It can be made private and can be personalised.

[Campaign Against Living Miserably \(CALM\)](#) – a charity that is dedicated to preventing male suicide. CALM offers support to men of any age through their helpline, webchat or website.

[Elefriends](#) – a supportive online community developed and hosted by [Mind](#) where people can receive support from other users and moderators.

[Samaritans](#) – a charity that provides support for people who are feeling low or suicidal.

### Resources for children and young people

[Bluelce App](#) – an evidence-based app that is designed to help young people to manage their emotions and reduce their desire to self-harm. This app is available on prescription, so you may only be able to access this from your local child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS), if it is available to them.

[Childline](#) – a confidential service where children and young people can access support on the phone or online at any time of the day about a range of issues and concerns.

[Kooth](#) – an online counselling and wellbeing platform for children and young people. It can be accessed through mobile, tablet and desktop.

[Papyrus](#) – an organisation that offers confidential support and advice to young people and anyone who might be worried about a young person.

### Resources for older adults

[The Silver Line](#) – a confidential helpline for older adults to receive support about a range of issues.

You may wish to speak to someone face-to-face about any of your problems. If you find it difficult to speak to a person that you know personally, you could speak to your GP or call NHS 111 out of GP hours. Alternatively, if you are linked in with your mental health crisis team, you can contact them for support.

If you do not feel like you can keep yourself safe right now, please seek immediate help by visiting the nearest Accident & Emergency department, or calling 999.

## Frequently asked questions

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### Q: Who do the competence frameworks apply to?

A: When creating the frameworks, we did our best to make them apply to everyone who needs support. However, the frameworks may not be applicable to people who are actively serving in the military, or to people who are currently in prison. Although a lot of the skills set out in the framework can be used to help these people, professionals may need some additional skills to work with people in these settings.

### Q: What age ranges does the framework cover?

A: The framework applies across a wide age range. The children and young people's framework is for people from the age of 8 up to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, while the adult and older adult framework applies to anyone aged 18 and over. For young people who might be cared for in an adult service or who might be moving from children and young people's services to adult services, the adult framework may also be suitable.

The framework for supporting people in the community and public is applicable to all people aged 8 or over.

### Q: How were the competence frameworks developed?

A: The competences were developed by looking at evidence that is already published in some of the following resources:

- guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)<sup>3</sup>
- national policy documents
- training resources
- treatment manuals
- research on different interventions or approaches that already exist.

We were also guided by the advice of three Expert Reference Groups (one for each individual framework). These groups included people with lived experience of self-harm suicidal thoughts or (some with experience of mental health services, some without), as well as people who have been bereaved by suicide. All these people are called 'Experts by Experience' throughout this document. As well as these individuals the reference group included professionals and non-professionals who support or care for people who have self-harmed or feel suicidal, along with academics and national experts in the field of self-harm and suicide prevention.

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<sup>3</sup> NICE provides national evidence-based guidance and advice for health, public health and social care professionals on how to improve health, public health and social care services, as well as quality standards for people who commission these services.

## Q: How will people use the frameworks?

A: There are lots of different ways the frameworks can be used. The main aim is to improve the quality of care people receive, and this can be done in several ways:

- Professional and non-professional staff can use the frameworks to identify whether the support and care they offer is in line with what the frameworks say
- Organisations can use the frameworks to review the way their services are designed and delivered, and to review teaching and training for staff
- People who develop training on self-harm and suicide prevention can make sure their training is in line with the frameworks, or can develop new training that teaches these competences
- Commissioners of health and social care services can make sure that services and any training programmes are delivering care in line with the frameworks
- Organisations can review their internal processes and policies against the frameworks to improve the quality of care they provide.



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