

# **Suicide Prevention for Children and Young People**

## **Discussion Paper to Support Local Action**

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### **1. Introduction**

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The discussion paper is an addendum to the previous 2018 paper of the Devon & Torbay Suicide Prevention Strategic Group (Task & Finish Group) which considered suicide in children and young people to ensure that the universal suicide prevention offer was right, to understand best practice and where there may be gaps that could improve prevention and early intervention for this age group.

The learning and next steps of the 2018 paper were:

- The paper should be shared to inform wider work to support the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people.
- There appear to be gaps in bereavement support which requires review.
- Suicide prevention related training is funded through grant funding applications, so delivery may reduce over time and a training needs analysis should be undertaken and opportunities for more sustainable funding routes agreed.
- An upstream approach to the resilience and the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people is essential.
- The risk factors and protective factors should be fully understood by stakeholders and professionals and the wider community so that suicide safer communities emerge and a reduction in suicides in children and young people is achieved.

This paper will outline developments, update on national and local policy and data, and include current evidence on the impact of the pandemic on children and young people.

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### **2. Developments Since 2018 Paper**

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#### **Real time surveillance**

Devon now has a Real Time Surveillance system which has been operational since September 2020. Police share information about suspected suicides which are then reviewed by the Suicide Surveillance Group. The main purpose of the system is to

ensure that there is a timely offer of bereavement support, to identify potential clusters and identify any novel methods or trends that differ from the national picture.

The Suicide Surveillance Group is Comprised of a core group of agencies: Police, Public Health, Mental Health Trusts; Local Authority Safeguarding Leads; School Psychology services; CAMHS. There have been meetings focussed on suspected suicides among Children and Young People. This has led to more collaboration between Public Health, the Children and Family Partnership and the Child Death Overview Panel.

The Data Analyst employed to oversee the data is based at Pete's Dragons which means there is a direct link to Bereavement support. This has enabled a more proactive support offer to schools, colleges and youth groups following a suspected suicide.

The piloting of a 'known to services' process looks to improve data flow between key agencies and the surveillance system. This process will alert relevant teams to suicides among their service users, improve engagement in postvention and prevention activities, and share learning back to the wider Suicide Surveillance Group network.

### **Bereavement support**

In 2019 Devon (including Plymouth and Torbay) were selected to be recipients of NHSE funding to develop suicide bereavement services. Pete's Dragons were awarded the contract by the CCG which means there is now equitable access to support across the County.

Pete's Dragons are currently working in partnership with CAMHS and school psychology services to develop a co-ordinated approach with schools where there has been a suicide among the school community

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## **3. Update on National Policy**

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Two key commitments were:

- Establishing new Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs), intended to provide early intervention on some mental health and emotional wellbeing issues as well as encouraging school and college settings to provide a 'whole school approach' to mental health and wellbeing. The teams will act as a link with local children and young people's mental health services and be supervised by NHS staff.
- Trialling a four-week waiting time for access to specialist NHS children and young people's mental health services

This remains a priority action within the NHS Long Term Plan published in 2019 [NHS Long Term Plan » Mental health](#), and NHS England began consultation in July 2021 on mental health access standards including 'Children, young people and their families/carers presenting to community-based mental health services, should start to receive care within four weeks from referral'.

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## **4. Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic**

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A COVID-19 cross Government mental health and wellbeing recovery action plan was published in 2021 in response to the challenges presented by the pandemic. The plan acknowledged the unequal impacts on particular groups who have experienced higher levels of distress and anxiety. This includes, but is not limited to:

- children and young people, and young women in particular
- individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions
- those facing increased financial insecurity
- those who have been exposed to violence
- those who have worked on the front line.

PHE COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing surveillance brings together close to real time intelligence on the mental health and wellbeing of the population of England during the pandemic. Reports were routinely updated during the with the final update released in April 2022. Chapter Four of the report presents emerging findings from UK studies of the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in relation to the pandemic.

Evidence suggests that some children and young people's mental health and wellbeing has been substantially impacted during the pandemic. Between March and June 2020, a period when schools were closed to most pupils, symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were found to have significantly increased in children and young people aged between 7.5 and 12 years old compared to immediately before the pandemic. However, some pupils reported sleeping and feeling better and primary aged children were more likely to report that they felt happier and less lonely during the lockdown than secondary aged pupils. During these months, some parents and carers reported an overall increase in mental health problems in their children. By September 2020, relative to the March to June 2020 lockdown, reported behavioural, attention, and emotional difficulties in children had returned to, and stabilised at, a lower level.

Data from February and March 2021 shows that rates of probable mental disorder in children and young people have increased between 2017 and 2021 (rates identified in 2020 were similar to 2021). In 6-16 year olds, rates had increased from 11.6% to 17.4%, among 17-19 year olds, rates had increased from 10.1% to 17.4%. Additionally, the proportion of children and young people with possible eating problems also increased.

Evidence from across the pandemic suggests that most children had broadly coped well with the pandemic. In their Big Ask survey in April and May 2021, the Children's Commissioner found that 80% of children and young people were happy or okay with their mental wellbeing. However, over the pandemic, girls and young women, older young people (16-24 year olds), disadvantaged children and young people, and those with SEND were more likely to report difficulties with mental health and wellbeing. It is unclear if these are continuations of pre-pandemic trends or reflect differential experiences between groups of children through the pandemic.

- Some children with SEND appear to have suffered substantial impacts on their mental health and experienced greater anxiousness during the pandemic than children without SEND.
- Data from across the pandemic indicates that boys and girls have had different mental health and wellbeing challenges. Evidence found that, throughout the pandemic (up to June 2021), parents/carers of school aged children reported higher symptoms of behavioural and attentional difficulties for boys than girls. However, girls had higher levels of emotional difficulties.
- Young women (aged 16 to 24) were more likely to report greater psychological distress than young men. Girls were also found to have substantially poorer wellbeing, on average, and greater anxiety during the pandemic than boys.
- There is evidence that, over the pandemic, disadvantaged children and young people have had poorer mental health and wellbeing outcomes than those with more advantage. Throughout the pandemic, parents in households with lower annual incomes reported their children had more symptoms of behavioural, emotional, and attentional difficulties than those with higher annual income.

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## **5. Update on National Data and Risk Factors**

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The suicide age standardised mortality rate in England and Wales for 2020 was 10.0 per 100,000 population. This is statistically significantly lower than the rate of 11.0 in 2019. This data is based on death registrations in 2020, and the decrease is likely to be driven by:

- A decrease in male suicide at the start of the pandemic
- Delays in death registrations due to the pandemic

Rates for all age groups were lower in 2020 than in 2019. Age specific rates for ages 10-24 in 2020 were 7.0 per 100,000 for males (8.2 in 2019) and 2.5 per 100,000 for females (3.1 in 2019). Males and Females aged 45-49 had the highest age-specific death rates.

In April 2022, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) released data on deaths that occurred between April and December 2020 and concluded that there was no evidence that the number of suicides increased during this time due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The analysis did show that the suicide rate for females aged 10-19 years had increased during this period compared with 2019 but this was not statistically significant. Although coroner inquests were disrupted during the pandemic, it is likely that the majority of suicide deaths during this time have now been registered and included in this data.

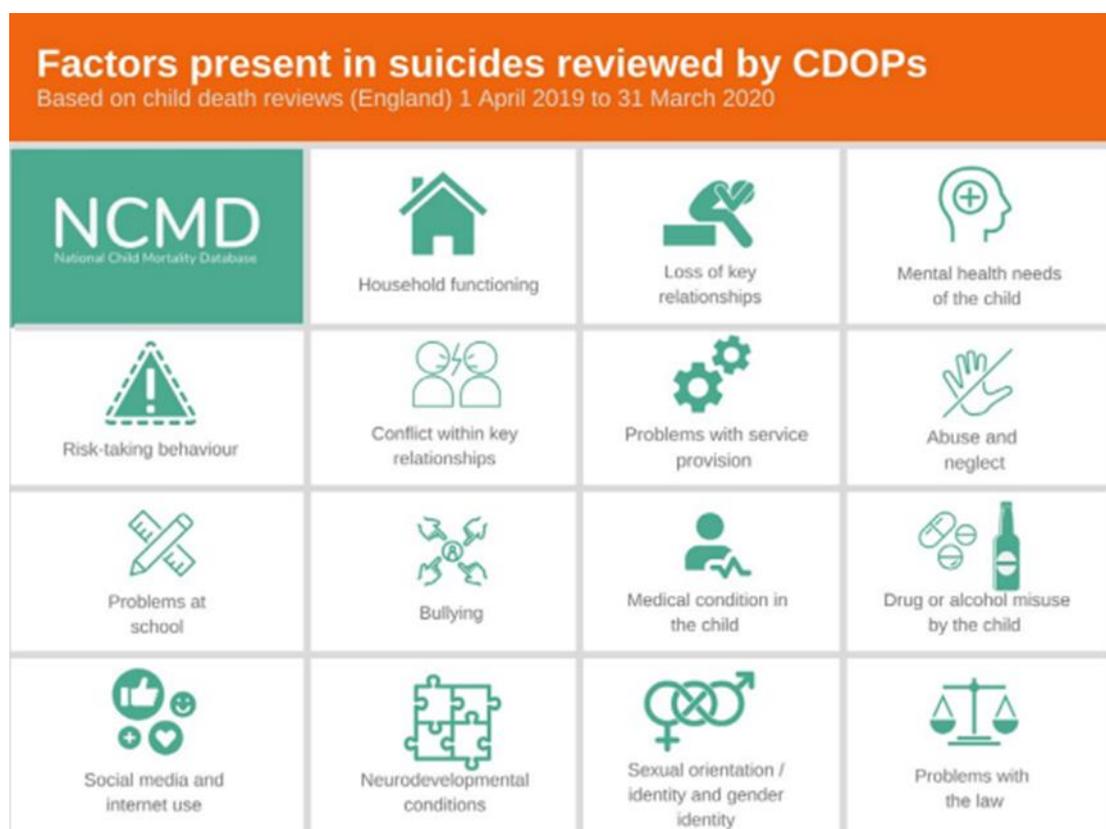
Similarly, research carried out by the National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Safety on Mental Health (NCISH) looking at real time surveillance data from several areas in England found that there was no rise in the number of suspected suicides in the general population. However, there could be higher rates in some in local areas or in different population subgroups.

Another study by ONS which looked at effects of Covid vaccination and mortality in young people during the pandemic found early indications that some causes of death

increased in 2020. In particular, suicides in young women and accidental poisonings (mainly drug poisonings) in young men.

The National Child Mortality Database (NCMD) thematic report identified common characteristics of children and young people who die by suicide, investigate factors associated with these deaths and identify common themes. The report looked at deaths between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 and therefore did not cover the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. The NCMD team continued to monitor suicides of children and young people throughout the pandemic using a real-time surveillance system and found no consistent evidence that suicide deaths in children and young people increased during the COVID-19 pandemic overall. While there were initial concerns that rates may have increased during the first UK lockdown, this was not statistically significant and baseline numbers remained low. Amongst the likely suicide deaths reported after the first UK lockdown, restriction to education and other activities, disruption to care and support services, tensions at home and isolation appeared to be contributing factors. However, no clear increase in childhood suicides has been identified in these reports, or subsequently.

Analysis was conducted by reviewing all the information submitted by Child Death Overview Panels for each death in this cohort of children and young people to look for common themes. The analysis describes the presence of each factor in the deaths in the review cohort but does not include an assessment of the significance of the factor in that specific death. Out of a total of 91 deaths, 81 (89%) children or young people had an adverse factor in more than one category, with 51 (56%) children or young people identifying an adverse factor in 5 or more categories.



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## 6. Update on Local Data and Knowledge

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The suicide rate for Devon for the three-year aggregated period 2018-2020 is 11.9 per 100,000 population, which is statistically significantly higher than the England rate of 10.4 per 100,000 population. The rate for males is also significantly higher (Devon 19.0, England 15.9) whilst the rate for females is broadly similar to England (Devon 5.3, England 5.0). At district level there are three areas that have significantly higher rates than England, these are Teignbridge, Mid Devon and Exeter. During this period, in Devon 10.2% of all suicide deaths were in males aged 10-24 and 1.6% were in females aged 10-24.

The Devon real-time dataset captures all sudden self-inflicted deaths (SSIDs) in the Devon STP region, including overdose data and suspected suicides. This dataset does not reflect official suicide numbers for the region, as a suicide is not confirmed until the coroner has made their conclusion. It is likely that some of the deaths captured in the dataset will be concluded as an accidental or drug-related death. This indicative dataset suggests a similar number of U25 deaths in 2020 and 2021, with a comparable gender split which aligns with national figures. The key thing to note is the greater number of SSIDs in those aged 18 year and under in 2021.

The risk factors identified by the data analyst based at Pete's Dragons are in line with those identified in the National Child Mortality Database thematic report. These are risk factors that have been highlighted, rather than a comprehensive dataset and include:

- Drug / alcohol consumption prior to death
- Bullying
- Previously bereaved / impacted by suicide
- History of mental illness
- Previous self-harm
- Known to police
- Unemployment
- History of substance misuse
- Known to mental health services
- Previous suicide attempt

In Autumn 2021 the School Health Education Unit was commissioned by Public Health to complete a further survey of children and young people. A total of 5,897 pupils took part in 49 primary and 16 secondary school settings across Devon County Council area. The survey covers many topics but of particular relevance are:

- 55% of secondary pupils responded that they are at least 'quite' happy with their life at the moment, down from 64% in 2019

- 23% of secondary pupils responded that they at least sometimes cut or hurt themselves when they have a problem that worries them, or they are feeling stressed.

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## 7. Current System Mapping

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The Thrive model has been used to map services in Devon County Council area that provide information and support for children and young people, and parents / carers below the 'Getting More Help / Risk Support' levels.

### *THRIVING: Universal level*

Most children and young people thrive and cope with the 'normal' difficulties and challenges of life and of growing up. They usually cope with challenges using their own resilience, the support of family and friends and support from their school.

### *GETTING ADVICE: Targeted support*

Some CYP show signs of emerging mental health needs and/or are struggling with their emotional well-being. Problems may be outside the normal range for their age or gender and of a mild to moderate nature. These will be starting to cause difficulties with their schoolwork, friendships or family relationships.

### *GETTING HELP: Specialist support*

A few CYP will show signs of significant mental health problems that are impacting on daily activities and preventing them from functioning within the norms for their age. These may be persistent and moderate to severe in nature, causing significant difficulties with their achievement and relationships.

Area	Organisation	Service Description	Thriving	Getting Advice	Getting Help
Devon	Pinpoint	<b>Pinpoint</b> contains lists for services and community groups across Devon <a href="http://pinpointdevon.co.uk">Pinpoint thousands of services and community groups across Devon (pinpointdevon.co.uk)</a>			
Devon	School Nursing Chat Health	<b>Chat Health</b> Young people aged 11-19 can text a school nurse for confidential advice and support. <b>Text 07520 631722</b> for advice on things like relationships, bullying, mental health, self-harm, drugs/alcohol.			
Devon	Public Health Nursing	<b>The Public Health Nursing</b> Service provides health visiting and school			

Area	Organisation	Service Description	Thriving	Getting Advice	Getting Help
		<p>nursing services across Devon. They deliver universal child and family health services, provide ongoing additional services for vulnerable children and families, and work to safeguard and protect children. The team is made up of health visitors, school nurses, staff nurses and community health workers.</p> <p><a href="http://devon.gov.uk">What we do – Education and Families (devon.gov.uk)</a></p>			
Devon	Splitz	<p>TALK toolkits – resource packs for young people produced by <b>Splitz</b> support service in Devon.</p> <p>Exploring Healthy Relationships is a resource for 14-16 years developed with young people for the benefit of young people. The aim is to encourage discussion and debate around healthy relationships and self-esteem, in order to prevent domestic violence and abuse.</p> <p>Healthy Transition is a resource for young people starting in secondary education. It helps to inform, explore and manage healthy relationships. It is intended to encourage discussion and debate to increase safety, confidence, identity as well as aiding emotional awareness and positive relationships.</p> <p><a href="#">Splitz Support Service - TALK Toolkits</a></p>			
Devon	Proud2Be	<p><b>Proud2Be</b> delivers interactive workshops to students and awareness training to organisations and schools around the UK. Proud2Be also runs a youth project, which includes online and in-person weekly youth groups in Totnes and Newton Abbot, 121 youth support, and a family coffee morning in Newton Abbot.</p> <p><a href="#">Proud2Be   Supporting LGBTQ+ People in Devon and Beyond</a></p>			
Devon	X-Plore	<p><b>X-Plore</b> LGBTQ Youth Groups in Devon - X-Plore run two youth groups for young people in Devon who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) or questioning (Q) their sexual orientation or gender identity</p> <p><a href="http://lgbtqyouthdevon.org.uk">X-Plore LGBTQ Youth Groups in Devon (lgbtqyouthdevon.org.uk)</a></p>			

Area	Organisation	Service Description	Thriving	Getting Advice	Getting Help
Devon	Devon Young Carers	<p><b>Devon Young Carers</b> work with young people aged 4 to 18 who help look after someone in their family, or a friend, who is ill, disabled or misuses drugs and alcohol. They work to make sure that young carers are supported, which can include specialist advice, access to respite opportunities and 1:1 support as identified in an assessment.</p> <p><a href="#">What happens at Devon young carers? - Devon Carers</a></p>			
National	NHS Every Mind Matters	<p><b>Every Mind Matters</b> Looking after your mental health - expert advice and practical tips to help you look after your mental health and wellbeing, so discover what works for you.</p> <p><a href="http://www.nhs.uk">Every Mind Matters - NHS (www.nhs.uk)</a></p>			
National	YoungMinds	<p><b>YoungMinds</b> For young people - practical tips and advice from young people, as well as information on getting support. For parents - lots of practical advice and tips on supporting your child. This can be from how to encourage your child to open up about their feelings to dealing with mental health services. Also provide a Parents Helpline if you're worried about a child or young person.</p> <p><a href="#">YoungMinds   Mental Health Charity For Children And Young People   YoungMinds</a></p>			
National	The Mix	<p><b>The Mix</b> is UK wide support service for young people across all issues - from mental health to money, from homelessness to finding a job, from break-ups to drugs. Talk to them via their online community, on social, through their free, confidential helpline or counselling service.</p> <p>0808 808 4994</p> <p><a href="#">The Mix - Essential support for under 25s</a></p>			
Devon	Babcock Education Services	<p><b>Babcock</b> Educational Services work with school communities to develop strategies for managing children's emotions and challenging behaviours and to help them</p>			

Area	Organisation	Service Description	Thriving	Getting Advice	Getting Help
	<p><b>(Devon Educational services from 01.08.22)</b></p> <p><b>Devon Educational Psychology Service</b></p>	<p>support and understand feelings of anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. <a href="#">Babcock LDP - Emotional Mental Health and Wellbeing</a></p> <p>Devon Educational Psychology Service (DEPS) provides a wide variety of psychological support at strategic, systemic, and individual child level, through service level agreements with educational settings and Devon County Council. DEPS also provides Critical Incident support through resources, and some psychological first aid and signposting, so that educational staff can make an effective response to a critical incident affecting their school community. Notification is through the Local Authority and the resources are available to all here: <a href="#">Babcock LDP - Critical Incident Support Pack for Schools</a></p>			
<p><b>Exeter / Cranbrook Barnstaple Teignbridge</b></p>	<p><b>Mental Health Support Teams for schools</b></p>	<p><b>MHST for Schools</b> cover 3 areas in Devon - Exeter/Cranbrook, Barnstaple and Teignbridge. The teams are linked with CAMHS and are provided under the umbrella of Children and Family Health Devon. The MHSTs have a focus on early intervention for children and young people with mild to moderate mental health needs and work in partnership with the school community and other wellbeing services to develop a whole school approach to mental health.</p>			
<p><b>Hubs in Honiton, Sidmouth and Exeter</b></p> <p><b>(Resources available free Devon wide)</b></p>	<p><b>Parental Minds</b></p>	<p><b>Parental Minds</b> gives support to families who are struggling with their mental health. The Parent+ Support Hub meetings are informal, café-style sessions. The hub is designed to create a space for caregivers to share hints and tips and be 'heard' in a relaxed environment. 1:1 support is centred around the funded hubs in Honiton, Sidmouth and a new one coming to Exeter.</p> <p>Resources on their website and their monthly zoom skills workshops are available free of charge to anyone in Devon.</p>			

Area	Organisation	Service Description	Thriving	Getting Advice	Getting Help
		<a href="#">Home - Parental Minds</a>			
Devon	Kooth	<b>KOOTH</b> provide an online counselling and emotional well-being platform for children and young people, accessible through mobile, tablet and desktop. Young people can access Kooth themselves for free, safe and anonymous online emotional wellbeing support and counselling, text chat and online forums. <a href="#">Home - Kooth</a>			
Devon	SPACE	<b>SPACE</b> provide support for young people from all circumstances and backgrounds to learn, create and realise their potential. By providing spaces to hang out safely with peers, talk about things they can't ask their parents, gain confidence, and try new things. <a href="#">Space Youth Services   Unlocking Potential with Young People   Youth Centres Devon   Youth Clubs Devon   Youth Help Devon   Online Youth Work   Digital Youth Work</a>			
Devon	Young Devon	<b>Young Devon</b> provide information, advice and counselling for children and young people 11-25 years. Contact details and further information is available on their website <a href="#">Wellbeing   Young Devon</a>			
Devon	Children and Family Health Devon	<b>Children and Family Health Devon</b> provide health services for children, young people and families across Devon. Services include occupational health, speech and language, and disability team. Their website contains a useful list of resources. For more information about their services: Email CFHD.DevonSPA@nhs.net or phone 03300 245 321 <a href="#">home - Children and Family Health (childrenandfamilyhealthdevon.nhs.uk)</a>  For information about emotional health and wellbeing, and how to access children and adolescent mental health services follow the link to:			

Area	Organisation	Service Description	Thriving	Getting Advice	Getting Help
		<a href="http://dcpf.org.uk">Emotional and mental health - Devon Children and Families Partnership (dcpf.org.uk)</a>			
Devon	<b>Early Help – Devon Children and Families Partnership (DCFP)</b>	<p><b>Early Help</b> is the extra support your family can get if you need it. It may be that you want to prevent a problem or change things for your family before the problem becomes more serious.</p> <p>It is not a specific service or team, it's an approach that brings together people from a range of services and teams who will work together with your whole family to help improve the situation for everyone.</p> <p>It can offer support to families from pre-birth to adolescents with all sorts of issues from parenting, employment and school attendance to emotional wellbeing or anti-social behaviour.</p> <p><a href="http://dcpf.org.uk">Early Help - Devon Children and Families Partnership (dcpf.org.uk)</a></p>			
Devon	<b>Children's Centres</b>	<p><b>Action for Children's Devon Children's centres</b> provide Early Help, to the whole family from pregnancy through to age eight. They use the "team around the family" approach when families most need support.</p> <p>Early Help means taking action to support a child, young person or their family early in the life of a problem, as soon as it emerges.</p> <p>In Devon, all Children's centres are managed by the charity Action for Children.</p> <p><a href="#">Find your local services   Action For Children</a></p>			
Devon	<b>Devon MIND</b>	<p><b>MIND</b> provide support groups, online workshops and courses available free of charge. Counselling available at reduced cost both in person and online.</p> <p><a href="#">Find Help   Devon Mind, leading the fight for mental health in Devon</a></p>			
Devon	<b>Y-SMART</b>	<p><b>Y-SMART</b> is the Drug and Alcohol Service for under-18s, providing targeted</p>			

Area	Organisation	Service Description	Thriving	Getting Advice	Getting Help
		prevention and treatment services specifically for young people across the county. Wherever possible, their service is confidential, promotes physical and mental well-being, and reduces harm that can be associated with drug and alcohol use for young people and their families. <a href="#">Drug and Alcohol service for under-18s - About Y-SMART</a>			
Devon	Pete's Dragons	Everyone affected by suicide will have a unique experience through the grieving process and it is extremely important that timely and appropriate support is available. Pete's Dragons provide a bespoke service to anyone in Devon who has been affected in this way. <a href="#">Home - Pete's Dragons (petesdragons.org.uk)</a>			
Exeter / East / Mid Devon	Balloons	<b>Balloons</b> offer a wide range of practical, emotional and social support to children and young people from ages 5-25 in Exeter, East and Mid-Devon, when someone significant in their lives die <a href="#">Balloons – Bereavement and loss looking onwards (balloonscharity.co.uk)</a>			
National	Childline	<b>Childline</b> provide advice, information and support on any issues. There are lots of different ways to speak to a Childline counsellor or get support from other young people. 0800 1111 <a href="#">Childline   Childline</a>  Childline Calm Zone has lots of suggestions for ways to feel calmer including breathing exercises, activities, games and videos to help let go of stress. <a href="#">Calm zone   Childline</a>			
National	Papyrus UK	PAPYRUS Prevention of Young Suicide is the UK charity dedicated to the prevention of suicide and the promotion of positive mental health and emotional wellbeing in young people.			

Area	Organisation	Service Description	Thriving	Getting Advice	Getting Help
		<p><a href="http://papyrus-uk.org">Papyrus UK Suicide Prevention   Prevention of Young Suicide (papyrus-uk.org)</a></p> <p>They provide a free, confidential helpline HOPELINEUK            If you are having thoughts of suicide - or are concerned for a young person who might be - you can contact HOPELINEUK for confidential support and practical advice. Advisers can support you to start a conversation about suicide and explore options of how best to support them.            Call: 0800 068 4141            Text: 07860039967            Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org</p>			

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## 8. Next Steps

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- Continue to update the mapping of services in Devon County Council area that provide information and support for children and young people, and parents / carers. Use the mapping to highlight any gaps in provision. More importantly, ensure that the support on offer is made clearly and easily available to all
- Share paper and findings with relevant partners including the Suicide Prevention Oversight Group and Devon Children and Families Partnership. Develop map to better understand where suicide prevention is a priority across the Integrated Care System for Devon. Increase understanding of the identified range of risk factors to improve awareness of the possibility of child suicide
- Complete a needs assessment to establish current training offer, what is needed or being requested, and if there are any gaps. Ensure that any training offered is evidence based.
- Ensure findings inform the developing Healthy Schools offer and link to Mental Health Support Teams. Highlight the importance of whole-school approach to developing a positive school environment conducive to better wellbeing.

**"Child suicides can occur in any part of the country, urban or rural, deprived or affluent. The factors that seem to have contributed also vary – from bereavement to bullying and online experience."**

Louis Appleby

Professor of Psychiatry, University of Manchester

Chair, National Suicide Prevention Strategy Advisory Group for England

The NCMD report recommendations for prevention include encouraging young people to understand their own emotional health and to ask for help when they need it; ensure services are skilled and accessible; for all of us to stay vigilant and supportive of family and friends. Most will get through the pressures of adolescence but for some the stresses are serious and the risks are real.

[NCMD-Suicide-in-Children-and-Young-People-Report.pdf](#)

**Amanda Emmett**  
**ADVANCED PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTITIONER**

**June 2022**