

Reducing self-harm and suicide in autistic adults

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Researchers are inviting partner organizations and charities to work with them to help shape and progress a study to develop new ways of reducing self-harm and suicide in autistic adults.

The [collaborative research](#) is led by Newcastle University and the University of Nottingham to look at how Suicide Safety Plans can be adapted to be more effective for autistic adults.

Suicide is much more common in adults who have a diagnosis of autism, with [autistic people](#) around nine times more likely to die by [suicide](#) than non-autistic people. Evidence shows that 66% of [autistic adults](#) have considered suicide, this is much higher than the UK general population where the rate is about 17%.

Jacqui Rodgers, Professor of Psychology and Mental Health at Newcastle University is the chief investigator and is leading the research in Newcastle, she says: "It is critical that we address the increased rates of suicide in autism. Safety plans are one way to do this. They are a straightforward, brief, and personalized method of

preventing [self-harm](#) and suicide in the general population. Our research will determine whether they can be adapted for use by autistic people and whether they are helpful. We are very pleased that NIHR have recognized the need for this research and provided funding to allow us to undertake this important work. We have a number of mental health, wellbeing and autism related support services and charities on board to help us with this work and welcome enquiries from other organizations that would like to get involved."

Safety plans are a tool used to support and guide someone when they are experiencing thoughts of self-harm or suicide, to help keep themselves safe. Anyone in a trusting relationship with the person at risk can help draft the plan; they do not need to be a professional.

Safety plans typically include information such as personal warning signs that the person might be approaching crisis, personal coping strategies to provide distraction from thoughts of self-harm or suicide, [contact information](#) for friends, family and professionals to provide support, and making the environment safe.

Although autistic people are at increased risk of self-harm and suicide, no research has yet explored the development of suicide prevention strategies adapted to their unique needs. Research into other types of [mental health](#) difficulties such as anxiety and depression indicates that autistic people require adaptations to be made to standard treatments to make them accessible and meaningful.

More information: Safety plans to reduce self-harm and suicide for autistic adults. sites.google.com/nih.ac.uk/safetyplanstudy

Provided by Newcastle University

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