

Have you lost someone to suicide?

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Have you lost someone to suicide? Do you know someone that has lost someone to suicide? Grief is a normal response to losing someone important to us. When someone dies by suicide, those bereaved often experience a very complicated form of grief caused by a combination of sudden shock, unanswered questions of ‘Why?’ and feelings of ‘What could I have done?’

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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 shamed due to people’s insensitive or uninformed comments or lack of comment at all.

When someone takes their own life, those 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 no longer physically being in our life however some may relate to the fact that the death was by suicide. These feelings may be particularly intense, overwhelming and far reaching, and can include: deep sadness, shock, alarm, disbelief, denial, regret, anger, shame, sadness, rejection, yearning, despair, blaming, detachment, loss of confidence and guilt. It is important to be able to discuss all of those 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.



Suicide loss can impact on physical and mental health. You are not alone and there is help available.

You may be experiencing:

- shock, numbness, denial
- searching for reasons ‘why?’
- guilt
- anger/blame
- despair
- listlessness
- stigma and shame
- loneliness/disconnection
- depression
- thoughts of suicide.

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, 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.

If you are thinking about suicide get help immediately.

Call
Lifeline on
13 11 14
if you need
to talk

How can you help someone bereaved?

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

- **Contact the person**, as you would with any other death, to let them know you acknowledge the situation and care
- **Listening** — 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 a psychologist
- If they are not coping and you are concerned, get professional help

Where to go for support?

- **Contact Lifeline:** 13 11 14 (available 24/7) or Online Crisis Support Chat (available nightly at www.lifeline.org.au)
- **Suicide Call Back Service** (24/7) that provides 50 minutes of counselling — 1300 659 467.
- **Salvation Army Hope for Life hotline** (24/7) — 1300 467 354.
- **headspace at www.headspace.org.au** — Mental Health support and information for young people aged 12–25.
- **ARBOR Suicide Bereavement Service** (WA only) has grief counsellors and volunteer peer support workers with a lived experience of suicide.
- **Apps for smartphones** — including relaxation, information and mood monitors.

Visit the Lifeline Service Seeker Directory at www.lifeline.serviceseeker.com.au to search for local services and centres in your area including standby 24/7 crisis response services for those bereaved by suicide.



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.



Phone 13 11 14 | www.lifeline.org.au

Call Lifeline on 13 11 14 (available 24/7) if you are feeling suicidal or in crisis or visit www.lifeline.org.au to connect online with our Crisis Support Chat (available nightly), find a range of other useful factsheets and to find local services in your area.

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