

Guidance for using Samaritans' crisis signs at high frequency locations

Key points

1. Liaise with your local multi-agency suicide prevention group and try to influence them to act to introduce safety measures at the location.
2. Put up signage with caution, only in high frequency locations (where two or more suicides or suicide attempts have occurred).
3. Monitor the impact of crisis signs. Are they drawing attention to the location as a method of suicide? Has there been an increase or decrease in suicides or suicide attempts?

What are crisis signs?

Crisis signs are designed to highlight our helpline number to a vulnerable person considering taking their own life in a public place. This could include the small Samaritans sign often at the ends of railway platforms, or small plaques on bridges. This guidance is specific to crisis signage. It doesn't cover use of posters or general awareness raising material.

What does research tell us about the effectiveness of crisis signs?

Research on the effectiveness of crisis signs is mixed. No studies have looked at the use of signs on their own, so it is not possible to attribute success solely to the use of signs. **The available evidence does not support placing signage everywhere.** This is because crisis signs could draw attention and highlight a particular location as a method of suicide to the public.

International research shows safety measures can help reduce suicide at high frequency locations (where two or more deaths by suicide or suicide attempts have occurred). It is important to consider all of the following measures:

- Restricting access to the site and the means of suicide
- Increasing the opportunity and capacity for human intervention
- Increasing the opportunities for help-seeking by the suicidal individual
- Changing the reputation of the site as a suicide location

Wherever possible, signs should be used in conjunction with other interventions and suicide prevention activities in the local area to increase the likely impact. Crisis signs should be used cautiously in specific high-frequency locations, taking care to consider the number and placement of signs.

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I'm considering using signs, what should I do first?

It is important to **engage with your local authority multi-agency suicide prevention group**, if possible, when considering whether signs should be placed in a high frequency location. The suicide prevention group should have data about frequently used locations. You should work to try and influence the group to implement safety measures at the location and consider all of the safety measures outlined on the previous page. **Highways England**, as part of their suicide prevention strategy, **are looking to implement signage, working in partnership with Samaritans**. Signage should be placed with caution, only in high frequency locations and the impact of signage should be monitored.

If your branch is not already in contact with the multi-agency suicide prevention group, you can contact the Director of Public Health within the local authority who has responsibility for the local suicide action plan and who should be driving this group. Guidance on working with local suicide prevention groups is **available on Sams Home**.

Where should I place signs?

Thought needs to be given to ensure signage is visible to someone vulnerable who may be thinking of taking their own life and that it doesn't inadvertently promote the location as a potential means of suicide.

Information from past incidents should be used to help inform where signs are placed, for example, were suicides or attempted suicides made in the same location on the site? Did those involved access the location in the same way?

We would also recommend you walk through the location imagining you were accessing it as a vulnerable member of the public and consider the following when deciding where to place signs:

- Are there frequently used or limited exit and entry points where signs could be placed?

- Are there places where someone can sit or stop; for example, on a bench?
- Are there places where someone could be obscured from view?
- Are there any places that are more accessible for someone to jump or access the carriageway?

The number of signs used should be proportionate to the size of the location. Given the likely variation in size and type of locations it is not possible to be prescriptive about this. However, for many locations, two signs well placed in consideration of past incidents and the local area may be enough. When making the decision on the number and placement of signs, remember that the aim is for these signs to be seen by a vulnerable person. **Caution should be taken to avoid promoting the place as a high frequency location for suicide.**

Try not to use too many signs, they may start to blend into the background and lose effectiveness.

- If the location is very large, target common walking routes and access points as a priority.
- Try to ensure signage is placed at waist or eye-level height. The only exception to this is if there's a risk of someone walking into the sign, in which case they should be placed above head height.
- Consider placing signage to the right of entrances. Observations of customers entering shops showed they often turn to the right.

Please bear in mind our **Media Guidelines** and do not publicise signs in the local press, as there are evidenced risks associated with highlighting suicide methods and locations in this way. Press reports about signs going up at known suicide locations are often sensationalised and can lead to further incidents at the location.

If approached by a journalist, please remind them of the guidelines and explain it is not advisable to run a story about the location. Branches and local media can contact Samaritans' Media Advisory Service at mediaadvice@samaritans.org

For further information about the evidence around signage, please email research@samaritans.org