

## IS SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU BEREAVED BY SUICIDE?

### QUICK FACTS

When someone takes their own life, family and friends can experience intense grief. This understandably affects how people are able to cope. Friends and colleagues who acknowledge this grief, listen, and offer support can make a big difference in helping people learn to deal with the loss.

When the person who died had a mental illness, family and friends often experience additional grief. It is common for people to feel confused, guilty, or even a sense of relief that the person is no longer suffering. They may also feel angry and disappointed that services have let them down. Because of stigma, they may feel they can't talk about either the mental illness or suicide, adding to feelings of isolation.

Grief may also be experienced when a friend or family member is missing for a long time, but with the additional stress of not knowing if the person will return. If you know the family or a friend of someone missing long-term, the information in this factsheet could help you to support them.

**Related:** [Supporting someone having thoughts of suicide](#)

### COMMON RESPONSES WHEN SOMEONE IS BEREAVED

#### **'I don't know what to say'**

If you're not sure what to say, ask 'How are you feeling today?' Tell the person you're not sure what to say. Being honest will help to build trust.

Try to listen 80% of the time and talk 20% of the time.

Avoid making unhelpful statements such as 'it's God's will' or 'things happen for a reason.'

#### **'I don't want to make it worse for them'**

The person might cry or not cry. One isn't necessarily better than the other.

By allowing the person to express their grief, you will be helping. Nothing you do can take away the sadness, but it is important to be there for them.

The way the person expresses grief may be different from the way you would express it. Don't take anger personally.

### **'They have lots of family and friends around — they don't need me'**

People with lots of friends and family still need support from others. It's important to have grief acknowledged by friends and colleagues so the person doesn't begin to feel isolated.

### **'There is nothing I can do — they need help from a professional'**

You can do things that a professional person can't, like going for walks, cooking a meal, remembering the birthday and anniversaries of the person who died, or just being there.

### **'I'm not sure what to say about the mental illness'**

Ask the bereaved person how they feel about this. Reassure them you're happy to talk about mental illness if they want. Find out some information so you know something of what the person may have been experiencing. Be compassionate and understanding about difficulties the illness may have caused in their relationship, and encourage them to talk to a bereavement counsellor if they are not coping or do not feel they can talk to anyone else.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

- Be compassionate — show care and concern and allow the person to talk about their loss.
- Listen and be patient. Grief lasts longer than a few weeks or months.
- Talk naturally about the person who has died and don't be afraid to speak their name.
- Let them know that it's natural to be feeling the way they are.
- Offer practical support, like cooking a meal, dropping the kids at school or allowing flexible working hours.
- Suggest activities that you know they enjoy. They might not feel ready to participate, but it's important to offer.
- Help make appointments and arrange to get them there.
- Find out about support services, and help with making calls and searching for information online.

**Related:** [Has someone close to you with a mental illness gone missing?](#), [Has someone close to you died by suicide?](#)

## **WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT**

- Talking to others who have been through a similar experience can be a great help. There are support groups for the bereaved in each state. Contact the services listed below for more information.
- The internet can be a good way to access information and support, particularly if the person feels too upset to see people face-to-face or travel. Use authoritative websites like the ones listed below.

- If you feel the person isn't coping, encourage them to talk to a health professional such as a GP, grief counsellor or someone at their community health service. Although grief is natural, sometimes it is too difficult to deal with and may trigger other health problems.
- Children who are bereaved may need special support to help them cope. For more information contact [Kids Helpline](#) on 1800 551 800.

## **LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF**

Be prepared for possible emotional effects you may feel when supporting a bereaved person, including:

- greater awareness of your own losses in the past
- worry about your own possible losses in the future
- anxiety about your own mortality

It is important to look after yourself and be aware of how supporting a friend or colleague may affect you. Talk to a trusted friend or seek help from a health professional if you find you are not coping.

**Related:** [Self-care after someone discloses suicidal thoughts](#), [Bereavement](#), [missing persons and suicide](#)