

SUICIDE BEREAVEMENT RESOURCE MANUAL

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**“Suicide carries
in its aftermath a
level of confusion &
devastation that is,
for the most part,
beyond description.”**

Kay Redfield Jamison

Suicide Bereavement

In the weeks, months and years after the suicide of a loved one, family and friends often ride a rollercoaster of emotions including intense grief, guilt, confusion, anger, disbelief and despair. The grieving process takes time and affects everyone differently. You might feel a mixture of emotions at any one time. It may feel as though the suicide of a loved one is too much to bear. There is stigma (inaccurate and unhelpful attitudes and beliefs) attached to suicide in our society and you will probably find that many people don't know what to say. This can sometimes result in not receiving the help and support that is needed. However, there is support available for people bereaved by suicide.

Initial Steps to Healing

- Many people feel shock or numbness after a suicide. This is the body's natural way of managing this overwhelming news. There may be a feeling of disbelief, great distress or very little at all as the reality sinks in. Allow time to help the healing process. These are some steps that may be helpful.
- Allow time to grieve- let family and friends know how you are feeling and contact a health professional to support you.
- Take care of yourself- eat healthy food, exercise and try to sleep as much as possible. It's ok to do things you enjoy during this time, even if you don't feel like doing them. Avoid stimulants such as alcohol and drugs to try and numb the pain. You will return to your normal routine in time, and when you are ready.
- Let other people help- most people have difficulty in finding words to express after a suicide. They want to help but don't know what to do. Talk to them about your feelings and allow them to share their feelings with you.
- Take time before making decisions- there is no set time when you should "move on", so allow yourself time and try not to put pressure on yourself by making major decisions.
- Allow time to heal- it is normal to feel guilt after someone passes away by suicide. Allow yourself to say good bye and let go when you're ready. There is no reason to feel guilty about moving on and returning to your normal life

- Believe in yourself- know your limits but believe that you will find strength to cope with your loss and return to your normal life.
- Expect that you will feel sad-there will be times when you will feel sad, particularly those times that remind you of the person, whether a birthday, anniversary, holidays, a song or photos. Try to prepare for these events and allow yourself time to remember and reflect.

Grief Counselling

Grief counselling allows you to talk about the person who has died, the suicide itself, what it means for you, and how you will cope in the future. You can explore the feelings you have and come to understand, accept or change them.

During the first few weeks or months after a suicide, you may find that your family and friends are all that you need. However, many people find that support falls away after a while, leaving them to deal with the longer-term grieving process alone. You may find that family members and friends cannot cope with talking about the suicide over and over again, even though it is perfectly normal and common for those who were close to the person to want to do so. This is when counselling can be helpful.

If you find that you are overwhelmed with grief and pain, it is beneficial to contact a professional who will be able to help you understand and manage your grief.

It may be necessary to identify the person who has passed away.

The Department of Forensic Medicine in Glebe provide grief counsellors to anyone affected by a death being investigated by the Coroner. The grief counsellors can assist and support you during this process and they may also be able to provide longer-term counselling and support groups.

The Department of Forensic Medicine Counselling (Glebe),
Tel (02) 8584 7800

Helping Someone Who Is Grieving

It is not always easy to support someone who has lost a loved one by suicide. Let them know that you care and are there for them, but don't try to assume the role of a counsellor. If the person is overwhelmed by grief, not coping, or showing signs of emotional, physical or mental distress, it may be necessary to refer them to a professional for help.

Listen to the person and allow them to tell you how they are feeling, and to reminisce about the person. They may be feeling guilt and helplessness. Allow them time to share this and let them know you are there for them.

Try to maintain contact with them on a regular basis. Often times a grieving person loses the support of friends and other loved ones shortly after a suicide. Grief takes a long time to process, and a phone call, a hot meal brought to them, and kind gestures let them know that they are not alone and someone still cares.

Where to Find Help

If you or a person you are supporting are overwhelmed by grief and require professional help, it is always a good place to start by speaking to your GP. They will be able to determine if you need further help and who you should see.

A psychologist can help with counselling and other matters that may be related to the suicide and relationship.

Grief counsellors and organisations offer support groups, counselling, and activities to assist children and adults through the grieving process.

Where do I go for help?

The WayAhead Directory

is an online resource providing a comprehensive list of mental health related services in NSW.

www.WayAhead.org.au

WayAhead Mental Health Information Line

1300 794 991

Support Services

The National Association for Loss and Grief (NALAG)

Provides telephone grief support, awareness and education in the area of grief, trauma, loss and bereavement. Also can refer you to a grief counsellor in your area: Tel (02) 9489 6644 (NSW) weekdays 9am-2pm and 6pm-11pm, or www.nalag.org.au

The Bereavement Care Centre (Eastwood) Offers counselling for adults and children experiencing grief: Tel 1300 654 556, or bereavementcare.com.au

Lifeline 13 11 14 provides support groups and counselling for people who are bereaved by suicide.

Northern Beaches Suicide Bereavement Support
02 9949 5522



Translating & Interpreting Service
(TIS) 131 450

Please call the Mental Health Information Line through the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS). Free to Australian citizens or permanent residents.

Bereaved by Suicide Centre for Intensive Grief Therapy (North Shore) Provides counselling and group programs (Heartbeat of Hope) regarding bereavement by suicide. Also has resources for sale including “Red Chocolate Elephants”—a resource book for children bereaved by suicide. Tel 0414 721 653, or bereavedbysuicide.com.au

Calvary Bereavement Counselling Service Kogarah Provides grief counselling for children and adults in the St George/Sutherland area who have experienced a death of a significant other. Occasional support groups held. Tel (02) 9553 3025

The Cottage Counselling Centre Offers grief counselling in the Narrabeen area. Charges apply according to income.
Tel (02) 9972 0141

Suicide Call Back Service provides support for people bereaved by suicide. It offers 6 sessions for 50 minutes each, by phone. 1300 659 467

Support Groups

Support groups enable people who have been affected by suicide to get together on a regular basis to offer each other support and companionship. They can be excellent sources of understanding and coping strategies

Disclaimer

This information is for educational purposes. As neither brochures nor websites can diagnose people it is always important to obtain professional advice and/or help when needed.

This information may be reproduced with an acknowledgement to the Mental Health Association NSW.

The Association encourages feedback and welcomes comments about the information provided.

Last reviewed by Jamie Saltoon 2018

**“ I found people who
understood exactly what I
was going through ”**



