

Three Features and Four Golden Threads of Positive Practice when supporting Care Leavers who express suicidal thoughts.

About this report

This report has been produced for professionals who support children and young people with their mental health and wellbeing (e.g. social workers, teachers, school nurses) to learn from each other.

If you are not a professional and are reading this report to find support for your own thoughts and feelings, including feeling suicidal, please get help as soon as possible.

You can get help by texting **KENT** to **85258** or visiting

<https://www.kentandmedwayccg.nhs.uk/mental-wellbeing-information-hub/children-and-young-people>.

If you are struggling and feel you need urgent support then please contact a person you trust or dial 999.

Introduction

In January 2021, an audit sub-group of the Kent and Medway Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Network was established to improve the support for Children & Young People (CYP) at risk of suicide and self-harm.

Practice can be improved by identifying and sharing best practice when things go well. This report celebrates best practice and demonstrates the effectiveness of the support available to CYP.

The audit sub-group includes individuals from the following organisations:

- Kent County Council, (including Children Young People and Education, Strategic Commissioning and Public Health)
- Medway Council
- Kent Police
- Canterbury Christ Church University
- University of Kent
- Children and Young People Mental Health Service provided by North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT)
- Kent and Medway Primary Care Trust (KMPT)
- Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group
- The Education People
- Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership
- Medway Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership
- Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust
- Shaw Trust

The audit sub-group agreed to focus its first Positive Practice Audit on the effective support given to care leavers who experienced suicidal thoughts. This group was chosen given the increased risk of suicide and self-harm they face, especially during the pandemic.

Presentation of findings

This report highlights the Three Features of Positive Practice and the Four Golden Threads (or common themes) identified to be present throughout the examples of effective support.

In order to preserve the anonymity of the individual young people who are at the heart of this report, there are no case studies of individual stories. To illustrate the importance of each feature and theme we include the words taken directly from individuals workers who were asked to identify the key features of the support that they felt were most important in leading to positive outcomes.

The report includes the experiences of 12 young people who come from a range of backgrounds. They are a mix of male and female; they have a variety of ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations. Several of the young people have made previous suicide attempts, have a history of self-harm or have other mental health diagnoses. These experiences were identified by a range of different agencies including NELFT, KMPT, University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University, Kent County Council and Medway Council.

We would like to express our thanks to the professionals and support workers who completed the Audit Tool and provided such high-quality information to prepare this report.

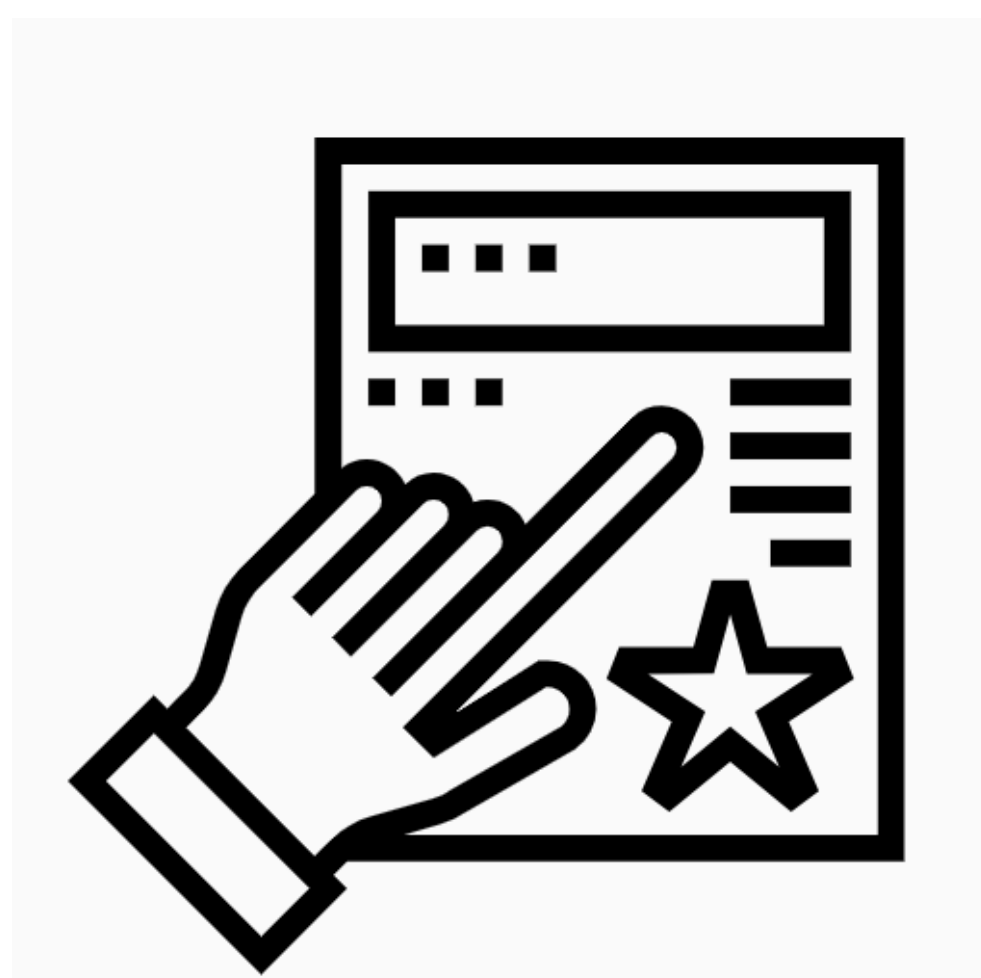
But our greatest thanks are reserved for the young people whose experiences form the basis of this work. Each of them was selected as an example of how individuals can transform their lives with the right care and support to become independent in keeping themselves safe.

Three Features of Positive Practice

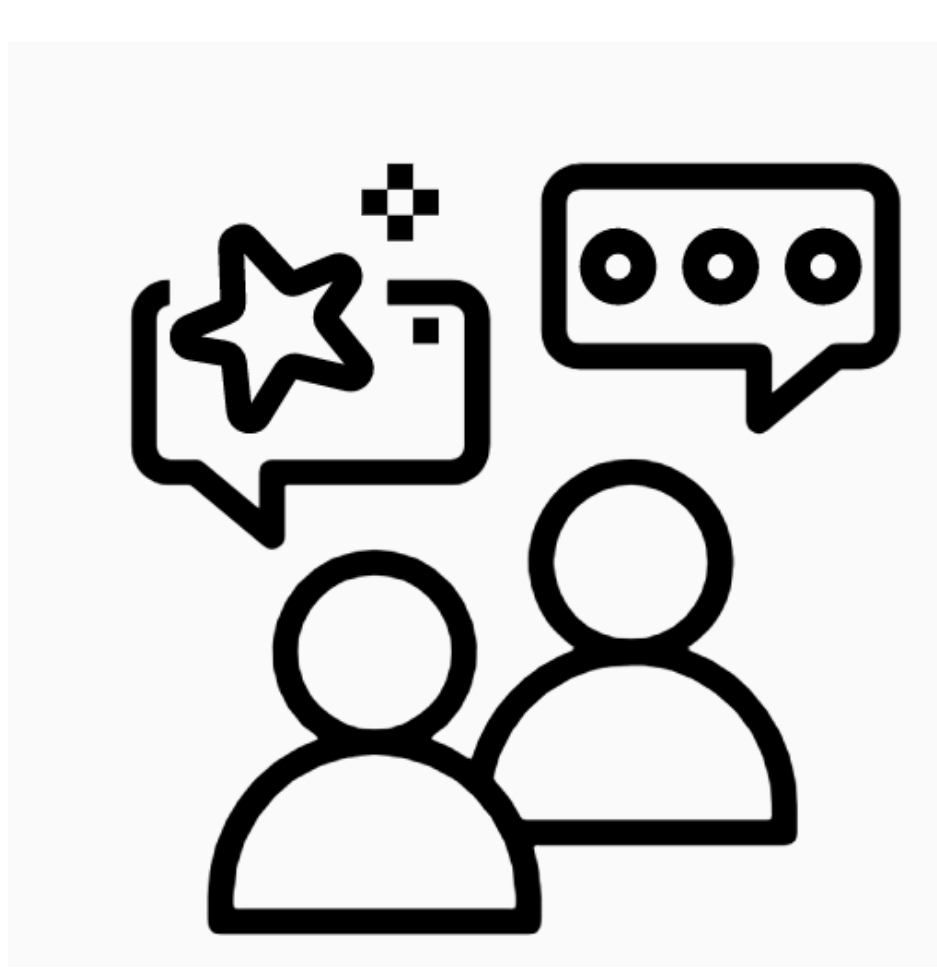
While the identification of these features may not surprise many people who support care leavers, it is worth reminding everyone of their importance and reflecting on how they can be further enhanced in future practice.

For each of the Three Features, we provide an introduction and quotes from individual workers with experience of working with the 12 young people whose experiences are at the heart of this audit. (Quotes have been taken from the written submissions to the audit, and from the multi-agency meeting which reviewed and discussed the submissions).

**Good
Assessments**



**Persistent &
Consistent
Engagement**



**Embedded voice
of the
Young Person**





1 Good Assessment

Getting it right from the beginning is essential - a good assessment will mean you are able to put in the right support network and interventions from the start.

- **Assessments should be timely**

“All of this activity took place (quickly) of the young person stating they felt suicidal.”

- **The full history of the young person should be taken into account**

“History was well recorded and supported by Children and Young People Mental Health Services (CYPMHS) notes. social history, drug use history and protective factors all considered.”

- **Where appropriate, the involvement of families/trusted people in initial assessments should be considered**

“Full initial assessment with Mum present.”

“Family involvement is not always possible or appropriate, but when it is it can really add to the richness of both analysis and action planning

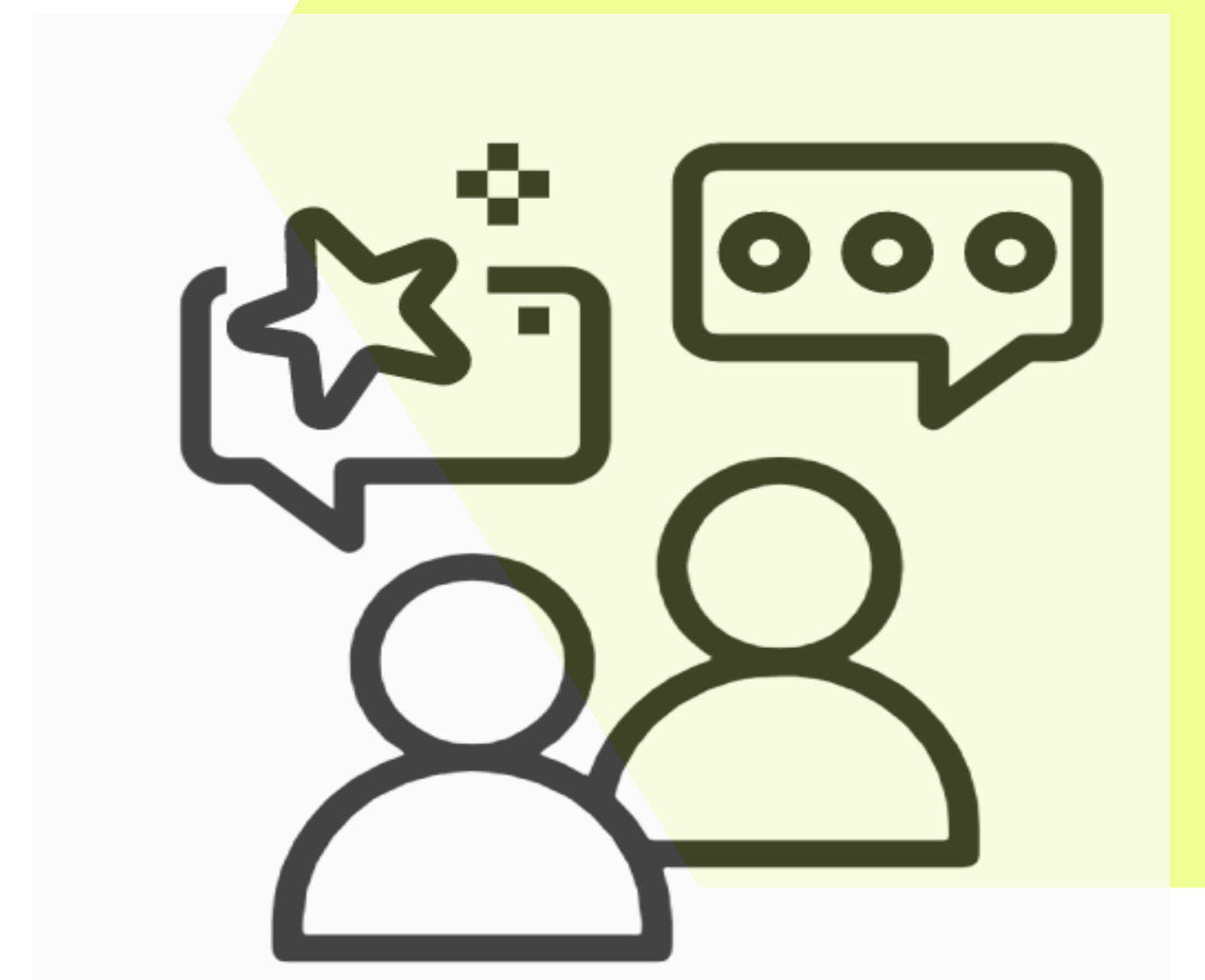
- **Assessments should lead directly to action planning**

“Parent expectations were considered and multi-agency plan of action put into place.”

“In order to deliver the best outcomes, high quality assessments must lead to high quality action plans”

2 Persistent and Consistent Engagement

Many young care leavers will have experienced rejection in the past. As a result, they can be reluctant to engage with professionals trying to help them. It is important for support workers not to take this personally, but persist in building a sustainable relationship with the young person.



- **Be professionally curious**

“It may take time to develop trusting relationships but workers should persist and show professional curiosity to ensure they can make the best decisions”

- **Be open to positive risk taking**

“As long as it was safe to do so, we went at the young person’s pace but took action (e.g. contacting the GP directly) when it was necessary to do so.”

- **Try to reduce the number of workers the young person has to engage with while ensuring that multi-agency support is available**

- **Expect rejection at times but persevere**

“The allocated worker's tenacity to continue to engage the young person and her genuine care of the young person is what has made the fundamental difference to the young person.”

“Good understanding of the diagnosis and how this influences behaviour and presentation, not taking the treatment from the young person personally”

“I and the Personal Assistant, used warmth and, where appropriate, gentle humour which helped to build rapport.”



3 Embedded voice of the young person

It is vital the voice of the young person is at the heart of the care plan and interventions are being done with them, not to them. This will ensure better and sustained engagement throughout their journey.

- **Ensure every aspect of support is person centred (from assessment to transition)**

"We first offered a listening exercise without time limit".

"We let the young person to speak and be heard."

"Continuing the meetings even when the risk reduced was very important. The more ongoing relationships can be, the greater the likelihood of building trust."

"Consistency and attempts to engage, both across the transition from CYPMHS and Adult Services as well as during CMHT input."

"There was a strong young person focused approach to support."

- **Support the young person to take the lead on their own plan**

"The voice of the young person was clearly recorded."

"The young person felt helped by us establishing 3-way meetings on Teams"

"Collaborative safety plan worked well to engage service user and to help plan for support and interventions in the event of the young person becoming more unwell or in crisis."

"The young person was spoken to with respect and her wish to study and to manage herself better was always acknowledged"

- **Undertake 'life story work' across the life course to help the young person understand their experiences**

"Give the young person the tools and support to map the ups and downs in their life."



Four Golden Threads

Four themes kept being highlighted as being critical. These themes couldn't be restricted to any particular element or phase of support, therefore we are highlighting them as Golden Threads which need to be consistently applied at every stage.

1. Trauma informed

Trauma-informed practice acknowledges that trauma may impact the way people cope with stresses or interact with others. The focus of discussion is: "What's happened to you?" rather than "What's wrong with you?" Trauma informed practitioners incorporate this understanding of trauma into all areas of practice, and they actively try to prevent re-traumatisation.

Trauma-Informed Practice aims to:

- *Work in collaboration with service-users, respecting their experience and co-producing policies and materials wherever possible*
 - *Taking a strengths-based approach to develop resilience.*
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2. Multi-agency at every stage

Ensuring care leavers are supported effectively will often require more than one agency to be involved. Regular communication between agencies is a minimum requirement, but the responses to our Audit identified the most successful support also features the development of a shared understanding of what is needed and clear accountability in relation to a shared action plan.

- **Ensure effective and ongoing communication between partners**

"Good communication (cc'ing in to emails so all aware particularly around crisis points) between a range of partners which was developed based on service user's needs and involvements at the time."

- **Develop shared understanding around priorities**

"Use of his appointments with the Probation service are also now being explored."

"The young person's Personal Assistant was exceptional and very proactive. She was very willing to work closely with me which was of great benefit to the young person."

- **Build on the shared understanding and create a multi-agency action plan with clear responsibility and accountability**

"Good interagency discussions took place to ensure professionals involved have a good understanding of the needs of the young person."

"Clear multi agency plan. Excellent communication. Joint visits undertaken with mental health and liaison with adult services"

- **Pay particular attention to transition points**

“Across the audit we found evidence that strong support at transition points between services or during other big changes in young people’s lives led to reduced distress”

- **Use the escalation procedures when necessary**

“Good escalation to adult safeguarding where adult safeguarding chaired the strategy discussion and did very well to engage the young person.”

3. Creativity and flexibility

Complex situations are likely to need creative solutions. Young people may not find it easy to engage with professionals or support workers. They may not even want to engage. Therefore, creative methods are likely to be needed at every stage (assessment, care planning, delivery). Just as importantly the ability to be flexible and change approaches will be needed as circumstances or the wishes of the young person develop and change. Remember, good practice in one context may not be appropriate in another experience

- **Be willing to try something innovative or different**

“Involvement of Mother, 18+ social worker, crisis teams, police and Liaison psychiatry team all evident. These inputs seem important and informative.”

"Caseholder creatively engaged mother, girlfriend/girlfriend's social worker which was vital given his needs"

- **If one approach doesn’t work, or becomes less effective over time, be flexible and try something else**

“The case holder was flexible in her approach and this worked to engage the young adult at the points of crisis”

4. Management and clinical oversight

Supporting any young person who expresses suicidal thoughts is not easy. When that young person is also a care leaver, there are likely to be additional elements which makes their experience particularly complex. Therefore, oversight, supervision and support from managers is vital.

- **Seek regular reflective supervision**

*“Management oversight is clearly evidenced and noted. Current practice ensures the evidence is clearer as it is now kept on the recording System, under 'forms' (previously in case notes) so these are more easily viewed and evidenced.”**“Having regular supervision to develop an understanding of his presenting needs and how best to support him when required”**“Clear case notes with management directions. Case notes from manager after incidents to support the PA (Personal Assistant). Reflection around how the young person projects onto the PA and how to best support the PA with this.”*

- **Ensure supervision also includes advice and support on activity as well as high quality supervision**

“The manager considered previous actions as to whether they were completed and how to address new challenges.” Good supervision in place which considered previous actions and was reflective to consider the current situation and how previous actions influenced activity. Good planning based on the reflections.

What difference can positive practice make?

At the heart of this audit are the experiences of 12 individual young care leavers who felt suicidal and engaged in risky or self-harming behaviour. Many of the individuals had experienced severe trauma in their past and some also had physical and mental health conditions which added complexity to their situations.

After experiencing support which featured many of the aspects highlighted in this report, these young people became more able to ask for help and communicate their needs. They have become more resilient and more able to utilise coping mechanisms.

They have been able to make this progress through their own efforts and with the support of workers who ensure they utilise the most effective features of positive practice.

If you would like a copy of the audit tool or have any further questions then please email - suicideprevention@kent.gov.uk
