

Grief Guide

What happens next and
what you can do

Section 1

Grief after suicide



Grief after suicide

You have just been told that you have lost someone – what now?

Losing someone you love unexpectedly, especially through suicide, is very painful. Many people will be involved, and it can feel confusing. You might feel numb, shocked, or unable to think clearly. That is normal.

This guide explains what may happen next and what you can do.

What happens in the first two days (48 hours)

- **Police will visit:**

In any sudden death, the police must be informed. They may not always wear their uniform, but they will ask questions to understand what happened. They may also speak to other family or friends in the days ahead.

- **Your loved one is taken for examination:**

The body is usually taken to a medical centre for checks (called a forensic examination). This is to help understand the cause of death.

- **The coroner will be involved:**

Someone from the Coroner's office may contact the family to confirm who is the next of kin (closest living relative). This person will be involved in decisions moving forward.

What you can do

- **You don't have to do this alone:**

Share the news with someone you trust—a family elder, close friend, or spiritual leader. They can help you take notes, answer questions, and support you in making important decisions.

- **If you don't want an autopsy:**

An **autopsy** is a detailed medical examination of a body after death to determine the cause of death and to evaluate any disease or injury that may be present.

Autopsies can be ordered for many reasons, such as:

Medical clarification (to understand disease progression)

- Legal investigations (if foul play, accident, or suicide is suspected)
- Public health reasons (to study new diseases or public health threats)

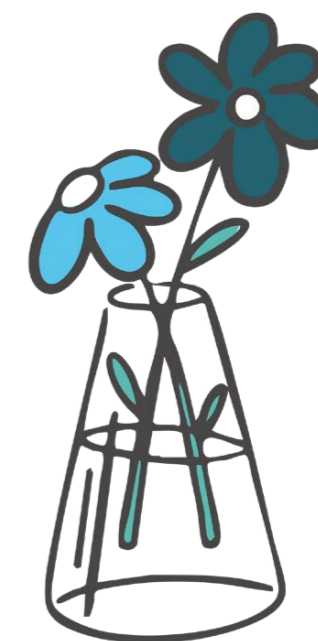
In some cases, families may wish to stop an autopsy (post-mortem). If that's what you want, speak to the coroner's team as soon as they call, or contact the Coronial Admissions and Enquiries line right away.

For immediate support, reach out to:

- Community Elders or Chiefs
- Faith or Spiritual Leaders (Pastors, Imams, Priests)
- Trusted Family Friends or Extended Family
- Local Recovery or Counselling Services (e.g., NAS Recovery, Pola psychology, Afri-Aus Care)

What could you do next

- You may be asked to make a formal statement to help the coroner understand the nature and cause of death.
- You may have to start informing people of your loved one's death. This can be very difficult and you may not know what to say.
- You may wish to visit the site where your loved one died.
- You might start thinking about a funeral or ceremony for your loved one.
- You may need to start thinking about their finances and their will (if they had one).



The first month and beyond

Getting a death certificate

A death certificate is an official record of your loved one's passing. Usually, a funeral director or medical practitioner will register your loved one's death.

Administering the will

In Australia, a will is a legal document where the deceased has declared how they want their money, property, and possessions (their estate) to be distributed after they die. A will can also appoint guardians for children and name an executor, the person responsible for carrying out the instructions in the will.

After someone dies, here's how the will is usually managed:

1. Locating the will:

The first step is to find the original will. It might be kept at the person's home, with their lawyer, or in a safe deposit box.

2. Executor applies for probate:

The executor usually needs to apply for a legal process called **probate**. Probate is a court order from the **Supreme Court** (in each state or territory) confirming that the will is valid and giving the executor the authority to manage the estate.

3. Paying debts and taxes:

Before distributing assets, the executor must settle any debts the deceased owed (like mortgages, loans, or taxes).

4. Distributing the estate:

Once debts are paid, the executor distributes the remaining assets to the beneficiaries named in the will according to the deceased's instructions.

5. Finalizing the estate:

After everything has been distributed and all obligations are settled, the estate is considered finalised.

The completion of this process can take up to 2 years, if it is not a complicated will.

What if there is no will

If someone dies without a will (called **intestate**), the law in their state or territory decides how the estate is divided, usually among close family members, following a strict legal formula.

This can take a long time and be very expensive. The easiest way to ensure that there is no tension about the division of the estate, is to ensure that there is a will that specifically states what a person would like to happen with the estate, after their death.

Special section: how to get a will

Decide what you want to include

Think about:

- Who you want to leave your assets (money, property, possessions) to.
- Who you want to be your executor (the person who will carry out the instructions in your will).
- Any specific gifts (e.g., jewellery, a car, donations to charities).

6. Write the will

You have a few options:

- DIY kits: Available online or from newsagents, cheap but risky if you make mistakes.
- Online services: Many Australian websites offer guided will-making for a fee.
- Solicitor or Public Trustee: If your situation is complicated (e.g., blended family, large estate, trusts), it's safest to use a solicitor or your state's Public Trustee office.

7. Follow the legal requirements

For a will to be legally valid in Australia:

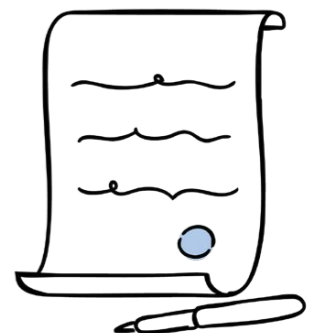
- It must be in writing (handwritten, typed, or printed).
- You must sign it at the bottom of the will.
- Your signature must be witnessed by two people:
 - Witnesses must be over 18 years old.
 - They should not be beneficiaries (people who will inherit something) – otherwise their gift could be challenged.
- The witnesses must sign the will in your presence.

8. Store the will safely

- Keep the original in a safe place (e.g., with your lawyer, in a fireproof safe).
- Tell your executor where the will is stored.

9. Update when necessary

- You should review and update your will after major life events like marriage, divorce, having children, or big changes to your assets.



Collecting your loved one's belongings

After someone dies, the police usually take care of their personal belongings. If their clothes or shoes were badly damaged, they may be thrown away. You can contact the police or the Coroner's Office to ask what happened to their things and find out if you can collect any remaining items. Sometimes, the coroner may need to keep the items until the investigation is finished.

Telling others about the death

How you share the news will depend on your community, culture, and family traditions. In many African communities, elders or trusted family members help to spread the word.

It can be hard to tell people that your loved one has died, especially when the death was sudden or painful. Here are some ideas that may help:

- Make a list of people you need to inform. Ask someone you trust to help you tell them.
- Write down a simple version of what happened, so it's easier to say the same thing each time.
- If it's too hard to speak to people directly, you can ask a trusted person to help share the news with those who need to hear it.
- Be careful with what you share online. You don't have to give too many details – especially if suicide is involved.
- Focus on telling close family, friends, or their employer first. You don't have to tell everyone at once. Take your time and share only what you feel ready to share.

Informing employers, banks, and other companies

You'll need to let your loved one's workplace and bank know that they have passed away. In most cases, you may need a certified copy of the death certificate to close accounts or stop services in their name.

Stopping their mail

If your loved one is still getting letters or mail, it can be painful to see. In some countries, like Australia, there is a service to reduce mail addressed to someone who has died. In your country, you may be able to visit the local post office or ask someone to help you stop or redirect the mail.

Social media and online accounts



Many people now have social media pages like Facebook or Instagram. You can use their page to let people know about the death or to share funeral details.



Some platforms allow you to "memorialise" the account, which means:

- No one can log in anymore
- The account stays online to remember the person
- The word "Remembering" may appear on the profile



To do this, visit the social media website. You might be asked to upload some proof, like a death certificate.



Cultural considerations to be aware of

Funerals are not just about saying goodbye—they are deeply tied to our culture, spiritual beliefs, and the way we honour our ancestors. It is important to show respect and support the family of the person who has passed away by following local customs.

Knowing the funeral plans and traditions

- Talking with the right people: Make sure the family, elders, and community leaders are all informed about the funeral. They will help spread the word and guide the process.
- Understanding the funeral process: Funerals often have several parts—like body viewing, prayers, traditional songs, or ceremonies. These can take place over a few days, depending on the culture.
- Language: When talking about what has happened, be sensitive in the words that you use. Think about using expressions like "ended their life" or "took their life" as opposed to using the word suicide. Be careful of not stigmatising people by using words that may be negative about the individual and their choices.

Who can attend and take part

- Children and certain rites: Not all funeral activities are meant for children. Some rituals are sacred and may only include adults. Always ask the family what is acceptable. Ask the family what role you can play, offer your suggestions, open up to the children / young people being involved.
- Involve people that your loved one knew. Friends, colleagues, social connections, (they would like to grieve as well and it means a lot to them and engage the voice of the young people).
- Carrying the coffin: This role is a sign of honour. In many cultures, only certain people (like male family members or elders) are chosen. Respect the family's decision.

How to dress and behave

- Dress with respect: Wear simple and modest clothes, usually in dark colours. Avoid bright colours, flashy jewellery, or heavy makeup. Some communities have traditional outfits for funerals—like headwraps for women or certain shirts for men. Speak to tribal or community leaders about what clothing requirements are for the funeral / celebration.
- Respect tradition and choice: Some people may wear dark clothes for some time (months or years) as a sign of mourning and respect. Showing people respect means to accept them as they are and support them through this mourning period.
- Respect diversity: Acknowledge that every tribe mourns in a different way. Recognise and accept the differences in tradition and tribal practice.
- Act with modesty: Be quiet, respectful, and avoid distractions. Crying is accepted but do it in a way that shows respect. Funerals are moments to support, not to draw attention to yourself.

What happens at the family home or funeral location

- Greeting the family: When you arrive, greet the family kindly and respectfully. If you're unsure how to greet, follow what others are doing or ask someone. When speaking with them, do not include unnecessary information in the conversation. Be respectful of the fact that they may not wish to communicate with you or hear what you have to say.
- Signing the book: Many funerals have a book where visitors write their names and short messages of sympathy.
- Giving support: It is common to give some money or bring food to help the family with costs. Sharing a meal with others also shows togetherness and support.
- Conversations: Now is not the time for insensitive conversations about who was to blame, what happened or how it happened. Those conversations can make people who are grieving feel worse than they already are.
- Respecting time – Show up on time for events. This shows respect for the grieving family but also for those that are working on the day, to make it go as smoothly as possible. This could include venue staff, funeral home staff or faith leaders who need to be able to do their job effectively.
- Phones: Ensure that your phone is on silent and will not ring at the wrong time.
- Young people: Find a way to include young people in the grieving process. They need to grieve as well. It is helpful for them to be able to express themselves and to be engaged in mourning practices and traditions.
- Home visits: If you are staying at the family home, make sure that you are not inconveniencing the family, taking over their space or inconveniencing the neighbours or local community. Think about leaving and coming back the next day to continue offering your support.

Things to avoid

- Social media posting – Be mindful of what you put on social media, ensuring that you have permissions to post content that may be distressing for others. Your social media posting could increase the intensity of the distress of the family and cause them pain.
- Alcohol: Drinking alcohol is usually not encouraged during mourning or at funeral events. It can be seen as disrespectful. Check with the family or elders as to whether alcohol is appropriate when visiting a family that is grieving.
- Respect grief expressions: Some people may cry loudly, sing, or wail. This is a normal and accepted way of expressing sorrow. Be quiet and respectful while others grieve.
- Photo's: Don't send out a photo of the person in the casket. Be sensitive to what people want to see. It could be a shock to others and cause them distress.

Be culturally aware

- Learn the traditions: Every community / tribe has its own way of doing things. Take time to learn and follow what the elders or family say.
- Ask when unsure: If you don't know what to do, ask someone you trust—a family member, elder, or community leader. It's always better to ask than to make a mistake.

When you can't attend a funeral or ceremony

Sometimes, it's not possible to attend the funeral of a loved one. This can be painful and may leave you feeling like you haven't had a chance to say goodbye. Here are some ways to honour their life even if you can't be there in person:

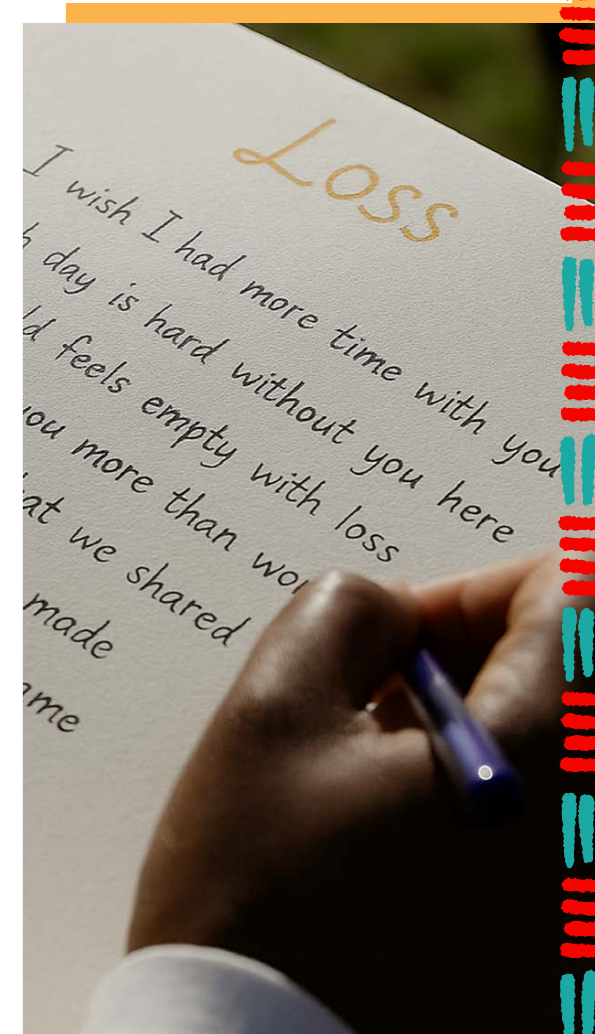
- Ask the family "what activities are you planning to do"? Offer to contribute in some way (EG. pay for printing, food, baby-sitting). Pick a task and do something that contributes to the family and community.
- Ask someone to record the funeral for you, or watch it live through a phone or computer (like Zoom or WhatsApp video).
- Visit a place that reminds you of the person. It could be their grave, the place they passed, or somewhere you shared memories. Only go when you feel ready.
- Have a small ceremony at home. Bring a photo or item that reminds you of them. You can play music, say a prayer, or just speak from your heart.
- Light a candle and think about the good times you had together.
- Cook their favourite food in their memory.
- Plan a memorial or gathering with others later in the year.
- Call or meet up with friends or family who are also grieving—talk, cry, or laugh together.
- Consider arranging appropriate cultural arrangements in their honour. You can gather people in your community to pray, clap, light candles, or play their favourite songs to honour their life.

Visiting the place where they died

Some people find comfort in visiting the place where their loved one died. You can leave something there—like flowers, a note, or a small item—to show respect and love.

Others prefer to go to the grave or a special place the person loved. It might be somewhere you went together—a hill, a river, a church, a field. You can go there to remember them, pray, talk to them, or just feel close to them.

Everyone finds comfort in different ways. **Do what feels right for you.**



Section 2

About grief and mourning

About grief and mourning

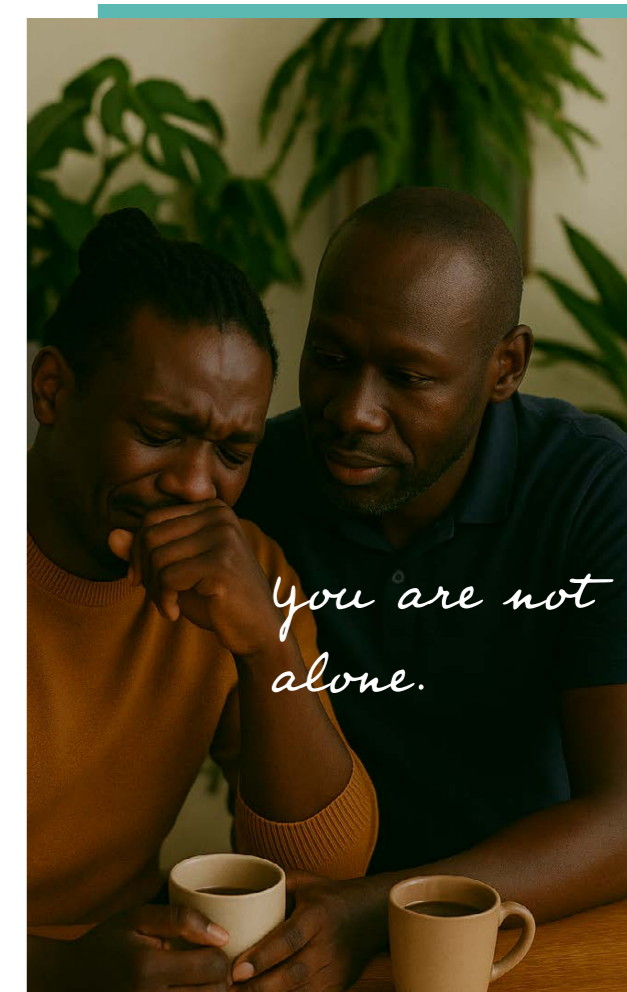
- Grief is the pain we feel when we lose someone we love. Some people say grief happens in “stages,” but this is not always true for everyone.
- At first, you may feel shocked, confused, or numb. This is normal—it’s your body and mind trying to deal with the pain. After some time (weeks or months), you may start to feel the loss more deeply. This doesn’t mean you are “getting worse”—it’s just part of the grieving journey.
- Daily tasks like cooking, cleaning, or even talking to others may feel hard. Don’t worry – many people go through this. In time, you will learn how to live with the grief.
- Losing a loved one suddenly, especially through suicide, brings deep pain and confusion. The sadness of losing someone mixes with shock and many unanswered questions. When someone takes their own life, it can be very hard to understand, and it leaves loved ones with heavy feelings.
- Grief is not a straight path. It can feel like a journey full of ups and downs—some days are better, some are harder. When the death is sudden or by suicide, the pain can feel even stronger.
- Grief doesn’t have a time limit. Even if others expect you to “move on” after a few months, your heart may still be hurting. Many people say that grief never really goes away—it just becomes part of your life, and over time, you learn how to live with it.

Grief after suicide

Grieving after suicide can feel different. You may feel:

- **Guilt** – thinking you should have done more.
- **Shame** – feeling embarrassed to talk about how they died.
- **Blame** – wondering if it was your fault.
- **Confusion** – asking why it happened.

These are common feelings.
You are not alone.



Everyone grieves in their own way

Not everyone shows grief the same way:

- Some people need to talk a lot about what happened.
- Others prefer to be quiet, think deeply, or stay busy.
- Some cry, others don't—but both are normal.

This can sometimes cause misunderstanding among family and friends. It's important to talk openly, respect each other's feelings, and allow each person to grieve in their own way.

Children and men need to be able to be open about their sadness. It is OK to cry and to express emotions during the mourning process.

We should be sensitive about expressions like "don't cry, be strong" or "be a man" as they may contribute to the stigma about grief and the expression of emotion.

Make space for differences. Support one another. Grief is personal, but healing is often helped by the love and understanding of others.

Seeing or hearing a loved one

Sometimes people say they see or hear the person who died. This might sound strange, but it is very common. In many African cultures, it's believed that the spirits of our loved ones can visit us or be close by. This can be comforting for some people.



Support one another

Special days and anniversaries

As time goes on, grief can feel less heavy. But special days like birthdays, the day the person died, or holidays can bring back strong feelings of sadness.

It helps to plan ahead. Ask yourself:

- What do I want to do on this day?
- Do I want to be alone, or with others?
- Do I want to pray, sing, cook their favourite meal, or just rest?

Thinking ahead can make the day easier, even if the days before feels hard.

Grief response

Sometimes, something small can suddenly remind you of the person you lost. This is called a *trigger*. It can happen anytime, even when you don't expect it.

Examples of triggers:

- A song on the radio
- A smell like their perfume or cooking
- A movie scene
- A letter or message
- An old photo or item they used
- Seeing someone who looks like them



You may not always be able to avoid these, but you can think about what helps when they happen.

Social media

Social media can help when you are mourning. It gives you a place to connect with others, share memories, and even celebrate the life of your loved one. But it can also bring back painful memories when you see old photos or hear unkind words from others.

Ways to cope when grief hits

When a wave of grief comes, you can try:

- Talking to a friend or family member / faith leader
- Sitting quietly and breathing
- Taking a walk or doing some exercise
- Crying—yes, it's okay to cry
- Writing down your thoughts and feelings

Grief is a journey. It doesn't have a deadline. Take your time and be kind to yourself.

Using substances to cope with grief

Be careful with alcohol and drugs when grieving

- There's no right or wrong way to grieve – but some things can cause more harm than good.
- Using alcohol or drugs to escape the pain might feel helpful at first, but it can create bigger problems over time.
- You may find it harder to cope, make decisions, or look after your family.
- Try to avoid alcohol whilst you are grieving. We may say things or do things that are not appropriate and could hurt others.

Drinking may feel normal – but check yourself

In many places, drinking is part of social life – but grief can make you drink more without noticing.

Ask yourself:

- Am I drinking to avoid my feelings?
- Do I forget things when I drink?
- Have people around me started worrying about my drinking?
- Am I drinking more than I used to?

Know the safe limits

Australia's health advice says:

- No more than 4 drinks a day.
- No more than 10 drinks in a week.
- 1 drink = 1 shot of spirits, or a small glass of wine, or half a beer.

You're not alone – reach out

- Many people turn to alcohol during grief – it's not a shameful thing, but it can become harmful.
- If you're struggling, talk to a trusted person, your community elder, or your doctor.
- Support is available. You don't have to carry it all by yourself.

Ask yourself: is my drinking becoming a problem?

Sometimes it helps to stop and think about how much you are drinking – especially during tough times like grief. These questions can guide you:

- How many days in the week do I drink? Do I ever have days without alcohol?
- Am I failing to do my daily responsibilities because of drinking?
- Have I ever forgotten things I said or did while drinking?
- Do I now need to drink more than before just to feel the same?
- Do I get into fights or trouble after drinking?
- Am I using alcohol to run away from pain or problems in my life?
- Do I feel shame, regret, or embarrassment after drinking?
- Have friends or family said something about my drinking?

It's okay to ask for help

If any of these questions worry you, it may be time to talk to someone.

- Speak to a trusted elder, community leader, or doctor.
- You can get help to manage your drinking and your grief – you don't have to face it alone.

What about other drugs?

Using drugs that were not prescribed by a doctor can be dangerous – especially when you're grieving.

Different people react to drugs in different ways. How a drug affects someone depends on:

- Your **age, body type, and health**.
- The **type of drug** and how strong it is.
- How much you've used before (your **tolerance**).
- Where you are and **who you're with** – your environment can make the effect stronger or weaker.

Why people use drugs

Many people use drugs to:

- Forget pain or trauma.
- Feel relaxed or happy.
- Fit in socially.

But the effects are **temporary** – and after the drug wears off, you can feel **even worse**.

That's because drugs change the way your brain works. They give a quick "high," but then your brain may stop producing natural feel-good chemicals. This can leave you feeling sad, empty, or unmotivated afterward.

Questions to ask yourself about drug use

If you are using drugs, ask yourself:

- Am I using to forget pain or avoid my emotions?
- Do I need more of the drug to feel the same effect?
- Am I spending more time with people who use drugs than with those who don't?
- Do I hide my drug use from my family or friends?
- Am I spending money I can't afford or doing things I regret to get drugs?
- Is my drug use stopping me from handling daily responsibilities?
- Have others said something about my drug use or my mood.

It's okay to ask for help

If you're worried about how you're coping with grief or drug use, you are not alone. There is no shame in asking for support.

Talk to:

- Your **doctor, community leader, or a trusted elder**
- A **grief support or drug support service**

If you find that social media is making you feel worse during this time, it's okay to take a break or stop following people who don't understand what you are going through. Protecting your peace is important.

Section 3

Taking care of yourself

Taking care of yourself

Tips for the first days after a loss

The first days after losing someone you love are often the hardest. You may feel overwhelmed by pain and also have many things to do – like organizing the funeral or informing people. That's why looking after yourself is very important during this time.

Here are some simple tips to help you cope in those early days:

1. Take one day at a time

You don't need to think too far ahead. Just focus on getting through today. If that feels too hard, focus on the next hour or even just the next few minutes. Be gentle with yourself.

2. Let your emotions out

You may feel sad, angry, guilty, relieved, or confused. This is normal. You are allowed to cry, to laugh, or even to scream if you need to. Everyone handles grief differently. Let yourself feel.

3. Take time for yourself

If you need rest, take it. If you need space from people, it's okay to ask for it. Take some time off from work or school if you can and explain to others what you're going through.

4. Care for your body

Grief is not only emotional—it affects your body too. Try to:

- Eat something, even small meals.
- Sleep and rest when you can.
- Move your body, even if it's just a short walk.

5. Ask for help

You do not have to go through this alone. Here are ways you can get support:

- Write down the names of three people you trust. Talk to at least one of them each week.
- Ask friends or family to help with everyday chores like cooking, cleaning, or fetching water.
- Talk to your local doctor or clinic. Let them know you are grieving—they may offer advice or help.
- Reach out to your community. Speak to your elders, church or mosque leaders, or local groups that support families in times of loss.
- Some countries or towns have organizations that offer help to those grieving. If available, contact them.

Remember: Grief takes time. Everyone walks through it differently. You are not alone, and it's okay to ask for support.

Talking to others about your loss

Losing a loved one — especially through sudden death or suicide — can leave you with many painful questions. On top of your own feelings, other people may ask what happened, why it happened, or how your loved one passed. These questions can feel harsh or insensitive, even if people don't mean to be hurtful. It's okay to feel overwhelmed in such moments.

Sometimes, it can be hard to say that someone died by suicide. You might worry about how people will judge you or the one you lost. These feelings are natural. You may want to protect both yourself and the memory of your loved one.

What you can keep in mind:

- You decide what to share. You don't have to tell everyone everything. Share what feels right for you, depending on who is asking and how you're feeling.
- Being honest can help you get the support you need. When you're ready, opening up can also help others understand how to support you better.
- Be careful with details. Avoid sharing graphic or painful information, especially about how the person died.
- Prepare yourself. You can practice some gentle responses ahead of time. That way, you're not caught off guard. It's also okay to say, "I'm not ready to talk about it right now."

EAP programs (Employee Assistance Programs)

An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a service provided by your employer to support you when you are facing personal or work-related challenges. It is designed to help you stay mentally, emotionally, and spiritually strong, so you can do your job well and take care of your family.

What support does an EAP offer?

- **Private counselling:** You can talk to a trained counsellor about issues such as stress, grief, conflict, sadness, family problems, or anything else that is troubling you. These talks are private and confidential.
- **Help in times of crisis:** If something serious happens at work or in your life — such as a death, violence, or accident— the EAP can offer immediate support.
- **Advice for daily life:** You can get practical help with things like managing money, understanding your rights at work, or getting support with family matters.
- **Support for leaders and managers:** Supervisors and managers can also use the EAP to get help when caring for their teams, especially when staff are struggling emotionally or mentally.

Why is the EAP important?

- It helps you stay strong in body, mind, and spirit.
- It supports your family and community responsibilities.
- It reduces stress, which makes you more focused and healthy at work.
- It builds trust and respect in the workplace.
- It helps solve problems before they become bigger.

Who can use it?

The EAP is free, and it is there for all employees—and sometimes for their family members too. You don't have to tell your manager if you are using it, and no one at work will know unless you choose to share.



Areas of community support

Name	Website	Location	Contact
Religious support			
All Nations Church	allnationschurchmelbourne.org.au	Melbourne	Rev. Tut Yoa: 0434 010 40
Catholic Care	melbournecatholic.org	Melbourne	Rev. Deacon George Piech Meat: 0432 400 452
Daughters of Jerusalem		Melbourne	Helena Chan: 0421 564 377
Islamic Council of Victoria	icv.org.au	Victoria	(03) 93 282 067
Mental health treatment and support			
Foundation Hous	foundationhouse.org.au	Victoria	info@foundationhouse.org.au (03) 9389 8900
HeadSpace	headspace.org.au	National	1800 650 890
Mensline	mensline.org.au	National	talkitover@menslineaus.org.au 1300 789 978
Mind Australia Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals	mindaustralia.org.au	Dandenong, Melton	mindconnect@mindaustralia.org.au
Nas Recovery Centre Ltd	nasrecoverycentre.org	15 Ercildoune Court, Cranbourne West	help@nasrecoverycentre.com 0434 000 670
Pola Practice	polapractice.com.au	135 Maribyrnong Road, Ascot Vale	Info@polapractice.com.au (03) 9001 5665
TurningPoint Online Counselling	turningpoint.org.au	National	1800 778 278
Family services			
Orange Door	orangedoor.vic.gov.au	Victoria	www.orangedoor.vic.gov.au /contact-us
South East Community Links	secl.org.au	5 Osborne Avenue, Springvale	info@secl.org.au (03) 9546 5255
Wellsprings For Women	wellspringsforwomen.com	79 Langhorne St, Dandenong	(03) 9701 3740
Windermere	windermere.org.au	48 Webb St, Narre Warren	1300 946 337
Youth & Family Support Junubi Wyndham	enquiries@wyndhamcec.org.au	20 Synott Street, Werribee	(03) 9742 4013
Crisis helplines 24/7			
Careline (Christian Helpline)	ccaa.net.au	National	(03) 9070 6134
National Alcohol & Other Drug Hotline	health.gov.au	National	1800 888 236
Nurse-Oncall	healthdirect.gov.au	National	1300 606 024
Stand By Support After Suicide Jesuit Social Services	jss.org.au	National	standby@jss.org.au 1300 727 247

Name	Website	Location	Contact
African community organisations			
Afri-Aus Care	afri-auscare.org	562-564 Springvale Rd, Springvale South	0433 526 553
African Library (Baai Alkebulan)	info@baaialkebulan.com	34 Moreland St, Footscray	0432 324 296
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre	smrc.org.au	Footscray and 39 Clow St, Dandenong	(03) 9767 1900 (03) 9326 6066
Australian African Foundation for Retention and Opportunity (AAFRO)	info@aafro.com.au	Level 1, 25-29 Devonshire Rd, Sunshine	0428 338 634
Centre for Multicultural Youth	cmynet.au	Head office: 304 Drummond St, Carlton VIC 3053 Dandenong: GF, 243 Lonsdale Street, Dandenong, VIC 3175	(03) 8594 1561 info@cmynet.au
Community Abundance Inc	communityabundance.org.au	Office 1 No. 31 Level 1 Hub Arcade, 15/23 Langhorne St, Dandenong VIC 3175	0469 726 105
East African Women's Foundation	eastafrikanwf.org	Unit 7/178 Duke St, Braybrook VIC 3019	0402 862 055
Muslim Youth, Adult & Families (MYAF) Program		831 Pascoe Vale Rd, Glenroy VIC 3046	mysupport@mycentre.org.au (03) 9078 3840
Oyiti Foundation for Multicultural Youth Inc	oyitifoundation.org	26/249-253 Lonsdale St Dandenong VIC 3175	ny.amum@oyitifoundation.org 0470 369 974
South sudanese victoria community leaders			
Chollo			Chairperson: Nyibil Amum 0470 369 974
Dinka-Mothers Coalition			Monica Majak: 0431 023 688
Dr. Banydhuro Samson Oyay			0419 794 987
Equatorian			Julia Alphonse: 0421 194 699
Lotuko			Andrew Ohidi 0470 268 579
Nuer			Chairperson: Mr. Pal Deng Pur 0401 938 981

The effects of grief

Changes you may notice in someone who is grieving

When someone loses a loved one, it can affect them in many deep and painful ways. Everyone reacts differently, but grief often touches the heart, the body, and the spirit.

You may notice changes in:

- How they feel – They may seem very sad, angry, confused, or quiet. Sometimes they may cry a lot, and other times they may not show emotion at all.
- Their health – Grief can be physically exhausting. They may feel tired all the time, lose their appetite, or even get sick more often.
- How they relate to others – They might withdraw from family or friends or find it hard to talk about what happened. Others may want to talk about their loved one often.
- Their daily life – They may struggle to concentrate, lose interest in things they used to enjoy, or find it difficult to work or care for their home.
- Their spiritual beliefs – Some may draw closer to their faith or traditional practices for comfort, while others may question everything and feel lost.
- Dress: People may wear certain types of clothes (head coverings) or clothing (dark colours) in order to respect the person that has passed.

Important to remember

- Grief looks different for everyone. Some express it openly; others hold it in.
- There is no “right” way or timeline for grieving.
- Being patient and showing love—without pressure—is one of the best ways to support someone who is hurting.
- Encourage community or spiritual support when it feels appropriate. Sometimes elders, religious leaders, or trusted friends can offer comfort when words fall short.

Section 4

Supporting someone through grief



Supporting someone through grief

Grief can be deeply draining. When someone is grieving, they need to feel allowed to take their time and move through their healing at their own pace.

How you can help

Ask, don't assume. Everyone grieves differently. Some people want company, others need quiet. Some may want to talk; others prefer to be alone. Just ask, *"How can I support you today?"*

Offer practical help. Sometimes helping with simple daily tasks is the best support. You could offer to:

- Cook a meal (and maybe freeze some for later),
- Help with housework, shopping, or errands.
- Look after children or pets.
- Give them a lift to appointments or help with paperwork.
- Do some work in the garden.
- Pick up family members who might be visiting for the funeral.

Be specific when offering. Instead of "Let me know if you need anything," try, "Can I clean the house for you this Saturday?" or "Would it help if I made dinner tomorrow?" or "What will be helpful for you today?"

Be respectful

- Always ask before doing something, especially anything personal like moving belongings or informing others.
- Be flexible. The support they need may change from week to week.
- Check in gently and often, and don't take it personally if they say "no" to your offer.
- People may need time for themselves and may feel overwhelmed by company and support.
- Be mindful that you are there to support in grief, not to discuss controversial subjects such as politics, or the situation back at home. These subjects may create more tension.

Helping with funeral planning

Funerals are a very personal part of saying goodbye. The family may want to:

- Choose the type of ceremony (traditional, church-based, or even something unique),
- Pick music, readings, or cultural practices,
- Paint the coffin, wear special clothes, or gather in a meaningful place.

Give them space to make decisions, and don't rush them. Support them with love and understanding, without taking over.

Allow for all voices to be heard and to contribute. Allow young people to express themselves naturally and don't judge them for it. If they want to be involved, allow space for them to contribute and engage.

Supporting someone emotionally after a loss

When someone is grieving, they carry a heavy burden. As a friend, family member, or neighbour, your presence and kindness can be a great comfort. Here's how you can walk with them through their pain:

Just be there

- Sometimes, the best thing you can do is sit quietly with them. You don't need to say much – just show that you are there.
- Let them cry, be silent, or talk – whatever they need. Do not try to stop their sadness or rush them to feel better.

Small gestures matter

- Offer them a cup of tea, hold their hand, or give a gentle hug – if it feels appropriate. These simple actions speak love without needing words.

Be gentle with words

- Grief can make a person very sensitive. They will remember your words – good or bad – for a long time.
- Don't avoid talking about the one who has died. Speaking their name can bring comfort and keep their memory alive.
- It's okay to admit you don't have the right words. Try saying:
"I am so sorry. I can't imagine what you are going through. I'm here for you."
- Avoid saying things like:
"It was God's will," "They're in a better place," or "You can have another child."
These may hurt more than help, even if meant kindly.

Give them time

- Grief has no deadline. Let them move at their own pace.
- Don't say, "You should be okay by now." Let them feel what they feel.

Share memories

- Talk about the person who died. Use their name. Tell stories. Laugh and cry together.
- Sharing memories keeps the person's spirit alive in the hearts of those who loved them.

Grief is like a journey—it changes over time, but it never fully ends. Your love, patience, and understanding can help lighten the path.

Self-care is important

Taking care of yourself while supporting others

Grieving is hard—for everyone involved. Whether you're going through loss yourself or walking beside someone who is, it takes a toll on your heart, your body, and your spirit.

Remember: you can't pour from an empty cup. Taking care of yourself is not selfish—it's essential. Resting and recharging helps you stay strong for yourself and for your loved ones.

You are not being disloyal by stepping back for a moment. Even the strongest hearts need to pause and breathe.

Self-care is personal

Just like grief, self-care looks different for everyone. What calms one person might not help another. That's okay. Be patient and gentle with yourself as you find what works best for you.

Here are some ideas to explore—try one or two each day or mix a few together and see how you feel.

Self-care ideas (for you and your loved one)

Move your body

Let your body carry some of your emotions. Try:

- A walk outside, feeling the wind and sun
- Gentle stretches or traditional dance
- An intense workout, if your energy allows

Ground yourself

Bring your focus to the here and now:

- Walk barefoot on the earth or through your garden
- Do breathing exercises, prayer, or meditation
- Try massage, tai chi, or just quiet sitting under a tree

Be creative

Let your hands and heart express what words can't:

- Paint, draw, build, or craft
- Sing or write music, poetry, or a journal entry
- Make something that reminds you of your loved one

Make space for stillness

Sometimes, what you need is less:

- Cancel or reduce some commitments
- Allow time for silence, prayer, or spiritual gathering
- Visit a quiet place—nature, a place of worship, or a childhood home

Write it out

Writing can be a gentle way to release what's inside:

- Keep a journal of your thoughts, dreams, or physical feelings
- Write letters to your loved one or to yourself
- Use your words to name what hurts and what helps

Enjoy simple pleasures

- Listen to music that lifts or soothes you
- Watch something light-hearted
- Play with pets or sit with a child and let their joy rub off on you

Connect with others

You are not alone. Even if words are few:

- Talk to someone who understands you
- Sit with a trusted friend or elder
- Share time with someone who has walked this path before

Take a break from grief

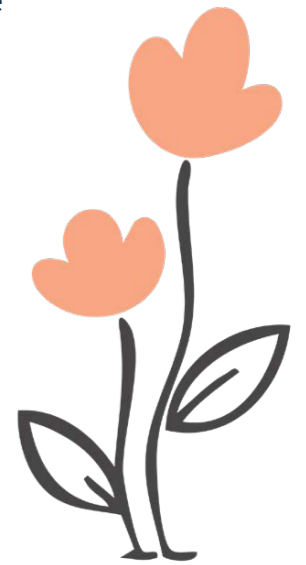
It's okay to have moments where you don't think or talk about grief:

- Meet a friend for tea and talk about other things
- Go to a market, play a game, or do something that brings a smile
- Give yourself permission to laugh—it doesn't mean you've forgotten

A final word

Whether you are grieving or offering support, remember that healing is not a straight road. Some days will feel heavier than others. Take those days gently. Be kind to yourself and to the people around you.

You are allowed to rest. You are allowed to feel joy. You are allowed to just be.



Understanding and supporting children and young people

When someone dies suddenly, especially by suicide, it can be very confusing and painful. For children and young people, it can feel even harder. They may blame themselves, feel sad, angry, or wonder why the person left them.

Should children attend funerals or ceremonies?

Joining in funerals or other ceremonies can help children say goodbye and understand what happened.

There is no “right” age for this. What matters is preparing them for what to expect. Let them know they are welcome to be part of the process if they want to be.

Children have feelings and will carry the effects of the experience into their adolescent years. Not talking can reinforce stigma and feelings of shame or guilt that children may need to process.

Children can find grief overwhelming and traumatising. Encourage conversations with children and be open to their grief. They already know what has happened and they may have questions.

Talking can be beneficial and help them to move through their grief. Remove them from the environment if that is appropriate, but when it's quiet, bring them back into the house and let them re-engage with the mourning process.

Should children see the body?

Deciding if a child should view the body depends on many things. Some children may be curious. If you choose to allow it, help them prepare. You can explain:

- “The body will be very still and cold.”
- “They won’t be able to talk or feel anything.”

Children often want to understand things with their eyes and hands. Let them ask questions and grieve in their own way, with no pressure or judgment.



How children show grief

Each child grieves differently. Some may cry or talk about it, others may play or draw pictures to show how they feel. Some may seem not to feel anything at all – this can be their way of coping.

Let children express themselves through:

- Drawing or painting their feelings.
- Writing poems or stories.
- Using toys to act out what happened.
- Making a memory box with photos, letters, or small objects.
- Listening to music that reminds them of the person.
- These can help even more than words.

Talking to children about death and suicide

Conversations with children should be age-appropriate. Because children are still developing emotionally and cognitively, they may not fully understand what suicide means. However, talking about it is not harmful to their mental health.

Children make sense of the world through what they see, hear, and feel—so it's important to be honest with them. Even if you haven't told the full truth before, it's okay to correct that now. You might say something like:

“At first I didn't know how to explain what happened. Now I want to tell you the truth because you deserve to know.”

When talking to children:

- Use simple words.
- Speak with love and care.
- Be patient and ready to repeat things.
- Avoid saying things like “He went to sleep” – this might make them fear sleep.
- You can explain suicide like this:

“Sometimes, a person is feeling so much pain inside that they believe the only way to stop it is to stop living. But there are always people who can help.”

Let children know it is okay to ask for help and that it is not their fault.

Supporting young people

Teenagers and young people may hide how they feel. It's important to:

- Keep daily routines as normal as possible.
- Let them choose where and when to talk.
- Listen without judging or blaming.

Young people may ask "Why?" a lot. Try saying:

"There's not always one reason. Many things might have made the person feel this way."

Encourage them to talk to someone they trust – a family member, friend, teacher, or a trained helper.

What to say to young people

- Be truthful but gentle. Let them know that suicide happens when someone feels very overwhelmed and doesn't know how to handle their pain. Explain that many things can lead to this – like mental illness, deep sadness, or serious life problems. It's not usually just one thing.
- Talk more about emotions than the details. It's best not to focus on how the person died or give too many details. This can be too upsetting and sometimes even harmful, especially for young people who are already feeling vulnerable.
- Guide them towards healthy ways to cope. Talk about ways to deal with the sadness, anger, or confusion they may feel. Encourage them to express these feelings in safe and helpful ways, like talking to someone, writing, drawing, or being part of community or religious gatherings.



Comforting and reassuring young people

- Speak with care and understanding. When you show that you care and are really listening, it helps young people feel less alone. They are more likely to open up and share their thoughts.
- Acknowledge different feelings. It's okay if a young person feels angry, confused, or guilty. They might feel upset with the person who died or think they could have done something to stop it. Let them know:

"It's not your fault. These feelings are normal. It doesn't mean you didn't love the person."

- Allow space to talk. Encourage young people to speak freely about what they're feeling, without fear of being judged. Remind them that it's okay to grieve in their own way.

Encouraging young people to ask for help

After someone close dies, especially in a sudden or tragic way, children and young people may feel lost or overwhelmed. It's important to let them know they are not alone and that it's okay to ask for help.

- Encourage them to talk to someone they trust. This might be a parent, teacher, religious leader, school counsellor, health worker, or a friend's parent.
- Let them choose who they feel comfortable talking to. You can offer to help them call, message, or visit this person.
- Go with them if they want support. Sometimes, just having someone sit beside them can make all the difference.

