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New research reveals troubling gap between intention and confidence on suicide prevention in the workplace

To mark World Suicide Prevention Day, 10 September 2025, MHFA England, experts in workplace mental health, has released new data on suicide prevention and support at work. The research reveals that 74% of UK adults say they would ask a colleague if they were worried they might be having thoughts of suicide. Despite this, only 40% would feel comfortable talking about suicide with a colleague.

Younger employees were most likely to ask a colleague about suicide. Over eight in ten (82%) of 18–24-year-olds, and more than three-quarters (77%) of 25–34 year-olds said they would do so. This drops to around two-thirds (67%) among those aged 55–64, and 60% for those over 65.

When asked how comfortable or uncomfortable they would feel talking to a colleague about suicide, younger people were also more comfortable. Nearly half (46%) of 18–24 year olds would be comfortable, compared to around a third (34%) for those aged 45–54. These figures suggest younger people are more open to having life-saving conversations, but still face the same confidence gap seen across all age groups.

This disparity sits at the heart of this year's theme for the day: 'Changing the narrative.' The findings highlight that while the majority of people care and want to help, many remain unsure of how, or whether, to act.

"This research tells us something vital," **says Sarah McIntosh, Chief Executive of MHFA England.** "It's not a lack of compassion that holds people back, it's a lack of comfort, confidence, clarity and sometimes permission. Changing the narrative means making suicide something we can talk about safely, in the workplace and beyond, not something to fear or avoid."

The study of 2,000 employed adults also shows that 11% of people said they didn't know what they would do, and 9% admitted they probably or definitely wouldn't ask. The reasons behind this hesitation are concerning. More than half (52%) of respondents said they lacked the confidence or skills to ask someone directly about suicide. Over 43% said they would be worried about how the person might react, and

nearly 29% feared that asking might, “put the idea in their head”. This is an enduring and dangerous myth. Others expressed discomfort, uncertainty, or a belief that suicide was not something to talk about at work.

These findings are further reinforced by a broader picture of workplace culture. Just 37% of respondents said suicide prevention was part of their employer’s mental health and wellbeing strategy. And while nearly two-thirds (65%) felt confident signposting someone to support, only one in three said they would know where to direct a colleague in need.

“Suicide prevention must be embedded into an organisation’s mental health and wellbeing strategy,” **continues Sarah McIntosh**. “It requires a considered, proactive approach. This means ensuring it is reflected in culture, policy, and in the way conversations and decisions are shaped across the organisation. It should be led from the top and supported at every level.”

The research also explores how people talk about suicide. Over half of respondents (59%) said they would use the phrase “took their own life”, while 48% still use the outdated and stigmatising term “committed suicide.” Only 14% said they would use the phrase “died by suicide”. This is the language most widely recommended by mental health professionals.

When asked what would make the biggest difference in reducing suicide at work, respondents pointed to practical, accessible support including access to confidential mental health services, training for managers, and wider education on suicide prevention. Mental Health First Aiders, peer-to-peer support, and normalising conversations about suicide were also cited as essential steps.

MHFA England is urging employers across all sectors to take action, starting with training, communication, and leadership. The social enterprise is the national authority in mental health first aid. It also offers specialist suicide prevention training in partnership with Junah Ltd. They provide consultancy and guidance on a whole organisation approach to suicide prevention, intervention and postvention to help build healthy, supportive workplace cultures.

“You don’t need to be a mental health expert to make a difference,” **says Julie Castleman, MHFA England National Trainer and Director at Junah Ltd**. “You just need to be ready to ask, to listen, to respond with care and signpost. That’s how we change the narrative. That’s how we save lives.”

Fellow MHFA England Instructor Member and Junah Director, Hannah continues, “It’s brilliant to see that younger people feel more able to ask the question if they’re worried about someone’s mental health or thoughts of suicide. So often we hear unfair criticisms about our younger generation being ‘too sensitive,’ but this data shows that sensitivity can be a strength.

Their willingness to have open, compassionate conversations could help shift the culture of silence around suicide.

As the next generation of employees, managers and leaders, they have the power to transform our organisations into safer, more supportive environments”

Neil, a Team Leader in the Civil Service, used his MHFA training to support a colleague recently.

“I reached out to the individual and they wanted to speak in person. I explained clearly to the individual that the conversation was confidential, unless there was any immediate danger. I said that you’ll lead us where we need to go in the conversation, I’m here to listen.

Initially, it was difficult for them to open-up, but I remained patient and asked some open-ended questions to encourage them to be more comfortable. Eventually, they did reach a point where I stopped needing to ask questions and I was just able to listen.

My MHFA training definitely helped me. It’s normal for people to respond with “I’m fine” but I knew not to take that at face value. It’s important to ask again, show that you care and that you’ll listen non-judgementally. They opened up about a lot of things they were struggling with and what they were going through.

I remember they specifically used the phrase, “if I wasn’t here”. I spotted that phrase and kept listening. Few people are going to directly come out and say they’re experiencing thoughts of suicide. I knew that I had to make a note of the phrase and come back to it once they’d finished speaking. I had to address it, the conversation had evolved to a point where I’d built trust and they felt more comfortable being honest with me. That’s when I asked them if they were experiencing thoughts of suicide.

They didn’t answer initially but I could see they were thinking and maybe going back through past situations in their head, to a time where they had been. I stayed quiet and after a few minutes they nodded their head.

Before my training I might not have asked that question, and if I had and received that answer my first thought would have been to panic. My training taught me what the next steps in the conversation were. It’s not the end of the conversation, it wasn’t the beginning either, but I knew where to guide the conversation from that point.

I was confident in signposting them to the right support. I talked to them about our employee assistance programme, gave them the Samaritans number and encouraged them to speak to their GP. I also used the MHFAider Support App® to show them other support in our area. There was no immediate risk to their life so

providing them with the knowledge to access these services was the right step to take.”

To empower everyone to feel confident in having supportive conversations around poor mental health and suicide, MHFA England has developed three resources:

- 1) ‘The five pillars of suicide prevention’ offers advice and guidance on how to tackle suicide prevention and provide support in your workplace
- 2) ‘Let’s talk’ helps you and your colleagues become more suicide aware. It gives advice on how to support someone experiencing suicide thoughts or behaviour
- 3) ‘For me’ provides advice and guidance on how to look after yourself after having a conversation about poor mental health and suicide

You can download the resources [here](#).

For more information, resources, and information on training and consultancy, visit mhfaengland.org or contact the workplace team [here](#).

ENDS

For interviews or comment, or more information, please contact media@mhfaengland.org or Sarah Bowie sarah.bowie@mhfaengland.org

NOTES TO EDITORS

About the research

- The research was undertaken by One Poll for MHFA England between 22 July – 28 July 2025 with a nationally representative sample of 2,000 working UK adults

About MHFA England

- MHFA England CIC is a social enterprise, established in 2009
- MHFA England’s vision is of a nation where everyone’s mental health matters. We work to create societal change so that we can all talk freely about mental health, because everyone should be able to offer and seek support when it’s needed. Together we create mentally healthy workplaces where people, communities, and business thrive
- To date, 1 in 35 (January 2025) of the adult population is trained in MHFA England knowledge, awareness, and skills

- MHFA England drives meaningful change and transforms workplaces across the UK by delivering inclusive, market-leading and evidence-based mental health training and consultancy
- MHFA England offers face-to-face, online, and digital training options to increase mental health knowledge, awareness, and skills, including the internationally licensed product, Mental Health First Aid and a range of training for managers
- Mental Health First Aid is the mental health equivalent of physical first aid training. It provides people with the skills and confidence to recognise the signs and symptoms of common mental health conditions; start a conversation; and effectively guide a person towards the right support, be that self-help or professional services. It isn't a replacement for professional medical advice and support
- MHFA England uses its expertise in workplace mental health to support and advise employers on creating cultures where wellbeing and productivity flourish. Its consultancy approach is tailored to suit the needs of the organisation and its people, working collaboratively, building on strengths, and recommending areas for improvement
- MHFA England extends its reach through subsidised training to the NHS and community groups that support young people
- Anyone who trains to be a Mental Health First Aider with MHFA England can become part of the Association of Mental Health First Aiders
- The Association of Mental Health First Aiders is the only membership body of its kind. It will help transform how we talk about and support mental health in the workplace and beyond
- MHFA England provide members with exclusive access to a wide range of resources, from ongoing training and qualifications to events and research
- More information about MHFA England and our courses can be found at mhfaengland.org or by emailing info@mhfaengland.org

About Junah Ltd

- Junah Ltd is a social enterprise, established in 2025
- Junah's vision is to create mentally healthy and caring communities where everyone can thrive

- Junah exists to advance suicide prevention, intervention, postvention and support for all people affected by suicide in organisations, through providing trauma-informed, evidence based training
- We aim to create suicide-safer organisations, promoting psychologically healthy environments, equipped to actively promote positive wellbeing, create safety to talk openly about suicide, encouraging sharing and help-seeking behaviour
- We aim to provide organisations with the skills to respond confidently and compassionately to suicide:
 - Prevention; promoting wellbeing and a culture of care and compassion, breaking stigma so people can speak openly
 - Intervention; to reduce the risk of suicide and provide hope. Learn how to spot signs and how to ask directly about suicide
 - Postvention; to ensure people impacted by loss through suicide are supported and to equip organisations with the skills to support all people affected by suicide appropriately
- Junah offers face-to-face and online inclusive and accessible training
- Junah's purpose is to foster caring communities and reduce suicides across the UK and globally
- Junah's core values are
 - Kindness and compassion
 - Accessibility and inclusivity
 - Professional and empowering
- More information about the training and how to book can be found [here](#)