

NHS GG&C Guidance on Ligatures & the Use of the Big Fish Safety Knife Cutters

Important Note:

The Intranet version of this document is the only version that is maintained.

Any printed copies should therefore be viewed as 'Uncontrolled' and as such, may not necessarily contain the latest updates and amendments.

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Lead Author:	L Cribbin, Lead Nurse MHS
Responsible Director:	Lead Associate Medical Director MHS
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MHS 42 - Guidance on Ligatures and the Use of the Big Fish Safety Cutters

Please record brief details of the changes made alongside the next version number. If the procedural document has been reviewed **without change**, this information will still need to be recorded although the version number will remain the same.

Version	Date	Brief Summary of Changes	Author(s)
1.0	Feb 2017	New policy	S Pettigrew and the SLWG for Ligatures
2.0	April 2021	Minor changes, updates of Author and addition of location of Tuff Cutters.	S McCulloch

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1. Introduction

This guidance was written with the aim of supporting staff to provide the best practice when dealing with people who are found using a ligature. NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde (NHS GG&C) would like its staff to follow a consistent approach when dealing with patients to ensure the best possible outcomes, NHS GG&C would also like to ensure a consistent approach to the procurement, storage access, use and maintenance of its recommended ligature cutters.

Although there are a number of implements (scissors, knives etc.) which could be used to cut a ligature, NHS GG&C recommends the use of the Big ***Fish Safety Knife***.

2 Purpose

The purpose of this document is:

- To provide the staff of NHS GG&C with information on best practice in dealing with those who are found using a ligature (See Appendix 1)
- To ensure that all appropriate staff members know where the ligature cutters are stored and how it is best used.
- To promote the use of the organisations recommended ligature cutters “Big Fish Safety Knife”
- To ensure that every NHS GG&C clinical area detailed within the scope of this guidance should purchase this tool via the Pecos Procurement system

3 Scope

This guidance relates to all Mental Health and Associated Services (MHAS) clinical areas and Acute service areas as detailed below. The ability to implement this guidance fully may be reduced if the service area is in the community. Nevertheless staff should be aware of the approach to be used and also consideration as to how to minimise the risk of ligatures should be included within the assessment process that is undertaken by staff annually.

The following areas are required to conduct annual (as a minimum) environmental ligature risk assessments using the Self Harm Control Checklist (Environmental) (Appendix 2):

Mental Health and Associated Services

- All in-patient units
- Rehabilitation units
- Forensic Services in-patient units
- Facilities accessible to in-patients (i.e. therapies areas)
- Day Hospitals

Acute Services

- All GG&C Emergency Departments
- All Acute Receiving Units
- Queen Elizabeth University Hospital (Main building – all wards)

The Self Harm Control Checklist (Environmental) (Appendix 2) must be reviewed a minimum of annually or earlier when there has been significant change (i.e. change of use, modification of the building or after a serious adverse incident involving suicide or attempted suicide using a ligature).

These areas are required to carry out environmental assessments of areas accessible to service users including enclosed gardens in order to identify likely ligature points and to liaise with Estate and Facilities Management and consult with Health and Safety to ensure that they are appropriately addressed.

The following areas are not currently required to conduct environmental ligature risk assessments but may do so where clinically indicated this may be reviewed on a site by site basis:

- All non-inpatient clinical areas (except day hospitals)
- All administrative areas

4. Definitions

Ligature: Something, which binds or ties. In this document specifically something which could potentially be used or has been used for self strangulation.

Examples include chains, linen, clothing (including belts, laces, bras, ties, tights stitching) pull cords, medical and non-medical tubing, cables or wires, audio and video tapes, toilet rolls, paper towel rolls, self-adhesive leaflet backing paper, wallpaper borders etc.

Ligature point: In this document anything that could be used to attach a cord, rope or other material for the purpose of strangulation.

Environment: The external surroundings conditions in which a person interacts. This could be the physical or built environment – the actual buildings, fittings etc. and the social environment. Personal possessions may also need to be taken into account including clothing.

Big Fish Safety knife: GG&C recommended tool used to release a ligature safely.



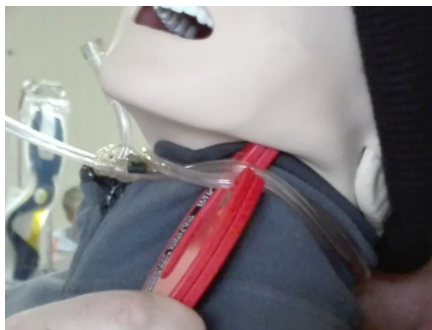
Senior Charge Nurse: The term can vary from clinical area to clinical area and dependent upon service area may include the roles of Senior Nurse or Team Lead

5. What to Do If You Find Someone Using a Ligature?

5.1 Safe Ligature Release and Use of Big Fish Safety Knife (See Appendix 1)

1. If you find a person with a ligature in situ immediately call for assistance:
 - a) Activate your alarm or shout for help
 - b) Direct another staff member to call an emergency ambulance and/or summon the medical emergency team (2222). If in a community area call an ambulance.

2. Support the person's body weight (if safe to do so) as soon as possible, to release the tension on the ligature. (A person does not need to be suspended or clear of the floor to be using a ligature.)
3. Keep the body weight supported and/or the tension off the ligature until the ligature has been cut.
4. The ligature should be cut as soon as possible. In some situations it may be easier to cut mid-way between the ligature point and the person, if possible. Then the ligature cut from around the person's neck.
5. Cut the ligature material at the thinnest point possible, avoiding any knots to ensure the cut is made as quickly as possible. This will aid with the preservation of evidence
6. If the person is found suspended one person should cut the actual ligature while another person continues to support the person's body weight, where possible.
7. Use the Big Fish Safety knife to cut the ligature from around the neck:
8. On the rare occasion that the big fish is unable to cut through the material alternative cutters such as 'tuff cuts' should be used. These are located either in the Emergency Trolley (Airway Drawer) or the Emergency Grab Bag.
9. Hook the mouth of the knife under the material to be cut, and make the cut at right angles to the material.
10. The cut should be made at the side of the neck where the neck is softer. The knife will be more easily inserted between the skin and the ligature here (rather than at the bony back or front of the neck).



11. Always attempt CPR/life support measures.
12. After use –ensure replacement cutters are ordered through procurement process.

5.2 Risks

1. Do not cut through a live electricity cable using the Big Fish Safety Knife – disconnect/unplug this type of ligature from the power first.

5.3 Preserving Forensic Evidence

1. If the person is subsequently pronounced dead, or there are suspicious circumstances, inform the police immediately.
2. The police will treat any such death as 'unexplained' and potentially treat the area as a crime scene until proved otherwise.
3. Do not touch or disturb the area or other evidence until the police give permission (apart from essential actions required to make the area immediately safe for service users).

4. Do not cut or untie the knot of the ligature and leave the other end attached to the ligature point to preserve forensic evidence.

6 Roles & Responsibilities

61 The Lead Associate Medical Director for Mental Health has responsibility for the development, implementation and review of this guidance on behalf of the chief executive.

62 General/Service Managers will ensure that:

1. To ensure that all staff are made aware of this guidance and procedures and their responsibilities in relation to practice is communicated.
2. There is constant vigilance and observation to identify and assess potential risks.
3. Any adverse incidents or near misses, including those involving ligatures and/or the use of the Big Fish Safety knife in an inpatient or acute day setting, are reported on Datix in accordance the NHS GG&C Incident management policy and procedures and investigated accordingly.

63 The Senior Charge Nurse will:

1. Ensure the implementation of this guidance within their area of responsibility
2. Ensure that staff within their area attend training on ligatures an annual basis
3. Record who has been trained in the use of the Big Fish Safetyknife.
4. Ensure that a Big Fish Safety knife is available for use.
5. Ensure that all appropriate staff are trained in dealing with someone who is found using a ligature.
6. Ensure that all staff within their area know how to use the Big Fish Safety knife and know where they are stored.
7. Monitor the use of the Big Fish Safety knife to ensure that use is appropriate.
8. Ensure appropriate records of the use of the Big Fish Safety knife are maintained on Datix.
9. Provide information on the availability and storage of the Big Fish Safety knife as part of the annual ligature and suicide risk environmental assessment and management process.

64 All clinical staff in identified areas will:

1. Ensure that you are aware of the correct procedure to follow if you come across someone who is using a ligature.
2. Attend training in the use and safe storage of the Big Fish Safety knife
3. Report any adverse incidents or near misses, involving the Big Fish Safety knife are reported according to the NHC GGC Incident policies and procedures.

65 The Resuscitation Officer and Resuscitation trainers will:

1. Provide 'train the trainers' sessions to ensure at least one person from each area can deliver training in the safe and effective practice when dealing with people who have used a ligature and the proper use of the Big Fish Safety knife to cut ligatures.
2. Ensure that safe and effective use of the Big Fish Safety knife to cut ligatures is incorporated into future training for inpatient staff.
3. Provide an annual update for trainers.
4. Provide specialist advice and support to staff via an NHS GGC Intranet page
5. Be responsible for demonstrating use of the Big Fish Safety knife to all staff in ward/department including existing, temporary and new staff this will be delivered via the medical emergency and basic life support training program within Mental Health & Associated Services.

7. The Procurement of Big Fish Safety Knives as a Ligature Cutter

1. Every NHS GG&C area covered within the scope of this guidance should purchase this tool via the Procurement system.
2. It is not considered mandatory for community teams to purchase a Big Fish Safety knife but may do so based on local clinical risk assessment and access training through Resuscitation Officers.
3. To order a Big Fish Safety knife an indent must be raised through the indent system using a non-stock purchase requisition with the supplier being – **Safety Knife Co. Ltd, Olympus park, Quedgeley, Gloucestershire, GL2 4NF.** Please use the following description - Big Fish Safety Knife (ligature cutter) no hook blade/rescue version in size 9mm with instruction on who and where to deliver too also in the description section.

8. Safe Secure Storage

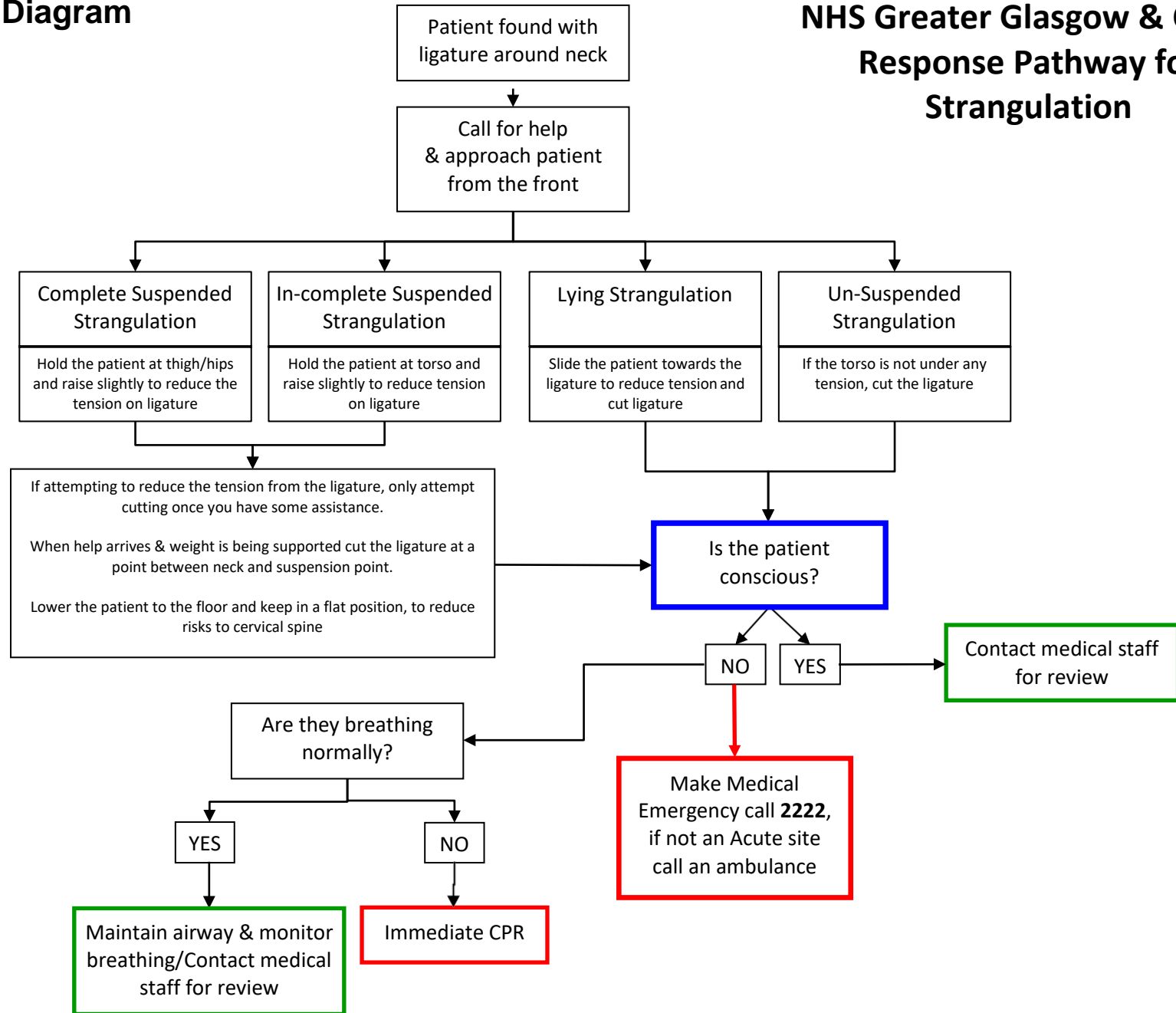
1. The Big Fish Safety knife should be stored in a safe place, but should also be accessible to all staff. Where practical the knife should be stored in close proximity to any resuscitation equipment.
2. Because the Big Fish Safety knife could potentially be used as a weapon or to self-harm it must be stored safely and securely where it cannot be accessed by service users
3. A sign to indicate the location of the knife should be displayed for staff.(Appendix 3)
4. Following the use of the Big Fish Safety knife, a Datix must be completed. The Resuscitation Officer is informed of any 2222 incidents and will visit your ward/area to remove the used knife. Ordering of another knife should be through the procurement as advised in section 7. Do not attempt to open or dismantle the knife.

9. References

<https://youtu.be/BLnblbWppcw>

Appendix 1 - Flow Diagram

NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde Response Pathway for Strangulation



Appendix 2

Self Harm Control Checklist (Environmental)

This document is designed to assist local managers and staff to identify and assess the environmental features of their wards and departments which may be used by patients to harm themselves including acts of suicide or attempted suicide. The checklist should be used in conjunction with local self harm risk assessment based upon the Generic Risk Assessment – Self Harm.

The Check list is not exhaustive and local managers and staff must only see this as an aid memoire and feel confident in amending the document to suit their particular ward /department.

SITE	
WARD / DEPARTMENT	
DATE:	
ASSESSOR(S):	
REVIEW DATE:	

<u>Toilet Areas Including Shower Rooms And Bathrooms And Disabled Toilets</u>	YES/NO	<i>Current assessed level of risk</i>			N/A	Action Necessary	Date Completed
		(H)igh	(M)edium	(L)ow			
Are Window restrictors fitted to all windows		H	M	L			
Does the style or installation of the window restrictors create a ligature risk		H	M	L			
Are Stopcocks & cistern pipes / exposed pipe work boxed in		H	M	L			
Are Towel rails/hand towel holders /soap dispensers Toilet roll holder Shower units (tracks/fixtures), bins of a know design to minimise self harm risk		H	M	L			
Are Ventilation grills (accessible/detachable)		H	M	L			
Are Emergency and/or Light pull cords of a known design to minimise ligature risk		H	M	L			
Are Coat hooks catches (fixed/plastic) present		H	M	L			
Are Mirrors made of safety glass or similar material		H	M	L			
Is there a False ceiling which is readily accessible		H	M	L			
Is any equipment, furniture added to the room or stored there which may therefore impact on self harm risk.		H	M	L			
Other(s) (specify)		H	M	L			
Bed Areas							
Does the type/style of bed or bed head introduce a ligature or other self harm risk							
Is all furniture fire retardant and marked as same							
Are Window restrictors fitted to all windows		H	M	L			
Does the style or installation of the window restrictors create a ligature risk		H	M	L			
Are Curtain tracks of a known design to minimise self harm risk		H	M	L			
Are Window Blind Cords of a known design to minimise ligature risk		H	M	L			

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Is all furniture present of a design and standard accepted by NHS GGC as minimising any self harm risk		H	M	L		
Are Coat hooks catches (fixed/plastic) present		H	M	L		
Is all cabling and pipe work enclosed		H	M	L		
Are Emergency and Nurse call system /or Light pull cords present and if so are of a known design to minimise ligature risk		H	M	L		
Are all Personal items , electrical items, clothing etc considered safe to have in terms of self harm risk		H	M	L		
Are Ventilation grills (accessible/detachable)		H	M	L		
Are Mirrors made of safety glass or similar material		H	M	L		
Is there a False ceiling which is readily accessible		H	M	L		
Are Doors of a design that allows ease of access for staff		H	M	L		
Other(s) (specify) e.g.		H	M	L		
Bins & Bin liners		H	M	L		
Bed lights		H	M	L		
		H	M	L		
<u>(General Access) Other Rooms / Communal Areas Including Kitchen Areas</u>						
Are any Access hatches secure		H	M	L		
Is there a False ceiling which is readily accessible		H	M	L		
Are Window restrictors fitted to all windows		H	M	L		
Are Curtain tracks of a known design to minimise self harm risk		H	M	L		
Clothes poles		H	M	L		
Is all cabling and pipe work enclosed		H	M	L		
Is access to Cutlery managed		H	M	L		

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Is all furniture present of a design and standard accepted by NHS GGC as minimising any self harm risk		H	M	L		
Are Doors and ironmongery of a design that minimises the risk of self harm and does not restrict access to the area by staff		H	M	L		
Isolation		H	M	L		
Stairwells		H	M	L		
Are Electrical goods/ cables present		H	M	L		
Other(s) (specify) e.g. bin liners, waste bin sack holders plastic waste bags storage.		H	M	L		
Is access to DSR and storage of harmful substances, antichlor, titan. Alcohol gel, secure		H	M	L		

<u>General (Policies & Procedures)</u>	<i>Applicable (Y/N)</i>	<i>Shared with staff (Y/N)</i>	N/A	Action Necessary	Date Completed
Risk Assessment for suicide risks					
Health and Safety Management Manual Quarterly Workplace Checklist					
Protocols/procedures for emergency response					
Suicide risk policy, big fish policy					
Incident Management Policy (including reporting of incidents)					
Other(s)					

Appendix 3 Big Fish Safety Knife poster



Ligature cutter
poster.docx