

Have you lost someone to suicide? We are here to stand by you

When a loved one is lost to injury or illness, family and friends generally rally around to provide support. However, following suicide, friends and family, and the community often do not react in the same manner. People bereaved may be left feeling isolated or ashamed due to people's insensitive or uninformed comments or lack of comment at all. When someone takes their own life, those of us left behind, the bereaved, often experience a very complicated form of grief caused by a combination of feelings, thoughts and behaviours. Many of these relate to the person not being physically in our life. Some may specifically relate to the fact that the death was by suicide.

These feelings can be particularly intense, overwhelming and far reaching, and may include:

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| deep sadness | rejection |
| anger | guilt denial |
| blaming shock | yearning |
| shame | loneliness |
| detachment alarm | regret |
| sadness | despair |
| loss of confidence disbelief | |

Thoughts of suicide may also emerge. It is important to be able to discuss all of these emotions openly and honestly in order to fully understand and process what has happened and deal with your own grief and those around you, as well as learning to live with the loss. The reality is that loss to suicide can impact on physical and mental health. You are not alone and there is help available.

How can I help myself?

If you are dealing with the suicide of a friend or loved one, it is important to find support to make sense of what has happened, deal with the grief and learn how to live with your loss.

The pain of suicide loss can't be eased quickly but there are things you can do that will help:

- Take time out — It's ok to give yourself time out from the pain you are experiencing by doing something you enjoy, even if you don't feel like doing it all the time.
- Stay connected and accept support from friends, family, and support networks. This will reduce your sense of isolation and feeling of loneliness associated with grief.
- Honour the deceased person — talk about them, keep a journal, share memories and photos. Remember the good and the bad.
- Stay healthy — eat well, hydrate, exercise, try to sleep and avoid drugs and alcohol.
- Prioritise daily tasks — only do what is essential, avoid making major decisions until you can think more clearly.
- Ask for help — talk to a counsellor/psychologist, a helpline like Lifeline, friends and family, online support groups, or a GP to find comfort, support and ways to cope.
- Join a suicide bereavement support group — sharing your experience with others who have been through similar experiences will help you realise you are not alone and you can survive.

How can you help someone bereaved?

If you know someone bereaved by suicide, you can help by:

- Contacting the person, as you would with any other death, to let them know you acknowledge the situation and care
- Listening — remember that the role of the helper is to listen, not solve
- Accepting the person and their feelings, whatever they might be and not judging
- Letting them cry
- Not asking 'why' or if there was anything that could have been done

Encouraging them to talk about the death with any children — they need help too

- Mentioning the loved one by name and trying to remember important dates (birthdays etc) for the future
- Including the bereaved person in your normal activities
- Realising that working through grief can take years and that the hurt is never forgotten
- Urging them to wait before making any major changes such as moving, giving away possessions or quitting a job
- Understanding they can't just 'get over it' but grow their lives around it
- Suggesting they join a suicide bereavement support group
- If and when appropriate, asking them if they are thinking about suicide and getting them professional help if they need it.

Supporting children impacted by suicide

Children who have lost someone to suicide need lots of help and support. Their reactions will often differ from an adult's.

- Ensure you talk to them in a safe place where there are no distractions
- It is important to be honest with children about what happened. Ensure an appropriate person talks to them as soon as it's possible to do so
- Reassure them it's not their fault
- If you are unsure about how to talk to them or how to support them, see ask a psychologist or go on Lifeline's webpage to obtain the information
- If they are not coping and you are concerned, get professional help.

If you know someone bereaved by suicide:

DON'T

- Don't ask for details
- Don't avoid talking about the person who has died

- Don't say things such as "They've gone to a better place"
- Don't say things such as "You need to move on"

DO

- Acknowledge the death as soon as you can
- Talk about the deceased and your memories with them
- Provide empathetic and non-judgemental support
- Encourage positive activities

People bereaved by suicide may experience a wide range of emotions and they need to be reassured that they are not alone. If you are currently grieving know that you are not alone, and that help is available. It is vital that, as individuals and communities we respond to people bereaved by suicide with compassion and continue to support them through their grief.