

Suicide and Grief



about grief

Grief is a universal experience. It is a human response to a loss of someone significant. It can be a very difficult experience.

Suicide bereavement

Grief in response to a suicide can be particularly intense and difficult. It can raise many questions for family and friends. Some of the experiences of bereavement might include:

- a sense of unreality, numbness, nightmares and intrusive thoughts
- feelings of guilt and failure that it was not prevented
- feelings of guilt at perceived failed responsibilities
- a sense of blame
- an unrelenting need to ask why, to try and make sense of and understand why it happened
- feelings of shame, rejection and abandonment
- anger towards the person who has suicided
- anger towards those perceived to have contributed to the suicide
- personal diminishment, that is, experiencing the suicide as a reflection of the quality of the whole relationship with the person.

What do I tell others?

Some people find it difficult to tell others about the cause of death and choose not to do so. Initially this may be easier. However, it may mean the bereaved person experiences a sense of unease and distance in their relationships with others. This may lead to a lack of support

and a sense of isolation for the bereaved person. Being as open and honest as possible is recommended.

Some things which may help

It is important not to expect too much of yourself in the early stages. You may not have the energy or motivation to live your life in the same way as before. Remind yourself that you are reacting to a devastating blow.

Some people find it helpful to realise and acknowledge that their lives will never be the same again. It has been described this way by one: "You will never be the same again, you will never get over it, but you will have a life again, you will wake up in the morning and feel good. You will start to make plans for the future. At some point, life will feel normal again; not the old normal, the new normal."

Many people who are bereaved through suicide have feelings of guilt and regret. They may feel they should have seen the suicide coming. 'If only ...' or 'I wish ...' are common thoughts. Parents may feel there was something wrong with their parenting. Brothers, sisters and partners may feel responsible particularly when there has been family stress or conflict. It is important for bereaved people to remember that *they acted with the information they had at the time*. With hindsight it is often easy to see signs of the person's distress and to criticise what was or was not done.

Support After Suicide

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Richmond VIC 3121

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aftersuicide@jss.org.au

A program of
Jesuit Social Services

Some may feel there were many things they would have liked to have said to the person but were unable to because of the suddenness of the death. They may yearn to tell them they were loved, or to settle misunderstandings. It is common to feel sadness about the unfinished, un-lived life, but it may help to recognise the person's contributions and influences during their life and to remember the time spent together.

Don't be afraid to ask for assistance. Some people will not be able to handle your grief, so find those who can. Seek out an understanding friend, family member or support group.

For some people there may be an experience of relief, particularly if there has been a period of difficulty leading up to the death.

In a family, it is important to communicate with one another while at the same time having respect for each other's way of handling the experience.

How can I support someone?

Those in the community sometimes feel unable to provide adequate support to those bereaved by suicide. They may struggle to know what to say or do. They may feel awkward or stay away leaving the bereaved feeling angry and isolated.

Any grief can be difficult to respond to and discuss and the stigma still attached to suicide makes this even harder.

What we have learned from bereaved people is that they need compassion, recognition and validation of their experience. In summary:

- non judgemental support
- an opportunity to tell the story, sometimes over and over again
- a safe and supportive environment
- to be listened to and heard
- to express their grief in their own way.

Support

Telephone counselling

- Griefline—12pm-3am—9596 7799

- Suicide Helpline—24 hours—1300 651 251
- Lifeline—24 hours—13 11 14
- Parent Help Line 1300 30 1300
- Kids Helpline—15-18 years of age
1800 55 1800

Counselling and Support Services

- Bereavement Counselling and Support Service 9265 2111
- The Compassionate Friends 9888 4944
- Mercy Western Grief Services 9364 9838
- National Association for Loss & Grief (NALAG) 9650 3000 – for accredited counselling and list of support groups
- Local Community Health Centre
- State Coroner's Office Counselling 9684 4395

Support groups

- Bereavement Counselling and Support Service 9265 2111
- Mental Illness Fellowship 0413 472 869
- Spring—Cheltenham 9553 1000
- The Compassionate Friends 9888 4944
- Survivors of Suicide—Cranbourne 5991 1759

Suggested reading

- *The Suicidal Mind*, Edwin Shneidman, Oxford University Press, 1996
- *Cry of Pain*, Mark Williams, Penguin Books, 1997
- *After Suicide: Help for the Bereaved*, Sheila Clark, 1998.
- *Healing After the Suicide of a Loved One*, Simolin and Quinan, 1993.
- *After Suicide: a ray of hope for those left behind*, Eleanora Ross, 2001.
- *No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving the suicide of a loved one*, Carla Fine, 2000.
- Coroner's Court Information Pack 9684 4395
- *Care and Support Pack: Coping with Grief After Suicide*, NSW Health Dept (02) 9816 0452

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Web sites

- Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement www.grief.org.au
- GriefLink www.grieflink.asn.au
- NALAG www.nalagvic.org.au
- Coroner's Court coronerscourt.vic.gov.au