

Guide To Supporting Someone Bereaved By Suicide

It can be difficult to know what to say or how to support someone who is bereaved by suicide, but that doesn't mean we should ignore the situation. Though you cannot make the pain go away, providing support is key to helping that person recover. Many people bereaved by suicide feel isolated due to social stigma and may find it difficult to reach out for help.



Talking About Their Loss

Don't avoid making contact because you are unsure what to say or you are worried about upsetting them, sometimes avoiding a conversation, or not acknowledging what has happened can make them feel even more isolated.

- Acknowledge their loss. Talking directly can be important to show you are not afraid to be talking to them about the loss they have experienced. Keep it simple too, such as "I'm sorry to hear about your loss, I'm here if you want to talk to someone".
- Don't try to rationalise their feelings. We naturally want to lessen the hurt that person is experiencing, but letting them talk through how they feel is important.
- Grief is not a problem to be solved, but a process to be lived through, so be present and listen to understand, rather than listen to respond.
- Focus on the loss of the person, rather than how they died. Many people will find it hard to talk about what has happened, so don't ask questions around the details of the death, just focus on how that person is feeling.
- Be prepared. The individual may be experiencing an array of emotions all at once and may find it hard to communicate. Be aware of this and be understanding and non-judgemental towards their emotions, thoughts and behaviours.
- Be patient, go at the individual's own pace and be guided by them.



Language and The Impact of What We Say

The words we use when communicating about suicide are important for breaking down stigma and positively supporting someone. We may have been through a similar situation which can be comforting, but be mindful to not minimise the impact of their loss.

- Be aware of your language and don't say "committed suicide" as this has the connotation of criminality. Instead use, "took their own life" or "died by suicide".
- Avoid phrases such as "I know how you feel", "you'll move on from this", "at least you have other children" or "you'll meet someone else". They are often well intended but can be very upsetting to hear.
- Use supportive phrases such as "I'm sorry you are going through this, I'm thinking about you" or "I can't imagine how painful this must be for you, but I am here to listen or help if you need me".



Practical Support

In addition to listening and talking to the bereaved individual, here are some other ways you can be supportive.

- Ask what you can do to help or what they need from you, if anything. It can be helpful to offer specific support such as babysitting, making a meal, shopping, cleaning, or other routine tasks which may be neglected when grieving. It may also be things within the workplace, such as helping out with a task or taking on a meeting for them.
- If appropriate, you may support them by attending the funeral, supporting during the inquest, or helping with other arrangements.
- When and where appropriate, share positive memories as this can be comforting.
- Be mindful that key dates such as anniversaries, holidays and celebrations can come with mixed emotions. Reach out before and after these events to check in with them and see if they need any additional support.
- Remember that the grieving process is often long and complex so don't stop supporting them as time passes. Your support may be needed less often but continual support can go a long way.

Further Support

There may be times when the support an individual needs outweighs our skills, and professional intervention is needed. When this is the case, it is important that we remember our boundaries and responsibilities and then signpost to more appropriate help.

- Be aware that grief can be a long process and will come with many emotions, but always look out for signs of depression, anxiety and other mental ill-health and encourage them to seek help from a professional such as a GP.
- Suggest some support services which may help them process their loss. Although we cannot force someone to take up this support, letting them know the possibilities can be a great first step.

Early Warning Signs

Someone bereaved by suicide is 65% more likely to make an attempt on their own life¹, so it is not uncommon that those bereaved may experience depression, feel confused, angry or disconnected from others. If the intensity of these emotions does not ease in time, professional support may be required. But what do we need to look out for?

- Extreme focus on the death of their loved one, friend, or colleague
- Persistent anger, frustration, or guilt
- Not coming to work, frequently being late or the opposite and spending more time at work, or working longer hours than usual
- Inability to enjoy life or activities
- Neglecting themselves
- Lack of concern for their own welfare or engaging in risk taking behaviours
- Use of alcohol and/or drugs
- Changes in mood
- Withdrawal from others
- Having or expressing suicidal thoughts, including those such as, “I cannot go on like this anymore” or wanting to be with their loved one who has passed

If you are concerned about someone and their safety, seek professional support right away. This Everymind at Work poster contains useful information on how to support someone: [‘Crisis Intervention’](#). If the risk is immediate, call 999 and stay with them until they can seek medical assistance.

¹ Source: University College London (2016). 1 in 10 suicide attempt risk among friends and relatives of people who die by suicide



Signposting

Postvention is about supporting an individual bereaved by suicide and there are organisations that are equipped to help with this specific topic. Here are some, alongside the [Everymind at Work Mental Health Support Directory](#), that you may find useful.

- [Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide \(SOBS\)](#)
- [Cruse Bereavement Care](#)
- [Suicide and Co](#)
- [Samaritans and Cruse Bereavement Care Support Groups –Facing the Future](#)