*Small Talk Saves Lives* (STSL) campaign Q&A
For internal background information & reactive media queries

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 March 2025

What is *Small Talk Saves Lives*?

Samaritans’ *Small Talk Saves Lives* campaign, in partnership with Network Rail, British Transport Police and the wider rail industry, aims to empower the public to start a simple conversation if they think someone isn’t OK at railway stations and other public places, if they feel safe to do so. A simple question or observation like ‘Hey, are you alright?’ can be all it takes to interrupt someone’s thoughts and start them on the journey to recovery. So, the campaign gives people the confidence to strike up a conversation, which could save a life.

The campaign first launched in 2017 and is Samaritans’ and the rail industry’s award-winning flagship suicide prevention campaign. It was first developed after research showed passengers have a key role to play in suicide prevention. Suicide is preventable and suicidal thoughts are often temporary and can be interrupted. The campaign aims to give as many people as possible the tools to notice if someone may be at risk and the confidence to approach them.

What is happening for the next phase of *Small Talk Saves Lives* and why is it needed?

*Small Talk Saves Lives* phase 8 will launch on Tuesday 4 March and run until Tuesday 25 March, across a range of earned, owned and paid media channels. Since its original introduction in 2017, the campaign has successfully raised awareness about the need for the public to start a conversation if someone needs help, but there is more to be done. Research shows that many people are still not entirely confident on how they should act or what they should say if they see someone who appears upset at a railway station. Therefore, an underlying theme for the campaign this year is to help reduce the barriers towards making an approach and in doing so shift people from ‘bystander’ to ‘standing by’.

The new campaign will build public confidence to take action and remind them the difference a simple question like ‘Hey, are you alright?’ could make. Your words are a life-saving kit. If you see someone who doesn’t look OK, a little small talk could save their life. Anyone can do it.

The campaign consists of:

* **Promotional assets -** A film with messaging demonstrating the behaviour we want someone to emulate; to normalise the action; and giving them confidence to act. It highlights that when it comes to saving a life, you already have a life-saving kit available to you – your words. We also have **new posters and leaflets**.
* **Multi-channel integrated campaign:** Digital paid for activity, and activity via partner digital channels, and posters in the rail environment.
* **Press and Media** -raising awareness through national and regional media – featuring powerful real-life stories of those who have used small talk to save lives, to inspire others to act.
* **Outreach events across England, Scotland and Wales, run by Samaritans staff and volunteers.** We plan to hold events across Great Britain at railway stations and within the community to directly interact with rail passengers and members of the public, spreading the campaign message.
* **Launch event on Tuesday 4 March, to be held at London Bridge station.** The event will be an opportunity for us to hold a press moment as the campaign launches, welcome key rail stakeholders, and engage with rail passengers about the campaign.
* **Campaign toolkit for the rail industry and other partners** - to enable them to amplify the campaign across their physical and digital spaces. The toolkit will include background to the STSL campaign, the campaign film, template press release and media Q&A, digital and print copies of the poster artwork, social media assets, and key contacts.

Phase 8 key messages

Primary messages:

* Samaritans’ *Small Talk Saves Lives* campaign, in partnership with Network Rail, British Transport Police and the wider rail industry, aims to empower the public to start a simple conversation if they think someone isn’t OK at railway stations and other public places, if they feel safe to do so.
* Your words are a life-saving kit. If you see someone who doesn’t look OK, a little small talk could save their life. Anyone can do it.
* When it comes to saving a life, you already have a life-saving kit available to you – your words.
* By starting a conversation, you could help save someone’s life.
* You might worry about saying the wrong thing or feel like it’s not your place to step in, but it’s always better to say something than to say nothing at all.
* A little small talk like **‘Hey, are you alright?’** can be all it takes to interrupt someone's thoughts.
* Your safety matters. If you don’t feel comfortable approaching someone, speak to a member of staff or in an emergency call 999.

Secondary messages:

* Suicide is preventable and suicidal thoughts are often temporary and can be interrupted.
* It's normal to feel nervous about starting a conversation and making small talk.
* There’s no evidence that starting a conversation with someone who doesn’t seem OK will make things worse. There’s no perfect approach—just do your best. By showing you care and being there, you can make a difference, even if they do not respond right away.
* We can all struggle. Any place. Any time. *Small Talk Saves Lives* is about moving people from bystander to standing by and offering support, turning everyday conversations into moments that matter. Together, we’re creating a community of small talkers.
* Your safety matters. If you don't feel comfortable speaking to someone you don’t know, that's ok. If you’re unsure about talking to them alone, consider asking a passer-by for support. At train stations, staff members and police officers are there to help too.
* Once you’ve started a conversation, really listen to what they’re saying and repeat it back to show you’re hearing them. Encourage them to find a safe, quiet spot to sit and ask if there’s someone you can call for them, like a friend or family member. You can also suggest reaching out to other sources of support like Samaritans or their GP.
* In partnership with Network Rail, Samaritans has trained over 31,000 rail staff and British Transport Police in suicide prevention, helping them identify and assist people in need of support.

What has been the impact of the campaign been so far?

Since launching in2017, *Small Talk Saves Lives* has successfully raised awareness within the rail environment and elsewhere about the need to start a simple conversation if you think someone might need help. Previous phases of the campaign have shown encouraging results – **86%** of those who had seen the campaign last year agreed with the statement ‘A little small talk can help save a life’. Meanwhile, **76 %** of those who had seen the campaign said that they would be confident about judging if somebody might need help on a platform at a train station. The survey results from last year also show **72%** of those who had seen the campaign said they would be likely to approach and speak to someone who didn’t look OK at a railway station, as opposed to only 52% who didn’t see the campaign – a significant difference of 20 percentage points.

Since 2015 over 27,000 interventions have been made across Britain’s rail network by rail staff, BTP, local police and members of the public. \*\*

[\*Research conducted by Savanta which include 2000 of general population aged 18+ who were train travellers, surveyed March 2024.\*\*BTP intervention data for lifesaving interventions made in the rail environment.]

Where did the idea for *Small Talk Saves Lives* come from?

A study carried out jointly for Samaritans and the rail industry by Middlesex University indicated that a ‘bystander’ campaign could be valuable as the public has a key role to play in suicide prevention, especially at railway stations. So, *Small Talk Saves Lives* was developed to provide the public with the tools and confidence to strike up a conversation if they see someone who needs help, showing the part they can play and difference they could make in acting to prevent suicide at railway stations and other public settings.

Since launching in2017 *Small Talk Saves Lives* has successfully raised awareness within the rail environment and elsewhere about the need to start a simple conversation if you think someone might need help.

Who have you worked with to develop the campaign?

Samaritans has worked in partnership with Network Rail, British Transport Police and the wider rail industry to develop the campaign. Together, we have also consulted individuals who have experienced suicidal behaviour, those who have lost loved ones to suicide, people who regularly travel by train, and the general public. We wanted to make sure we took into account a range of experiences and insights to create a powerful and relevant campaign. All of the *Small Talk Saves Lives* campaigns have been tested with members of the public.

Why does the campaign just focus on the railway setting? Should it not try and prevent suicide more widely?

The campaign encourages people to act at railway stations and in other settings. We want to give as many people as possible the skills to notice if someone is at risk.

Does this campaign contradict Samaritans Media Guidelines – you’re talking about a method of suicide?

This campaign is about empowering the public to notice someone who may be at risk and encouraging life-saving conversations. This is a positive message which could save lives. The aim of our media guidelines is to support safe public discussion of suicide, not to shut down conversations about suicide. Samaritans has a long-standing partnership with Network Rail and the wider rail industry to prevent suicide in the rail environment, which we talk about publicly in safe ways to minimise risk to anyone who may be vulnerable. We have taken the same approach with this campaign and we’re asking journalists who report on the campaign to bear in mind Samaritans’ Media Guidelines throughout.

Why is responsibility being put on the general public to act, rather than railway staff or members of the British Transport Police?

The rail industry has trained over 31,000 staff members in suicide prevention and – after the prison service – there’s no other sector with as many people trained in this area. As a result, lives are being saved every day. The campaign is calling on members of the public to help act as extra pairs of eyes and ears to help identify people in emotional distress. The hope is that by appealing to members of the public, more life-saving interventions will be made across Britain.

Aren’t you potentially putting people at risk or in danger by encouraging them to act?

Our message to the public is to only approach somebody who doesn’t seem OK if they feel comfortable to do so. You don’t have to manage this alone. If you don’t feel comfortable speaking to the person yourself, let a member of staff or a police officer know, or call 999. Someone who feels suicidal is likely to be in significant emotional distress and focused on ending their own pain, rather than harming anyone else.

Isn’t the general public or even rail staff intervening with someone who is suicidal likely to have a big impact on their own mental health?

Our message to the public is to only approach somebody who doesn’t seem OK if they feel comfortable to do so. We recognise it could be a very emotional experience for those helping too and it’s important to talk about how you’re feeling – whether that’s with a co-worker, friends or family or a helpline like Samaritans, which has volunteers who are always there to listen, 24/7, on 116 123.

Samaritans listening volunteers have received extensive training to help people, how can we ask the general public to do this without any training?

This campaign is encouraging the public to look out for one another in the moment, and if they think someone might need help, to start a simple conversation. You don’t need any training to do that – small talk is a skill we all have and use. The aim is to potentially interrupt someone’s suicidal thoughts, which could help start them on a journey to recovery. This could include them seeking further help, such as talking to a family member or contacting Samaritans.

Surely the campaign is pointless because if a person is serious about killing themselves then there is nothing that can be done?

Suicide is preventable and suicidal thoughts are often temporary and can be interrupted, even if someone has been feeling low, anxious or struggling to cope for a long period of time. This is why interventions and getting the right kind of support at the right time is so important.

What should people look out for in case someone is at risk?

How people act when they are struggling to cope is different for everyone. Trust your instincts if something doesn’t seem right. Some of the signs could be looking distant, withdrawn, or upset. At a railway station, it could include someone standing alone or in an isolated spot, remaining on the platform for long periods of time, or repeatedly not getting on the trains that are stopping.

What kind of small talk or questions can you use to interrupt someone’s suicidal thoughts?

The campaign highlights simple conversation starters that bystanders could use if they see someone who needs help, including:

* Hey, are you alright?
* Where can I get a coffee?
* Lovely weather, isn’t it?
* Is this a direct train?

When would it not be considered safe to approach someone in the rail environment?

* If they’re on the track or in a restricted area
* If they’re under the influence of drugs or alcohol

What should people do after they’ve made an approach and started a conversation?

When you’ve started a conversation, listen to what they have to say and repeat it back to them to make them feel listened to and understood. Encourage them to sit down somewhere safe and quiet. Ask the person if there’s someone you can call for them. You could mention sources of help, including Samaritans and their GP, as well as friends and family. You don’t have to manage this alone. If you don’t feel comfortable speaking to the person yourself, let a member of staff or a police officer know, or call 999.

Is there a danger that someone could make the situation worse?

There is no evidence that intervening when someone is at risk will make the situation worse and there’s no perfect way to make an intervention, just do your best. By simply being there and showing you care, you could make a difference even if they don’t respond right away. We do know that when a person is suicidal having someone talk to them and listen to them, and showing that they are not alone, can encourage them to seek support.

How will you know if the campaign is a success?

We will know the campaign has been a success by asking the public if after seeing the campaign they are more aware of how to recognise if someone needs help (and is possibly at risk of suicide) and feel more comfortable approaching them, knowing what to say and do. Suicide is preventable so the campaign will also be a success if more people understand that and talk about it. That in turn will help to challenge the stigma around experiencing suicidal feelings; encouraging more people to reach out for help, and not suffer in silence.

How can I support the campaign?

Please visit [www.samaritans.org/smalltalksaveslives](http://www.samaritans.org/smalltalksaveslives) to find out more and share the campaign on social media channels.