

Suicide and self-harm

Introduction

There may be times when claimants say they intend to harm or kill themselves. Staff should be alert to claimants who may declare or whose behaviour indicates an intention to attempt suicide or self-harm.

Whilst some claimants may say they intend to kill or harm themselves as a threat or a tactic to “persuade”; others will mean it. Our actions must be organised around the assumption that it is a real possibility that the customer will take action on their declaration.

Staff are not counsellors but must be aware of the principles of DWP’s Six Point Plan and should use these as a basis to enable them to effectively manage situations that may arise. The safety of the member of staff must always come first when dealing with this type of incident. Staff should be aware that if possible they should summon a colleague to act as a support partner so they are not dealing with the incident alone. The support partner can:

- take notes
- find contact phone numbers
- witness the conversation.

These are examples, not a full list.

Local Six Point Plan

Managers, in all DWP businesses who work with claimants, must use the DWP’s Six Point Plan to develop arrangements that suit their own local working environments to help staff deal effectively and safely with claimant declarations of intention to attempt suicide or self-harm. The local Six Point Plan must be developed in consultation with the local trade union. There is an outline local Six Point Plan template ([link is external](#)) to help prepare the Plan. The Plan should contain details of how to summon a colleague to act as a support partner. The local Six Point Plan should be kept up to date and communicated to all staff who work with claimants. Staff must refresh their knowledge and understanding of the local Six Point Plan at least annually, and following an incident.

It is strongly recommended that staff create a desktop shortcut to the local Six Point Plan so that they can access it quickly and easily if they need it. Staff members who are working away from the office, for example on visiting duties, are also strongly recommended to carry a copy of the local Six Point Plan with them.

Claimant threatens to harm others

The claimant may be agitated and could come across as aggressive and threatening to others. They may have a weapon or threaten to self-harm in the office in such a way that would endanger others, such as pouring petrol on themselves and the surroundings and threatening to set fire to it. In these circumstances it is important to report the incident using the Unacceptable Claimant Behaviour (UCB) procedures ([link is external](#)).

Recording the claimant’s declaration of intention

Regardless of whether UCB procedures apply or not, details of the incident are noted on a record of claimant declaration of intention to attempt suicide or self-harm form ([link is external](#)). It is good practice to do this within a day of the incident if possible.

The record should be as detailed as possible including, for example:

- the time and duration of contact with the claimant
- what the claimant said or did
- their behaviour and demeanour, for example if they were:
- fidgety
- not interested

- vacant
 - fast or slow talking
 - not replying to you
 - talking incoherently
 - not making eye contact
 - key information provided to the claimant, for example details of:
 - the local Community Mental Health Team
 - Samaritans (link is external) - a confidential emotional support service available 24 hours a day Tel 116123, free from both landlines and mobiles
 - MIND (link is external)– Mental Health charity providing confidential mental health information services - 0300 1233393
 - Breathing Space - a free, confidential phone and web based service for people in Scotland experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety - 0800 838587
 - Get connected - a free, confidential helpline service for young people under 25 - 0808 8084994
 - Bereavement Trust (link is external)– helps people to overcome the grief and sorrow that can follow bereavement - 0800 435455
 - Cruse Bereavement Care (link is external)National charity set up to offer free, confidential help to bereaved people - 0844 4779400
 - any specialist support held on the relevant District Provision Tool
 - any actions the claimant said they would take such as contacting their GP, visiting a friend or family member
- These are examples, not a full list.

A copy of the record is retained by the Manager for 6 years in case it is needed for legal purposes and localised Six Point Plan reviews.

The member of staff recoding the incident should also record on the claimant's profile that the Six Point Plan has been invoked.

Declarations made in writing, electronically or via social media

Occasionally a claimant may say they intend to attempt suicide or self-harm in a letter, email, on social media or in their journal. In such cases, every effort must be made to contact the claimant to:

- activate the local Six Point Plan
 - gather as much information as possible
 - signpost to local support, for example their doctor or the Community Mental Health Team where necessary
- This list is not exhaustive.

If there is sufficient concern about a claimant the emergency services may be called. The details of the incident are noted on the record of claimant declaration of intention to attempt suicide or self-harm form.

A third party declares a claimant intends to attempt suicide or self-harm

A third party might contact Universal Credit to inform that a claimant intends to attempt suicide or self-harm. A third party could include:

- the claimant's representative
- family member
- friends
- organisations such as Social Services
- landlord
- neighbour

These are examples, not a full list.

In these circumstances it is reasonable to expect the third party to manage the situation, for example, encouraging the claimant to contact their GP or Community Mental Health Team. If the third party considers the claimant to be at serious risk or in immediate danger, they should call the emergency services.

If the third party is capable of managing the situation they should be informed that no further action will be taken. Details of the incident and discussion with the third party are noted on the record of claimant declaration of intention to attempt suicide or self-harm form.

If the third party is not capable of managing the situation and the claimant seems to be at serious risk or in immediate danger, the emergency services should be called. Details of the incident, discussion with the third party and any action taken are noted on the record of claimant declaration of intention to attempt suicide or self-harm form.

Claimant declares intention during a home visit

A claimant may declare an intention to attempt suicide or self-harm during a home visit. The principles of the local Six Point Plan apply.

If possible, the jobcentre should be contacted to get support to handle the incident and to rearrange or cancel any other visits arranged for that day.

The safety of the member of staff must always come first when dealing with this type of incident. If at any time there is any sign of a weapon, such as a knife, gun or petrol the member of staff should leave the property immediately and contact the emergency services.

Reviewing the incident

Following all claimant declarations of intention to attempt suicide or self-harm the incident should be reviewed by the line manager on the incident review template (link is external) at the earliest opportunity. This is a chance to reflect on:

- how the incident was handled
- whether the localised Six Point Plan worked effectively
- any lessons to be learned for future handling and responses
- any support needed to help deal with reactions to the experience

The support partner should be included in the review.

The completed review record must be kept for 6 years and a copy sent to the person in the jobcentre who is responsible for developing and reviewing the localised Six Point Plan.

Support for staff following an incident

It is important to consider how the member of staff and the support partner feel about handling the incident. It can be very upsetting but they should remember that they are not responsible for actions the claimant might take or if they decide not to seek help. Encouraging the claimant to seek help or by calling the emergency services is all that can be reasonably expected of them.

Some people will be affected differently. They may need some time off work or wish to receive the independent, confidential counselling services available under the Employee Assistance Programme (link is external) (EAP). The EAP helpline is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and all calls are free of charge from landlines. There is no limit to the number of calls that can be made to the helpline. The EAP also has a management support service to help a line manager deal with these conversations with their members of staff.