

# Helping Autistic People Who Want To End Their Life

An Easy Read briefing for services in Kent and Medway  
From our Community of Practice meeting on 2 September 2026

## Please read this first



This book talks about suicide.

Suicide means when a person ends their own life.

This book also talks about people hurting themselves.

These are hard things to read about.

**You can stop reading at any time.**



**If you need to talk to someone now:**

You can call Samaritans on 116 123.

You can call them any time of the day or night.

It is free to call.

There is also a list of help in Kent and Medway.

It comes with this book.



## How to use this book



This book is in Easy Read.

Easy Read uses short sentences and pictures.

It puts one idea in each sentence.



Some words are **hard words**.

Hard words are in bold the first time we use them.

There is a list of what these words mean at the end of this book.



You can read this book with someone you trust.

You can take as long as you need.



You can share this book with your team.

You can share it with the people you work with.

You do not need to ask us first.



## What is in this book



1. **Why we made this book**
2. **What we know about Autistic people and suicide**
3. **What Autistic people and families told us**
4. **Notice when someone needs help**
5. **Speak clearly and mean what you say**
6. **Be careful about giving the wrong label**
7. **Stay with people for a long time**
8. **Make places and moves better**
9. **Work with families**
10. **Help early, before things get bad**
11. **What happens next**
12. **What the hard words mean**

## **? 1. Why we made this book**



We are a **Community of Practice**.

This is a group of people who meet to learn from each other.

We are Autistic people, people with a learning disability, families, and people who work in services.

We come from all over Kent and Medway.



On 2 September 2026 we met to talk about suicide.

We asked one big question.

**When an Autistic person tells us they want to end their life, what should happen next?**



Lots of people wanted to come to this meeting.

Twice as many people joined our group because of this topic.

This tells us people want to talk about it.



This book tells you what we learned.

It tells you what services should do.

Services means places like hospitals, mental health teams, schools, councils and charities.



## 2. What we know about Autistic people and suicide



Margaret Dean is an Autistic researcher.

She spoke to lots of Autistic people about suicide.

She told us what she found.



Nearly all the Autistic people she asked had thought about ending their life.

Almost half had tried.

Some had not planned it at all. It just happened.



Other researchers looked at people who died by suicide.

More than 4 in every 10 of them would have been found to be Autistic.

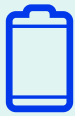
But nobody had checked while they were alive.

So we do not know the real numbers.



Many Autistic people first tried to end their life when they were about 10 years old.

Primary schools need to know this.



Autistic people who want to end their life are often **burnt out**.

Burnt out means completely worn out by too much for too long.

They are often not depressed.

So tablets for depression often do not help.

But the dose gets made bigger and bigger anyway.



**It is safe to ask someone if they want to end their life.**

Asking does not make it more likely to happen.

Please ask.



Once an Autistic person feels this way, the feeling often stays.

People say they feel better so they can stop taking tablets.

Or so they can stop going to therapy that does not suit them.

So "I am fine now" may not be true.



Small lies break trust.

People say it was only a little lie to be kind.

But if you lie to an Autistic person, we may never trust you again.



### **3. What Autistic people and families told us**



Karen told us about her daughter Serena.

Serena is 26 years old. Serena said Karen could tell her story.

Serena has been in hospital many times.



### **Staff said things to Serena that made her much worse.**

One person said she was being cruel and selfish.

One person asked why she was smiling when other people were really ill.

Serena smiles when she feels under pressure. That is an Autistic thing.

One doctor told her parents she would keep trying and one day it might work.



Every time Serena went into hospital it was a different ward in a different town.

Every ward had a different doctor with a different idea.

One night she was moved a long way with no handover.

The new ward did not know she was coming.

This made her much more unwell.



Serena wants people to know something important.

**She does not want to die. She wants peace in her head.**



Other Autistic people in our meeting said the same kinds of things.

Tom said hospital wards are noisy and strange and frightening.

Robyn was a teenager on an adult ward.

Robyn said you get patched up and sent away.



## 4. Notice when someone needs help



### What services should do:

- Know that Autistic people may show this in a different way.
- It may come on very fast and go away again.
- Or a person may just say they do not want to be here right now.
- It is often not planned.



A person can smile and still want to end their life.

Smiling does not mean someone is safe.



**Ask clear questions.**

"How are you?" is a very big question.

Many of us answer "I am fine" without thinking.

Try asking: "What has happened to you since I saw you last?"

That is easier to answer.



Take it seriously.

But also check with the person.

Felicity told us we sometimes have to say things very strongly just to be heard.

So ask the person what they mean. Do not guess.



**When we say we need help now, we mean now.**

Not tomorrow morning.

Not next week.

Not in six weeks.



## 5. Speak clearly and mean what you say



### What services should do:

- Say what you mean. Do not hint.
- Do not use sayings that are not real, like "pull your socks up".
- If you say you will do something, do it.
- If you cannot do it, say why. Do not leave the person waiting.
- Never tell a small lie to be kind. It breaks trust for a long time.



Think before you speak.

One sentence can set a person back for months.

This is true in every service. Not just mental health.



Do not challenge an Autistic person.

Serena was told she must want to be on the ward or she would have run away.

So she walked out to prove it was not true.

She now only goes into hospital when she is sectioned.



## 6. Be careful about giving the wrong label



Many Autistic people are told they have a **personality disorder**.

Some people call this EUPD or BPD.

Sometimes this label is wrong.

Sometimes the person is Autistic and burnt out instead.



### **What services should do:**

- Stop and think before you give a label.
- Ask yourself: could this person be Autistic?
- Ask yourself: could this be burnout, not a personality disorder?
- You do not have to know the answer. Just be curious.



Never use a label as a reason to stop caring for someone.

Serena was told she had the right to choose to die because of her label.

This made her feel her life was worth less than other people's lives.

**This should never happen.**



If a personality disorder label is right, still be kind.

Many people got there because of hurt in childhood.

Try to understand, not to judge.



At Kent and Medway Mental Health NHS Trust we are doing something about this.

We are running training for our psychiatrists.

Autistic people are helping to build the training.

We want doctors to stop and wonder if the person in front of them is Autistic.



## 7. Stay with people for a long time



This was the biggest thing people asked for.

**Support that lasts a long time.**

Not help that stops after a few weeks.



Tom told us about going in and out of services again and again.

He called it a revolving door.

It does not work.



Robyn told us why long support matters.

When you know someone well, you can walk in and say you have had a rubbish week.

When you do not know them, you say "I am fine" before you are through the door.



### **What services should do:**

- Keep in touch with people, even when they are doing well.
- A short check-in is better than closing the case.
- Let people build trust with the same person over time.
- Offer groups where Autistic people can meet other Autistic people.



### **Do not just send a website link.**

Robyn told us this is her biggest annoyance.

People want to talk to a real person.

Being told to click a link and ring back in a week does not help.



## 8. Make places and moves better



Hospital wards are hard for Autistic people.

They are noisy and bright.

There are alarms.

Staff change at the weekend.

You do not know what will happen next.



Sensory things are not small things.

Serena cannot put away plates or pans.

She cannot walk with someone close behind her.

Small changes to her routine are very hard.



### What services should do when someone moves:

- Always do a proper handover.
- Tell the new team the person is Autistic.
- Tell them how the person is doing right now.
- Never move someone in the night with no handover.
- Give community teams what they need when someone leaves hospital.



### Read the **hospital passport**.

A hospital passport says how a person communicates and what they need.

Make sure it is easy to find.

Make sure everyone caring for the person has read it.



## 9. Work with families



### **What services should do:**

- Talk to the people who know the person best.
- Ask them what they know. They usually know a lot.
- Do not make guesses about the family.
- After you make a plan, check the person and the family understand it.
- Ask if they have any questions.



Do not write unkind things about families in the notes.

Serena's notes said her parents spoiled her.

Her parents say Serena would not be alive if they had not fought so hard.



## **10. Help early, before things get bad**



Schools need to know Autistic children can feel suicidal.

This can start when a child is about 10.



Teach people about Autistic burnout.

This should be part of every suicide prevention course.



**Do not teach Autistic children to hide who they are.**

Hiding who you are is called **masking**.

Masking makes people very unwell.

Teaching an Autistic child to fit in should be like teaching French.

We teach a child French. We do not ask them to become French.



Help Autistic people meet other Autistic people.

Feeling proud to be Autistic helps people stay well.

Being part of an Autistic community protects people.



Help people find work they are actually good at.

Many Autistic people want to work.

Some only want a few hours a week.

Do not send a clever person to a charity shop to practise being social.



Help with real life jobs too.

Like how to register a death.

Or what to do with a house when a parent dies.

Nobody helps with these things now.



Put all the help in one place so people can find it.

Kent and Medway are building one website for this.

It has a yellow "need help now" button.

If the button is broken, please tell them so they can fix it.



Train all staff, not just mental health staff.

Felicity asked a good question.

If lots of suicidal people are Autistic, why are helplines not trained about us?

We will keep asking this question.



## 11. What happens next



We did not finish everything at the meeting.

There was too much to talk about.

**We will carry on with this topic in November 2026.**



In November we will hear more from Autistic people about their own experiences.

Tom and Robyn have said they will speak.



We will also go into small groups.

We will talk about what services should do.

We will talk about how services should work together.



Everyone is welcome to come.

You can bring people from your team.

You will get an invitation by email.



## 12. What the hard words mean

|                              |                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Autistic</b>              | A way of being. Autistic people think, feel and sense the world differently. It is not an illness.           |
| <b>Burnout</b>               | When a person is completely worn out because life has been too much for too long.                            |
| <b>Community of Practice</b> | A group of people who meet to learn from each other about the same thing.                                    |
| <b>Hospital passport</b>     | A paper that tells staff how a person communicates and what they need.                                       |
| <b>Masking</b>               | Hiding who you really are so you fit in with other people. It is very tiring and can make people unwell.     |
| <b>Personality disorder</b>  | A mental health label. Some people call it EUPD or BPD. It is sometimes given to Autistic people by mistake. |
| <b>Sectioned</b>             | When the law is used to keep a person in hospital to keep them safe.                                         |
| <b>Sensory</b>               | To do with what you see, hear, smell, taste and touch.                                                       |

|                 |                                                        |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Suicide</b>  | When a person ends their own life.                     |
| <b>Suicidal</b> | When a person is thinking about ending their own life. |



## About this version



This book is an Easy Read version of a longer document.

The longer document is a summary of our Community of Practice meeting on 2 September 2026.

You can ask us for the longer version.



We have not put in details of how people hurt themselves.

We did this on purpose to keep people safe.



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Chloe works at Kent and Medway Mental Health NHS Trust.

Chloe is Autistic.



You can contact us at:

**[kmmh.ld-autism-admin@nhs.net](mailto:kmmh.ld-autism-admin@nhs.net)**



## **If you need help now**



### **Samaritans**

Call 116 123. Free. Any time of day or night.



### **NHS 111**

Call 111 and choose the mental health option.



There is a list of help in Kent and Medway.

It comes with this book.

You can also ask us for it again.