

Network Rail gets on board for Samaritans' Small Talk Saves Lives

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British reserve may be internationally renowned but a new survey by Samaritans shows how much we rely on small talk as a nation, even with the limiting social restrictions of the pandemic. The findings come as Samaritans launches a new phase of *Small Talk Saves Lives this summer*, in partnership with Network Rail, British Transport Police and the wider rail industry, to empower the public to act to prevent suicide on the railways and other settings.

The YouGov survey found that over three quarters of UK adults (78%) used small talk during the pandemic, whilst almost one in five of those surveyed say they are likely to want to make more small talk with a stranger face to face once restrictions are lifted (19%).* Just over half of those who want to make more small talk said it was because they now recognise the importance of human connection (51%) and with 39% of respondents saying they also appreciate the sense of community the pandemic brought out in people. Whilst during pandemic restrictions, people said they made small talk with neighbours they hadn't spoken to before and with strangers at the supermarket (both 37%).*

Despite the unprecedented events of the last year, the good old British weather still remains the go-to subject for striking up conversation, chosen by 71% of people, compared to coronavirus in second place

with 45%.*

After an incredibly tough year and as the nation begins to readjust to life with easing restrictions, the campaign reminds the public they already have the skills to start a conversation with someone who needs help, giving them the confidence to act. By trusting our instincts, if something doesn't feel right, a little small talk and a simple question, such as "Hello, what's the time?" can be all it takes to interrupt someone's suicidal thoughts and help start them on the journey to recovery. It could save a life.

The survey also highlighted the benefits small talk can have, with over half of respondents saying it can make people feel less lonely (57%) and boost their own mental health and wellbeing (45%), as well as showing others that people care and want to help them (28%).*

Network Rail's Dom Mottram, age 32, knows the importance of small talk after he experienced suicidal thoughts aged 19 and was considering taking his life when a lady approached him and asked him a question – her kindness "snapping him out of harming himself in the moment". Dom has since helped others in a similar situation both in and out of the rail environment.

Dom said: "I'm thankful for the ripple effect of that lady saving my life – without her stopping and checking if I was okay, I might not be here to now look out for and save others. I'm always on the lookout for anyone who might need help. If I see someone who looks out of place or a bit down, I often just go over and ask if they're alright and try and bring them to a place of safety. Nine times out of ten the person is absolutely fine – but trusting my instincts and talking to that one person can make such a difference.

"It took me a long time before I spoke to anyone about that moment – but it was a wake-up call and I eventually got help from the university and my family. I've had my ups and downs with my mental health after that, but I've come a long way since my 19-year-old self and feel I know how to support my mental health now. I'd encourage everyone to talk about how they're feeling and ask for help. It's so true that small talk is enough to save someone's life – just as it did for me and it's what I always try to do for others."

Samaritans CEO Julie Bentley said: "We know that the pandemic has had a huge impact on the nation's mental health and wellbeing and even though restrictions are lifting, people are still struggling. It's so important we look out for one another now more than ever, because suicide is preventable and it's everybody's business.

"How people act when they are struggling to cope is different for everyone – people may seem distant or upset, but suicidal thoughts are often temporary – so if something doesn't feel right, trust your instincts and try and start a conversation. Whether that's on a journey home from work as we start to travel more or someone you may pass in the street – any one of us could have an opportunity to save a life. Let's start a conversation and work together to prevent suicide."

Initially launched in 2017, *Small Talk Saves Lives* was developed after research showed passengers have a key role to play in suicide prevention.** The latest phase of *Small Talk Saves Lives* has the backing from leading suicide prevention expert and psychologist, Associate Professor Lisa Marzano, from Middlesex University. Further new research from Marzano has confirmed that when asked, people with experience of

suicidal thoughts said that verbal interventions, including small talk, providing reassurance and listening, are the most helpful things a person can do to respond to someone in a crisis.***

Associate Professor Lisa Marzano, Middlesex University said: “I am pleased to support Samaritans’ latest phase of *Small Talk Saves Lives*. This important campaign remains a testament to the fact that we can all play a crucial role in preventing suicide and help someone who may be in need by looking out for one another. It could save lives.”

Rupert Lown, chief health and safety officer at Network Rail, said: “As lockdown restrictions lift, it’s essential that we continue to take care of ourselves and each other. That’s why we’re supporting *Small Talk Saves Lives* and encouraging passengers to join our staff to look out for someone who may be in emotional distress and start up a conversation. When you’ve initiated a conversation, listen to what they have to say and repeat it back to them to make them feel listened to and understood. Suicide is preventable, so let’s work together to start conversations and save lives.”

British Transport Police Assistant Chief Constable Charlie Doyle, said: “When our officers make lifesaving interventions, they may simply start by saying hello and engaging the person in conversation. There’s no magic formula for what to say – I’ve heard of officers chatting about the weather or the football. What I’d like the public to take from this campaign is that everyone has the ability to make a difference. Starting a conversation can be all that it takes. We’re not suggesting people intervene if they don’t feel comfortable or safe to do so. They can tell a member of rail staff or a police officer – many of whom have been trained by Samaritans – or call 999.”

Rail Minister Chris Heaton Harris said: “We have all been through a year of difficulty, many feeling cut off from friends and family, so it is more important than ever for people to look out for each other. The work that Samaritans is doing on our rail network is vitally important to so many people. It is incredibly reassuring to see how comforting just a few small words can be to those struggling.”

Find out more about *Small Talk Saves Lives* at: www.samaritans.org/smalltalksaveslives or join the conversation on social media using #SmallTalkSavesLives.

- The new campaign video will be shown on social media, along with posters which will be displayed across Network Rail stations, provides small talk scenarios to give people examples of what they could say, encouraging them to trust their instincts.
- Due to the proven link between certain types of media reporting of suicide and increases in suicide rates, please be mindful of Samaritans' [Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide](#) and [Rail Suicide](#)
- *Survey was carried out by YouGov from 2-4 July 2021 with a total sample size of 2224 adults. unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).
- ***Why do people take their lives on the railways in Great Britain? A research study, final report* (August 2016, Middlesex University London & University of Westminster, Marzano, Borrill, Mackenzie, Fields, Kruger) Summary available on request.
- *** Source: *Suicide and Life-Saving Interventions on the Railways in Great Britain: A Research Study*, final report (March 2020, Middlesex University, Westminster University, Canterbury Christchurch University & University of Birmingham, Mazarno, Mackenzie, Katsampa, Fields, Kruger, Marsh, Crivatu, Winter, Chung Tang)
- The rail industry and British Transport Police (BTP) work in partnership with Samaritans to reduce suicides on the railway and support those affected by them. Our suicide prevention programme includes training railway employees and BTP staff to look out for and offer support to people who may be considering suicide and working within the wider community to de-stigmatise suicide and promote help-seeking behaviour. To date almost 23,000 rail staff and BTP officers have received suicide prevention training.
- Anyone can contact Samaritans for free any time from any phone on 116 123, even a mobile without credit, and the number won't show up on your phone bill. Or email jo@samaritans.org or go to [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org) to find details of your nearest branch where you can talk to one of our trained volunteers face to face.

Photo credit: Chris Turner. Video credit: Network Rail