

Supporting the wellbeing of staff working with self-harm and suicide content

This information sheet provides guidance for sites and platforms hosting user-generated content on supporting staff and volunteers who are exposed to self-harm and suicide related content online. Exposure to this content can be distressing and steps should be taken to limit the impact this content may have on individuals' wellbeing.

Tips for supporting staff and volunteers

Sites and platforms should consider the wellbeing of all employees and volunteers who are exposed to self-harm and suicide content as part of their role. While content moderators are likely to have the most frequent access, people working in other teams may also be exposed, particularly employees with responsibility for self-harm and suicide content policies and safeguarding policies.

To promote the wellbeing of staff, platforms should:

Promote a positive wellbeing culture in the workplace.

Including the promotion of self-care and the importance of reaching out for support. Activities and resources that foster wellbeing should be made available.

Consider the length of time individuals spend looking at content. If viewing for extended periods, companies should encourage regular breaks and self-care.

Provide regular check ins. Managers should regularly check in with employees or volunteers exposed to self-harm and suicide content to understand the impact it has on their wellbeing and identify additional support or training needs. This is particularly important if staff are working from home without in-person support.

Provide options for support. This could include regular supervision sessions with a trained counsellor, an external employee assistance programme or group reflective practice sessions with a professional.

Provide specialist training. Companies should consider providing access to specialist training, such as mental health awareness or suicide awareness training. This can help to increase knowledge and understanding of the area, increase confidence in dealing with such issues and help employees to learn new ways of looking after their wellbeing.

Guidance for staff and volunteers

Sites and platforms should promote the following best-practice principles to employees and volunteers when viewing self-harm and suicide content:

When viewing content

- **Only view when necessary**, ask yourself whether it is necessary to look at the content to complete the task.
- **Be mindful of the time spent viewing harmful content** by taking regular breaks or setting timers to make sure the content isn't viewed for extended periods.
- **Consider those around you**, by being mindful of who else might accidentally see the content. Be careful about talking about harmful topics within earshot of people who are not involved in the discussion.
- **Ask for help** by reaching out to colleagues or managers for support. Self-harm and suicide are difficult topics and it's OK to feel affected by it.
- **Practice self-care** by doing something relaxing after viewing harmful content, such as going for a walk or chatting to a colleague.

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- **Speak to a manager** if you're exposed to high volumes of harmful content and discuss ways of managing this. If you feel that viewing this type of content is impacting on your wellbeing, you should discuss this with your manager immediately. If you are worried about viewing certain kinds of content, such as graphic self-harm or suicide images and videos, you could ask your manager to view it together.

When sharing content

- **Be mindful that colleagues may have personal experience** of suicide or self-harm and may be triggered by the content.
- **Use trigger warnings** when sharing content digitally to allow people to make an informed

choice over when they view this content eg, beginning an email with 'content warning: description of suicide methods'.

- **Remind colleagues of available workplace support** when discussing potentially harmful content.
- **Try to limit the number of employees who view harmful content** by only including relevant members of staff in discussions.

When storing content

- **Store it securely** by password-protecting and clearly labelling files to ensure that the content is not viewed without permission or stumbled upon by accident.
- **Delete it** when it's no longer needed. Don't store harmful content unnecessarily.

Guidance for supporting moderators

Sites and platforms that recruit moderators and volunteers to review and respond to self-harm and suicide content should be clear about the content they will be expected to review and the support they will receive, so that individuals can make an informed choice about whether the role is right for them.

If moderators are expected to communicate directly with vulnerable users, companies should consider undertaking a DBS check or its equivalent if not in the UK.

Training and supporting moderators

Extensive training should be delivered to all moderators, covering self-harm and suicide policies, on how to respond to users in crisis and how to look after their wellbeing when reviewing and responding to content.

Sites and platforms contracting moderators from external companies should consider how they will ensure the same level of high-quality training and support.

Training should include:

- **Moderator shadowing** whereby new starters should be paired with more experienced moderators during their induction before moderating independently.
- **Refresher training** so moderators are kept updated on emerging online trends and trained on how to respond to these.

- **Self-care training** with guidance on how to look after their wellbeing when interacting with users in distress and viewing harmful content.
- **Suicide and self-harm awareness training** to increase knowledge and understanding of the area and confidence in responding to users in distress.

Supporting moderators

All sites and platforms should put in place measures to ensure moderators feel fully supported, such as:

- **Regular breaks** or shorter shifts for moderators viewing high volumes of self-harm or suicide content, particularly if working alone or during unsocial hours.
- **Access to managerial support**, including when working remotely or out of hours, for support when responding to content or with issues relating to safeguarding.
- **Access to a safe, quiet space** if distressed by content.
- **Opportunities for debriefs** at the end of shifts to discuss any difficulties faced or feelings experienced.

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- **Access to external support**, including out of hours, such as an Employee Assistance Programme.
- **Reflective practice sessions** with a trained counsellor (individual, group or both).
- **Peer support training** so moderators build the skills to support each other during shifts.
- **Provision for secondment opportunities** away from harmful content in larger companies with multiple departments.
- **Additional days of annual leave.**



How Samaritans can help you

For further support and advice on responding to self-harm and suicide content online, please see our [website](#) or contact the Samaritans' Online Harms Advisory Service at onlineharms@samaritans.org
Email monitored Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm.