



Losing someone to suicide

Every type of grief has the potential to cause intense and complex feelings, but research shows that people bereaved by suicide can have a particularly complex set of feelings and can experience additional struggles and dilemmas in trying to resolve their grief.

"It took me a good few years to work through my feelings about the death... (but) in coming out of the depression I finally began to truly be myself and stop feeling so isolated and detached."

Feelings you might experience when you lose someone to suicide include intense sadness, shock, anger, frustration, confusion and isolation. Some people also talk about experiencing a sense of shame or guilt, and while this is a very common reaction it is important to remember that people who take their own lives are often trying to stop feelings of distress that can feel as intense and real as physical pain - the reasons for suicide are complex and you are not to blame.

For more information see our pages on suicidal feelings¹.

Who is affected by a suicide?

Suicide can have a ripple effect, extending well beyond the person's immediate family and friends. How you are affected will depend on your relationship to the person who has died, the strength of the attachment and the circumstances around the death. While losing someone close to you to suicide can be an extremely painful and emotionally complex experience, you may find that you are also affected if someone you know less well has taken their life. If you feel affected by a suicide, there are organisations that can help. Talking through difficult emotions and talking about the person who died can be helpful in processing the loss.

¹<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/suicidal-feelings/>

What help is available?

Many people bereaved by suicide find that they need more specific support than that provided for bereavement in general and can find it particularly valuable to make use of support groups that are especially designed for people bereaved by suicide.

In addition to the support options mentioned on our support and self-care page, you might like to consider the following:

- Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS) are a great source of support for people who have been bereaved by suicide. See the SOBS website² for details of their helpline, local support groups and many more practical resources.
- Cruse Bereavement Support also has some suggestions for further reading and support for people who have lost a loved one to suicide. See Cruse's website³ for more information on traumatic bereavement and suicide, including support if you live in Wales.

"To the outside world (including family and friends) he was thoughtful, caring and inspirational. Someone with a loving and supportive family, secure job and content life. But inside, he was fighting an invisible battle that not even those closest knew about."

Grief doesn't necessarily stop, but it can change

Grief is completely individual and there is no time limit or tried and tested process for it. People who are bereaved can sometimes feel pressure from those around them to 'move on' but it is important to recognise that grieving takes time and is not a linear process. Time doesn't necessarily 'take away' the grief, but it can give us space to adapt around it, accept the loss and build new meaning.

"People seem to expect you to move on. I think that patience and support without a deadline is the best thing you can give to someone suffering from bereavement."

Support and self-care

Where can I get support?

There are a number of different organisations offering support for different types of bereavement. For example:

- Cruse Bereavement Care⁴ – offers face-to-face, telephone, email and online support for anyone who has experienced a loss.
- BEAD (Bereaved through Alcohol and Drugs)⁵ – provides information and support for anyone bereaved through drug or alcohol use.
- Child Bereavement UK⁶ - provides support for anyone who has lost a child, and for children themselves who are bereaved.

²<https://uksobs.org/>

³<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/traumatic-bereavement/suicide>

⁴<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help>

⁵<https://www.beadproject.org.uk/>

- Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity (SANDS)⁷ – provides information and support for anybody affected by the death of a baby.
- The Compassionate Friends⁸ – offers a range of services supporting bereaved parents and their families.
- Sudden⁹ – helps people who have experienced a sudden bereavement to access specialist information and advice.
- Widowed and Young¹⁰ – offers support to people under 50 who have lost a partner.
- Sue Ryder¹¹ - offers bereavement support, as well as care for people with terminal illness and neurological conditions. This includes ways of finding bereavement support online¹², including an online community and text service.

If you have lost someone to suicide, see our page on bereavement by suicide¹³ for more information and specific support options.

“Losing my dad unexpectedly aged 20 completely turned my life upside down. I thought I wasn't going to get through the grief but with the right support and time, I got through it.”

How can I help myself?

Coping with the loss of a loved one is always difficult, especially when it is not expected. It can take time to understand your feelings and adjust after the loss has happened, but there are things you can do help yourself cope. For example, it can help to:

“If I knew then what I know now, I would have prioritised looking after my own needs.”

Understand the grief process

Grief can be painful and exhausting but most people find that in time things become easier. Understanding the grief process and the common stages of the grief cycle can be really helpful - so it can be a good idea to familiarise yourself with these and keep them in mind during the periods when difficult feelings come up.

It can be particularly helpful to:

- Take each day at a time. There might be good days and bad days. Try to focus on each day at a time and set yourself small, achievable goals.
- Develop coping strategies that work for you. Self-help resources can help you to work through difficult feelings and learn coping skills.

⁶<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/supporting-bereaved-children-and-young-people>

⁷<https://www.sands.org.uk/>

⁸<https://www.tcf.org.uk/>

⁹<http://www.suddendeath.org/about/about-sudden-death>

¹⁰<https://www.widowedandyoung.org.uk/>

¹¹<https://www.sueryder.org/>

¹²<https://www.sueryder.org/how-we-can-help/online-bereavement-support>

¹³<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/bereavement-by-suicide/>

- Make a memory box. You might find it helpful to fill a box with items which prompt happy memories of the person who died, as these can help lift your mood, when you feel down. The box can contain anything that is meaningful and helpful to you, for example: a favourite book, quotes, photos, letters, poems, notes to yourself, a cuddly toy, a perfume, or a smell that's important to you.
- Learn your triggers. It is normal for certain things to trigger difficult feelings or painful memories about the loss. By taking note of what causes your mood to change, you can gradually learn how best to cope with triggers when they happen. You can try tracking your feelings using an online mood diary (there are many freely available, such as MoodPanda¹⁴).

“I assumed that when I was feeling sad, it was not to do with my dad's death. But now that it has been several years, I can understand that what I was experiencing was a reaction to [his death].”

Connect with others

- Let others know how you're feeling. Tell people what you find helpful and let them know when you are finding things difficult. It's okay to ask others to be with you if you need them.
- Seek support. If you're not already receiving support or don't feel the support you have is helpful, take a look at our useful contacts¹⁵ page for a list of organisations who might be able to help.
- Try peer support. It can be helpful to talk with others who are also currently coping with a loss or have experienced grief in the past. Contact your local Mind¹⁶ to find out what peer support¹⁷ is available locally. You can also access peer support via online communities, such as Mind's Side by Side¹⁸.

“In the early days, talking to whoever would listen helped me cope.”

Talk to a therapist

Talking with a trained professional can help you become more aware of and address your thoughts and feelings following a loss. It can be useful to have a continuous focused source of support that goes beyond the level of support that friends or family may be able to provide.

Talking to a specialist grief counsellor may be appropriate and could help you with:

- understanding the grieving process
- identifying and expressing your feelings relating to the loss
- exploring ways of coping
- moving towards acceptance

¹⁴<https://moodpanda.com/>

¹⁵<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/useful-contacts/>

¹⁶<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/local-minds/>

¹⁷<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/peer-support/>

¹⁸<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/side-by-side-our-online-community/>

- coping with birthdays and anniversaries of the loss.

For information on talking therapies see our pages on talking therapy and counselling¹⁹. Cruse Bereavement Support also have a local bereavement services directory²⁰, with some regions providing grief counselling.

"I thought that because I appeared to be coping better than my siblings, I was doing fine - but I needed to look closer at my own feelings."

Look after your wellbeing

Following a loss it is natural to feel like your whole life has been disrupted. This may mean that you experience disrupted sleep (sleeping too much or too little), eating unhealthily or for some people using substances like alcohol or drugs in an attempt to numb difficult feelings - all of which are likely to make your mental health poorer.

With this in mind, it can be helpful to try to:

- Get enough sleep. Learn how to relax before bed, making sure your bedroom is a calm place and as clear of distractions as possible. If you are having trouble sleeping, see our pages on coping with sleep problems²¹.
- Eat well. Eating regular healthy meals can make a big difference to your overall sense of wellbeing. See our information on food and mood²² for tips.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol. Alcohol and drugs tend to make it difficult in the longer term for you to manage your feelings and find ways to help you to cope. See our pages on the mental health effects of recreational drugs and alcohol²³ for more information.

"When I am absorbed in playing and creating it can distract me from the distress I still experience at times."

How can other people help?

Death and loss can be difficult to talk about and many people struggle to know what to say when trying to support someone who has been bereaved, even if they are a close family member or a good friend. You may want to help but worry about saying 'the wrong thing'. Here are some ideas of how you might be able to support somebody after a loss.

"I was shocked when friends didn't ask how I was doing. I felt invisible, as if I were standing there but they couldn't see me."

- Acknowledge the loss and don't avoid contact. It's understandable to feel uncomfortable speaking about death or other losses, or to worry that you might say the wrong thing, but staying silent or not contacting somebody after their bereavement can often make feelings

¹⁹<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/talking-therapy-and-counselling/>

²⁰<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-support/>

²¹<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/sleep-problems/>

²²<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mental-health/>

²³<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/recreational-drugs-alcohol-and-addiction/>

of isolation and sadness worse. Reaching out to the bereaved person so that they know you are available to talk and listen if they would like to can be incredibly helpful.

- Consider how best to be in contact. There are different ways to grieve and there are different ways to communicate after a loss too. Receiving text messages may be easier for somebody to manage than returning calls. Dropping in to see them in person may be welcome for some but may be an inconvenience for others. It is worth asking the person what they'd prefer rather than making assumptions.
- Give them space. Not wanting to spend lots of time with other people or feeling guilty at not acknowledging messages could be an additional burden for a grieving person, so it can be worth letting them know they can respond whenever they feel able, or simply send them a message to let them know you are thinking of them and that no response is needed. Adapting to life after a loss can take a long time and people should be allowed the space to process their emotions for as long as they need. It is useful if you can strike a balance between contacting them so that they do not feel isolated but also giving them space. Again, asking them what they need is a good idea.

For more information and resources that can help you talk more openly about dying, death and bereavement have a look at the Dying Matters²⁴ website.

"When someone shows up with a cast, we immediately inquire, 'What happened?' If your life is shattered, we don't."

- Talk about the person who died. When a person dies it can feel like they are erased from people's memories. While you may fear that talking about the deceased person will just bring up painful feelings, many people actually appreciate the opportunity to talk a bit about the memory of the person, finding this a comfort and a way of integrating the memory of the person who has died into their life, rather than pushing memories away. "What's your favourite memory of [the person who has died]?" or "Tell me about a time [the person who has died] made you laugh" can be useful.
- Focus on listening. Try to respect what the bereaved person is choosing to share with you and focus on listening rather than finding out more. Give the bereaved person space to open up if they want to, while also being sensitive if they would rather not take it further.
- Focus on the bereaved person. Try to keep the focus on the bereaved person rather than coming back to your own feelings about the loss. Unless you have your own experience of bereavement it may not be helpful to make comparisons with your own experiences.
- Help them seek additional support. Supporting someone who is bereaved can be hard work and it is worth exploring what other options for support are out there. If they are ready and interested, help them explore additional support options, such as those listed on our useful contacts²⁵ page.

"With the help of amazing family and friends I have been able to talk about the way I feel myself and have been able to share my experiences with them."

²⁴<https://www.dyingmatters.org/>

²⁵<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/useful-contacts/>

Support following a suicide

Similarly, it can be difficult to find the right words when trying to support someone who is bereaved by suicide, but by asking the bereaved person what they feel will help we can offer vital support.

In addition to the above, you may also want to:

- Be sensitive when discussing the death with others. Other people around the family or friendship group may not know about the death so it can be useful to think about and agree how best to talk about what has happened, what details are appropriate to disclose, and with whom.
- Use non-stigmatising language. When referring to suicide try to use words like "died by suicide" or "took their life", rather than the outdated expression "committed suicide", which dates back to when suicide used to be a crime.
- Avoid speculating about the suicide. Suggesting or speculating about explanations for a suicide could make somebody feel blamed and also risks over-simplifying what causes suicide.

Useful contacts

Other organisations

At a Loss

ataloss.org²⁶

The UK's signposting website for the bereaved. They can help you find bereavement services and counselling. They also have resources on coronavirus pandemic bereavement²⁷.

Bereaved through Alcohol and Drugs (BEAD)

beadproject.org.uk²⁸

Information and support for anyone bereaved through drug or alcohol use.

Blue Cross

bluecross.org.uk²⁹

Animal charity that helps sick, injured and homeless pets.

Child Bereavement UK

0800 028 8840³⁰

childbereavementuk.org³¹

²⁶<https://www.ataloss.org/>

²⁷<https://www.ataloss.org/Pages/FAQs/Category/coronavirus-pandemic>

²⁸<https://www.beadproject.org.uk/>

²⁹<https://www.bluecross.org.uk/>

³⁰<tel:+44-800-028-8840>

Support when a baby or child of any age is dying, or a child is facing bereavement.

The Compassionate Friends

0345 123 2304³²

tcf.org.uk³³

Provides support to bereaved families after the death of a child.

Cruse Bereavement Support

0808 808 1677³⁴

cruse.org.uk³⁵

Information and support after a bereavement.

Dying Matters

dyingmatters.org³⁶

Coalition of individual and organisational members across England and Wales, aiming to help people talk more openly about dying, death and bereavement, and to make plans for the end of life.

The Good Grief Trust

thegoodgrieftrust.org³⁷

Charity run by the bereaved, helping all those suffering grief in the UK. Can help you find reassurance, advice and support. They have a detailed page of coronavirus bereavement advice³⁸.

Hub of Hope

hubofhope.co.uk³⁹

UK-wide mental health service database. Lets you search for local, national, peer, community, charity, private and NHS mental health support. You can filter results to find specific kinds of support

.Mood Diaries

emoodtracker.com⁴⁰

moodpanda.com⁴¹

Some examples of mood diaries – many more are available. Mind doesn't endorse any particular one.

³¹<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

³²<tel:+44-345-123-2304>

³³<https://www.tcf.org.uk/>

³⁴<tel:+44-808-808-1677>

³⁵<https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

³⁶<https://www.dyingmatters.org/>

³⁷<https://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org/>

³⁸<https://thegoodgrieftrust.org/need-know-info/coronavirus-bereavement-advice/>

³⁹<https://hubofhope.co.uk/>

⁴⁰<https://emoodtracker.com/>

⁴¹<https://www.moodpanda.com/>

Samaritans

116 123⁴² (freephone)

jo@samaritans.org⁴³

Freepost SAMARITANS LETTERS

samaritans.org⁴⁴

Samaritans are open 24/7 for anyone who needs to talk. You can visit some Samaritans branches in person⁴⁵. Samaritans also have a Welsh Language Line on 0808 164 0123⁴⁶ (7pm–11pm every day).

Sands

0808 164 3332⁴⁷

sands.org.uk⁴⁸

Information and support for anyone affected by the death of a baby.

Sudden

0800 2600 400⁴⁹

sudden.org⁵⁰

Support for people bereaved by sudden death.

Sue Ryder

sueryder.org⁵¹

Supports people living with neurological conditions and terminal illness, and for anyone experiencing bereavement after losing somebody.

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)

uk-sobs.org.uk⁵²

Emotional and practical support and local groups for anyone bereaved or affected by suicide.

Widowed and Young (WAY)

widowedandyoung.org.uk⁵³

⁴²<tel:+44-116-123>

⁴³<mailto:jo@samaritans.org>

⁴⁴<https://www.samaritans.org/>

⁴⁵<https://www.samaritans.org/branches>

⁴⁶<tel:+44-808-164-0123>

⁴⁷<tel:+44-808-164-3332>

⁴⁸<https://www.sands.org.uk/>

⁴⁹<tel:+44-800-2600-400>

⁵⁰<https://www.sudden.org/>

⁵¹<https://www.sueryder.org/>

⁵²<https://uksobs.org/>

⁵³<https://www.widowedandyoung.org.uk/>

Offers a peer-to-peer support network to anyone who was aged 50 or under when their partner died.< For friends and family⁵⁴



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⁵⁴<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/for-friends-and-family/>