



Who Needs To See This Bulletin?

Please ensure that this bulletin is circulated to ALL STAFF.

Please print out copies of this bulletin for distribution around your establishment. You may also wish to distribute it to Managers at your morning meeting.

Quick-Time Learning Bulletin Increased Risks in Young Offenders and Young People

Of the apparent self-inflicted deaths since 1st January 2011, 8 involved young offenders (aged 18-20) and 3 young people (under 18). Feedback from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman investigations show there to be a number of common features in these deaths.

The aim of this bulletin is to highlight key learning points which may be useful to staff to help them identify potential safer custody risks and triggers and take appropriate action where necessary.

A young prisoner's risk (likelihood) of self harm and/or suicide can increase in certain circumstances.

For further information on risks and triggers and complex behaviours please refer to Chapters 3 and 9 of PSI 64/2011.

Increased risk factors in young prisoners:

Background history

- Childhood adversity/maltreatment (e.g. sexual abuse)
- History of violence/deliberate self-harm
- Family history of suicide/mental illness

Clinical history

- Learning difficulties diagnosis (such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) and Autism)
- Mental illness/personality disorder diagnosis

Psychological and psychosocial factors

- Social isolation/non association
- Unpredictable behaviour/impulsiveness
- Poor hygiene
- Desperate/angry/sad
- Ashamed
- Disconnected/hopelessness
- Low self-esteem
- Relationship instability
- Lack of social support

Current 'context'

- Early days in custody and following transfers between establishments or transfer between wings
- Relationship problems
- Violence, intimidation or fear of these, including verbal abuse
- Alcohol/drug misuse
- Irrational behaviour/recklessness
- Hostile rejection of help
- Recent suicide of someone similar to them

Key Learning Points and Prompts for Actions:

- Where risks are identified as being relevant to a prisoner, appropriate action must be taken.
- It is key to accurately record and document all decisions made.
- What systems do you have in place to ensure that information about younger prisoners who may be vulnerable to self harm or suicide is accurately recorded and shared?
- All staff (discipline and non-discipline) should be mindful of the links between violence, intimidation and self harm or suicide and ensure that information is shared and appropriate supportive measures are put in place.
- You don't have to be physically beaten up or hurt to be a victim of bullying in the Young People's estate. Teasing, being threatened and name calling are all forms of bullying.
- What systems do you have in place to ensure that clinical and other non-discipline staff are made fully aware of the processes to refer bullying?
- Ensure that the risks and triggers section is completed in any open ACCT document.
- If early signs of a tendency to self-harm are overlooked or met with a purely punitive response, the risk of eventual tragedy may be increased.
- All staff who have contact with prisoners must be aware of the triggers that may increase the risk of suicide, self-harm or violence, and take appropriate action.
- After speaking to a prisoner, staff should use their judgement in combination with all available evidence to inform their decisions on prisoners who pose a risk to themselves or others.
- Prisoners with learning disabilities or learning difficulties are likely to need additional support and reasonable adjustments to allow them to cope with and understand the demands of prison life. A learning difficulty affects the way individuals understand information and how they communicate. Making small communication changes can have a powerful effect on the lives of prisoners who struggle to communicate.
- In most instances the use of case management will allow staff to respond more effectively to the prisoner's individual needs to help reduce or keep their challenging behaviour to manageable levels.

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