

What is Suicide Bereavement?

Suicide Bereavement is the deep sadness and mourning that often occurs after the loss of a loved one to suicide. While grief is a normal response to losing someone important to us, when someone dies by suicide we may experience many complex feelings, thoughts and behaviours.

Many of these relate to the person no longer physically being in our life. Some relate to the fact that the death was by suicide; these feelings can be particularly intense, overwhelming and far-reaching.

For every suicide there are often many family members, friends and colleagues who are affected. While individuals work through their personal anguish differently, some aspects of suicide bereavement are common due to the stigma often associated with suicide.

Suicide loss can affect your physical and mental health and sometimes includes dealing with thoughts of suicide. 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.

How does suicide bereavement affect us?

Some common experiences of grief following suicide loss may include:

- Shock, numbness and denial.
- Searching for a reason for the suicide, asking “Why?”
- Guilt, responsibility for not preventing the suicide, and sometimes relief.
- Anger and blame.
- Stigma and shame, that you or other people will think negatively of the bereaved family and friends.
- Loneliness, social isolation and disconnection.
- Difficulty trusting others, feeling abandoned and rejected - family relationships are often affected.
- Depression and heightened suicide risk.
- Coming to accept that the loss will be a permanent part of your life (we can't just 'get over it' but grow our life around it).

What helps?

Although the pain of suicide loss cannot be eased quickly, there are things that can help:

- Take 'time out' for enjoyable activities - allow yourself time out from the pain you're experiencing.
- Stay connected to your loved ones and to those supportive people around you.
- Find ways to honour the life of the person who has died e.g. assemble a memory box, photo album, keep a journal, share memories and talk about their life.
- Allow people to help you; don't be embarrassed to accept their help. Sharing with other people can reduce the sense of isolation and aloneness that comes with grief.
- Stay healthy – eat healthy meals, exercise regularly, get a good night's sleep, avoid drugs and keep alcohol to a minimum.
- Prioritise daily tasks, do only what is essential; be kind to yourself.
- Consider joining a support group to share with others who have had similar experiences. This will help you realise that you are not alone in your experience and that you will survive.
- Take opportunities to join in public ceremonies where you can be private, yet part of a larger group. Use rituals and customs that are meaningful to you.
- Talk with a counsellor/psychologist to focus on your unique situation, to find support and comfort, and to find other ways to manage and cope.

Additional Resource:

Suicide Bereavement Resources in each State & Territory:
www.livingisforeveryone.com.au/Library.html



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Find out more

Call Lifeline – **13 11 14** if you need to speak to someone about suicide bereavement. Lifeline can also connect you with information about helpful services in your area. Visit **www.lifeline.org.au** to find a range of useful resources relating to suicide bereavement.