



O blaid gwell
iechyd meddwl

For better
mental health

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)

Background

ASIST was developed in 1983 by Living Works in Canada, and is now widely used in Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, Ireland and Norway. In fact it is the most widely used and researched suicide intervention skills training in the world. It has been continuously refined over 24 years with countless evaluation studies and feedback from over 750,000 participants.



Why ASIST?

- The most widely used and researched suicide intervention skills training in the world
- In-depth, practical training
- Two-day format places particular emphasis on the safety of participants, recognising the possibility that participants may be vulnerable.
- Quality assured, standardised format ensures consistency, and establishes a common language and understanding throughout communities and front-line services
- Very effective intervention tool that combines the benefits of active listening with a practical, directive approach
- Empathic, person-centred approach based on trust and good communication
- Highly experienced trainers from a wide variety of backgrounds

What is it?

This award-winning two-day course offers intensive training for front-line workers and community members to enable them to recognise someone who is suicidal and give them the skills and confidence to intervene.

ASIST aims to improve the methods used by all health, social care and emergency services professionals to support people at risk of suicide.

Programme Objectives

After training, ASIST participants should be able to:

- Recognise that caregivers and persons at risk are affected by personal and societal attitudes about suicide.
- Discuss suicide in a direct manner with someone at risk.
- Identify risk alerts and develop related safe plans.
- Demonstrate the skills required to intervene with a person at risk of suicide.
- List the types of resources available to a person at risk, including him or herself.
- Recognise that suicide prevention is broader than suicide first-aid and includes life promotion and self-care for caregivers.

Effective Interventions

The Welsh Assembly Government's suicide prevention strategy emphasises the importance of early intervention, and the role that all front-line services should play in responding to individuals in need, at the point at which they request help.

ASIST is a key strand of the *National Suicide and Self Harm Reduction Action Plan: "Talk to Me."*

Who is it for?

ASIST is suitable for everyone - whether they work in specialist services, in front-line services or are concerned community members

Over 3000 people have attended ASIST in Wales:

Participants have included Social Workers, Police, Nurses, Ambulance Services, Midwives, Doctors, CAMHS workers, Teachers, Occupational Therapists, Counsellors, Help-line workers, Job-centre staff, Youth workers, Drug Intervention workers, Community Psychiatric Nurses and Community Mental Health Team workers, Foster Parents, Carers, Clergy

Over 93% of participants reported a significant increase in confidence, and over 95% said they would *highly* recommend the training to others

People are dying for suicide first aid

In Wales nearly twice as many people die by suicide than are killed in road traffic accidents, while as many as four to five percent of the population have attempted suicide. Stigma, fear and pessimism continue to be barriers that cause suicide to be seen as something only specialist mental health professionals can deal with. These attitudes can translate into inertia in front-line services and the general public.

As long as suicide is seen as the preserve of specialist mental health services, opportunities for early intervention will be missed. Providing a community-wide training programme is an important step in breaking down these barriers and increasing confidence.

United Nations' guidelines and national strategies in Australia, England, Finland, Norway, Scotland and the United States emphasise that caregiver competence is a critical component in any large-scale suicide prevention program. **ASIST** is a major component in suicide prevention strategies in Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Norway.

The key to suicide prevention is trained caregivers who are ready, willing and able to get involved - caregivers who can recognise individuals who are at risk and who are willing to intervene to reduce the risk of suicidal thoughts becoming suicidal behaviours. Early response helps to reduce the isolation of the person at risk, relieves distress and improves the chances of people working together effectively to provide support.

ASIST is not just about preventing suicide: many of those who feel suicidal will never go on to attempt suicide, but having thoughts of suicide results in acute and terrifying emotional and mental distress. The National Office for Statistics estimates that 3.4% of the population has thoughts of suicide in any one year - the Samaritans put it even higher at 5%. This means that between 100,000 - 150,000 people in Wales are having thoughts of suicide. Ultimately the real success of the Positive Choices Project will not be measured by reducing the suicide rate; the true measure of success will be how much we improve the way in which we all respond to the needs of those who are in distress.

The chances of someone who is thinking about suicide finding someone to talk to, and relieving that distress increases if there are trained people in the community who are ready, willing and able to intervene. An important component of the training is to prepare and protect workers who can find themselves working with someone who is feeling suicidal; this is a stressful experience that can leave a permanent and damaging legacy. Other key elements of the course are to promote partnership working and to help all professionals know other local services that can help. The multi-agency nature of the workshops is crucial in building local networks and breaking down barriers. The training creates a common language and a shared understanding – so important in being able to make effective referrals and communicate risk.

Feedback from Participants

- *“The training has prepared me so I know I can deal with it now, and not to be afraid of the situation.”*
- *“The course itself was incredibly beneficial, I was amazed that I had not had any training of this sort in the past 20 years. I am now able to talk about suicide and have the confidence to be upfront about the subject”*
- *“I feel like an ASIST life buoy as such, always ready to throw out that safety rope, in the hope the other person will want to hold on to the other end.”*
- *“Very important first aid to be armed with, both personally and professionally”*
- *“Well delivered and thought-out workshop”*
- *“Best training I’ve ever done!”*
- *“Professional and sensitively handled.”*
- *“Extremely thorough and very informative”*
- *“Thank you again, the training was absolutely fabulous, best course I’ve ever been on – and today I might have just saved a life.”*
- *“I attended this course at the University last year. I want to say that I’ve successfully helped two people using the techniques I learnt that day. Thank you so much”.*



Mind Cymru have been awarded £1 million by the Big Lottery for the five year "Positive Choices" project to help promote early intervention for people with thoughts of suicide, as well as raising awareness and reducing stigma. Project partners are Vale of Clwyd Mind, Mind Aberystwyth, Torfaen Mind, who are Regional hubs for the delivery of the training, and Public Health Wales, who are involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the project.

For more information on the

Positive Choices Project

visit our website: www.positivechoices-wales.org or email: positivechoices@mind.org.uk