

# When someone you know dies by suicide

Losing someone close to us can be painful. Losing someone by suicide can be particularly challenging due to the unexpectedness of the death and the negative end-of-life experience. Suicide is often perceived as preventable, which makes it difficult to comprehend. Issues such as stigma and shame can further complicate the natural grief process.

In response to suicide, people may experience shock, disbelief, confusion and profound sorrow. Some people may struggle with guilt and self-blame. It is common to have unanswered questions about what happened and why.

## Common responses to another person's suicide

People respond to suicide in a range of ways. For some, it is a deeply traumatic experience.

Some typical grief reactions include:

- Intense feelings of sadness, anger, anxiety, disbelief, panic, irritability or numbness
- Feelings of failure
- Physical symptoms such as headaches, nausea or aches and pain
- Difficulties with concentration and focus
- Poor sleep
- Reduced appetite
- Withdrawing from others socially
- Not enjoying your usual activities or hobbies
- Increased drug or alcohol use
- Nightmares or intrusive thoughts
- Preoccupation with thoughts of the person who died, trying to make sense of the loss

Grief can be overwhelming and debilitating, especially immediately after the event. Grief generally lessens over time as you are able to process what has happened and find meaning in the loss. The grief process is about coming to terms with what has changed in your life.

Grief is experienced in different ways by different people. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. This process takes time and there is no standard timeline to follow.

Grief is a dynamic and highly individualised process. Grief tends to come in waves. Some people may seem unaffected. Most people find ways to live a full life in spite of grief.

## How to support those around you

Those affected by suicide may need some time and space to process their loss. They may be grappling with intense emotions that come and go.

To support others, you can:

- Acknowledge their loss
- Normalise their experience of grief
- Offer practical support (e.g., cooking, cleaning, child minding)
- Check-in with them regularly
- Provide a safe, non-judgmental and supportive environment
- Be there to listen to their stories and memories about their loved one
- Encourage social interaction and participation in enjoyable activities (e.g., hobbies, sports)
- Consider cultural differences as this can affect how people respond to suicide
- Look out for signs that they are not coping

## When to consider accessing your own support

You should seek professional support if:

- Your grief is overwhelmingly severe or persistent
- You are experiencing thoughts of suicide or self-harm
- Your usual coping strategies are not helping

