



**POSTVENTION**  
AUSTRALIA

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
FOR POST-SUICIDE  
SUPPORT



# BEREAVEMENT AFTER SUICIDE

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PRACTICAL ADVICE, SUPPORT & UNDERSTANDING

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of the land, and we pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

We recognise the disproportionate impact suicide has on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

We acknowledge all people who have direct experience of suicide, including those who have attempted suicide and those impacted and bereaved by suicide.

The voice of people with lived experience is essential in the development of our work.

## FUNDED BY THE NSW GOVERNMENT

Postvention Australia would like to thank the NSW Government for funding the development of this resource, as well as other projects, to better support those impacted by suicide.

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

If someone you know or love has taken their own life, or you're wanting to give support to someone who is recently bereaved, this booklet has been written for you.

We know that this can be an overwhelming and confusing time. Although each experience of suicide loss is unique, we hope that you find some comfort or helpful suggestions in the following pages. You may not want any help right now, or you may want help but don't know what you need.

Reading through this booklet may help you work out where to start; you can read some sections that seem relevant now and you may want to come back and read other sections later.

We want to let you know that there are people who understand this experience and who can help, both professionals and peer supporters. There is a list of key organisations and services in the final section of this resource.

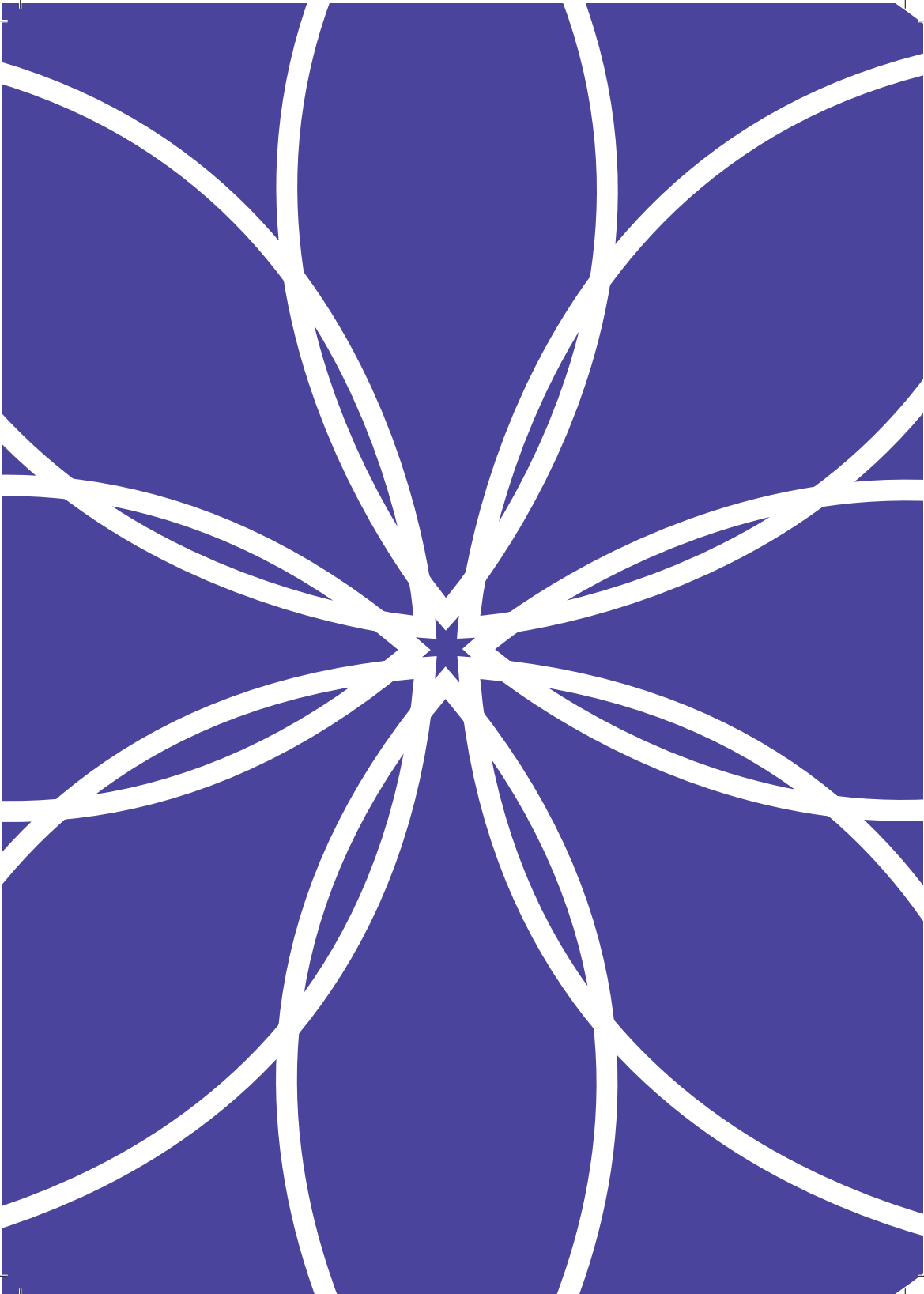
There is more information on each section of this booklet in the online version of this care pack.



**2**

**IT'S  
JUST  
HAPPENED**









## IT'S JUST HAPPENED

You may feel overwhelmed or be flooded with thoughts that are confusing as you try to understand how this could have happened.

Initially, many people experience shock and disbelief; intense distress; a need to understand why and how; or perhaps anger, guilt or shame.

The sudden nature of a suicide death may also mean you are experiencing the effects of trauma.

Grief and trauma can affect how we think, behave and how we feel in our bodies.

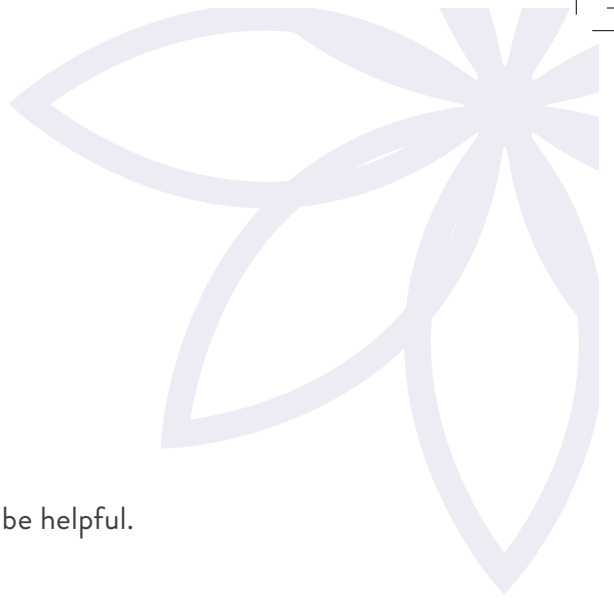
### Questions

You may find that you are filled with a barrage of questions:

*Why and how could this have happened? How could someone I love take their own life?*

You may find yourself going over and over events and conversations as you try and find answers to these questions.

Searching for answers can be relentless and exhausting. It may help to understand that the reasons behind a person's suicide are usually complex and may never be completely understood.



## What can be helpful

At this point, some simple steps may be helpful.

For anyone who is bereaved:

- Try to take care of the basics. Eating, sleeping, light exercise. These can be difficult when grieving and traumatised so eat small meals several times a day.
- Connect with others who care about you. Support from those who know and understand you is very beneficial and can be comforting.
- It can be helpful to be aware that others around you may be having difficulties as well. Being patient with yourself and others can be a good place to start.
- If there are things to do, people to speak to, and you do not feel up to it, reach out to others for help. It is better not to put too much pressure on yourself to function in your usual way.



## The first few days – some practical information

This section has more information about what happens and what may be needed in the first few days in terms of some of the practicalities.

The NSW Government provides a general guide and checklist for what to do after someone passes away on their website: what to do when someone dies.

If you are the next-of-kin, you may need to:

- Communicate with the Coroner's Court and learn about the process.
- Let others know what has happened. If you do not feel up to this, ask a family member or friend to do it for you.
- Begin to plan the funeral, memorial or service. The first step is to seek out a funeral director. It is helpful to remember that a funeral service does not need to be arranged straight away; you can take your time. There is more information about arranging a service in a later section.

### Police

Police and ambulance are often the first called when someone takes their own life. They will make sure the body of your loved one is taken care of; police will contact the Coroner to report the death.

Some personal belongings may be collected by the police for further examination in case they have relevant information, for example, their mobile phone. These will be returned to the next-of-kin at a later stage.

### Coroner

The Coroner investigates and determines the cause of any sudden and unexplained death, which includes how it occurred and the details needed to register the death. The Coroner also has legal responsibility for the body of the person who has died from unnatural causes, which includes suicide.

In Sydney, your loved one will be taken into the care of the Forensic Medicine Service at Lidcombe.

In regional areas, your loved one will be taken into the care of the local hospital pending a decision by the Coroner about a post-mortem examination (also known as an autopsy). If a post-mortem examination is required, your loved one will be taken into the care of either the forensic medicine service at Newcastle or Wollongong.

It may be possible to view your loved one while in the care of the Coroner. Your funeral director will organise to take your loved one's body to the funeral home to prepare for the service when the Coroner indicates that their body can be released.

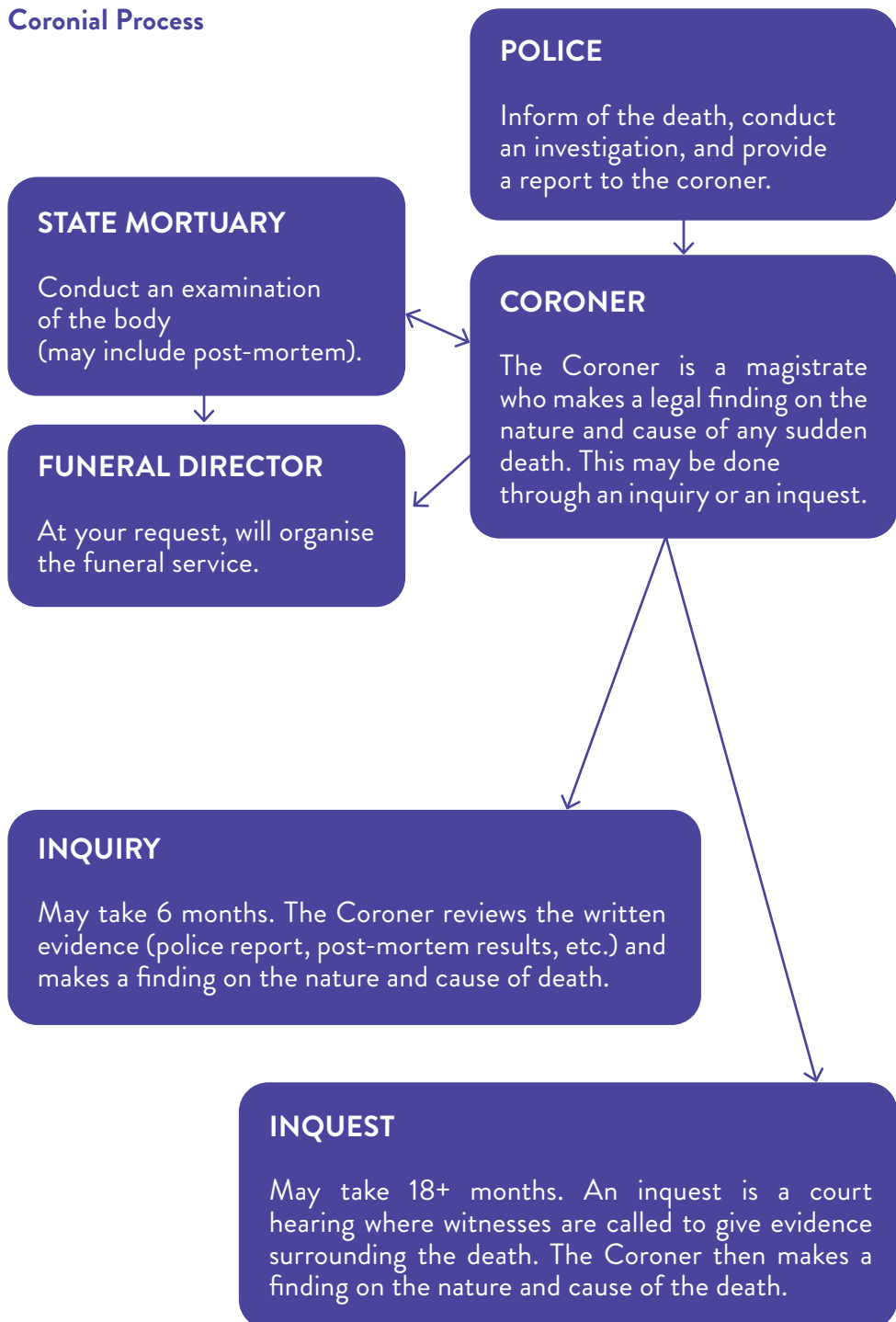
If you are the senior next-of-kin, a social worker will usually contact you within 24 hours to let you know what is happening. You may be asked to formally identify your loved one and provide further information about the circumstances surrounding their death.

A final report may take up to 12 months to be completed and it is recommended that you seek the help of a GP to help you understand the medical terms that may be in the report.

More information can be found on the NSW Coroner's website ([www.coroners.nsw.gov.au](http://www.coroners.nsw.gov.au)). LegalAid NSW also provides free legal advice and assistance in coronial matters, as well as other legal issues ([www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au](http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au)).



## Coronial Process





## Funeral

A funeral director will assist in making arrangements for the funeral or memorial service and work with you to create the funeral in the way you would like it.

If you contact a funeral director and don't feel confident that they will listen to your needs, we suggest you contact others until you find one that will be suitable for you and within your budget.

It is possible to obtain this information by phoning or enquiring online to compare services and costs. If you are making comparisons, the funeral directors should clearly communicate what is included in their services, and if there are any other associated costs.

In NSW, you may find a funeral director at the Funeral Directors' Association of NSW website ([www.fdansw.com.au](http://www.fdansw.com.au)).

Arranging the funeral can often be a difficult experience. However, it may be a part of your grieving process, a time when your loved one is remembered and honoured. It is possible to arrange a funeral that is an expression of their life and unique personality.

It may be an opportunity to grieve with others who also loved them; it can be a time of connection and sharing of memories and feelings, which can be comforting.

The funeral service is usually held between one and four weeks after the death (depending on cultural customs). You can contact the funeral director at any time to start planning the funeral.

However, it's best not to set a date until you receive confirmation that your loved one is able to be released from the Coroner's care.

A question that can arise as the funeral is being planned is whether to acknowledge that they died by suicide.

There are helpful guidelines which are best to follow when talking about suicide to ensure that the communication is safe, reduces stigma, and encourages help-seeking. The Mindframe Guidelines and Conversations Matter website can be provided to those speaking at the funeral ([mindframe.org.au](http://mindframe.org.au)).



In some circumstances, government support can cover the cost of a basic funeral. If there are no funds to pay for a funeral, the NSW government's Area Health Service can pay for a basic funeral and next-of-kin will be contacted about arrangements.

Some tips that may be useful:

- Choose a funeral director who listens to you and who you feel confident will assist you to create the service you would like.
- Should you decide to have a celebrant or minister, choose who you think will set the tone you want and be able to acknowledge your loved one's life well.
- Tell the funeral director and staff what you want (and what you don't want). If you don't know, they can guide you and offer options. Ask as many questions as you want.
- There are decisions to make about how best to honour the person and their life. What do you and others close to the person want to do to honour them? What music, activities, symbols and items with special meaning would you like?
- What clothes or special items would you like your loved one to be dressed in?

- How can others, including children, be involved in the funeral?
- If some family members or friends are unable to attend, consider live streaming the service so they can participate. You may also be able to obtain a recording.

## **Viewing**

Some people want to spend time with the person before the service. This is often called a 'viewing'. It may be that you want to see them or that you want to place something in the coffin or simply to be with them. This is usually arranged with the funeral director, however viewing can be done at one of the specialist forensic medicine facilities at Sydney (Lidcombe), Newcastle or Wollongong.

## **Death certificate**

Whenever a person dies, the death needs to be registered with the NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages.

The death certificate may take some time to be issued. However, an interim certificate is usually made available, even if the coronial process is not yet finalised. Your funeral director completes all the paperwork and registers their death on your behalf. In some circumstances, organisations such as banks, real estate agents, or Centrelink will accept a confirmation of death letter issued by coronial support staff. If you require this document, please email your request to the Coroner's Court where the death was reported.

## **Suicide note**

If there was a note left by your loved one, the police may have collected it and passed it to the Coroner. Less than 30% of people who take their own lives leave a note, so it is not as common as widely believed.

There is often an idea that a note will explain why the person took their own life. Occasionally, a note provides some information about the state of mind of the person at the time of writing, but very often, notes don't tend to offer the comfort or the answers that you might have hoped for.

## Financial & legal matters

Dealing with these bureaucratic tasks can be upsetting, frustrating and time-consuming and add to your distress. Many people find tasks difficult, especially when they are grieving. If possible, reach out to a trusted person to assist you with these tasks.

### Insurance

Sometimes private health, funeral, life, sickness or accident insurance will provide assistance in paying for the funeral of the person who has died. If the deceased had insurance, call their insurance company to ask if assistance is available. If you have lost a child and have insurance, your insurance company can advise you. Again, if any of these tasks seem too difficult, ask a trusted person to assist you.

### Financial matters

Attending to finances and continuing with your employment may prove challenging for a time. Many people find they are not able to function well in the early days. This can add to the stress if it creates financial pressure. Engaging with your employer, your GP and friends and family for support and to work on solutions can make things more manageable.

Informing one key person at your workplace (such as your manager) about what has happened, as well as the funeral arrangements can be a way to keep things manageable in the beginning.

All employees (including casual employees) are entitled to compassionate leave (also known as bereavement leave). Fair Work outlines compassionate leave information on their website ([www.fairwork.gov.au](http://www.fairwork.gov.au)). Other types of leave that you may be able to access are sick leave, annual leave, and long service leave.

You may also be eligible for financial assistance from the Government, depending on your relationship to the person, which includes bereavement payment from Centrelink. Services Australia details the types of payments you may be eligible for on their website ([www.servicesaustralia.gov.au](http://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au)).



### **Will and estate**

The will is a legal document of what your loved one wants to happen with their belongings and assets. This may include personal items, property, shares, pets and other assets. There may also be information about the funeral service in the will. The finalisation of the estate may take between 3 to 12 months, and longer if it's complex. When there is no will, generally certain family members and next-of-kin receive a certain amount or proportion of assets.

The Australian Tax Office provides information and a checklist for steps to be followed. This is available on their website ([www.ato.gov.au](http://www.ato.gov.au)).

### **Notifying services**

Notifying services and utilities for cancellation or transfer can seem daunting, especially when you are in the process of grieving. In time, when you have received the Death Certificate (or Proof of Death document), you may start the process of cancelling or transferring services for your loved one.

The Australian Death Notification Service ([deathnotification.gov.au](http://deathnotification.gov.au)) allows you to notify multiple services and organisations of someone's death in one central online location. These include participating banks, superannuation, phone, internet, energy and water companies, government services, local government, insurance companies and membership services.

Some other organisations like banks may have a specific process to go through when closing an account following the death of the owner. You will need to provide a Proof of Death document, as well as forms of identification for yourself. Most banks will try to make this process easy for you and will guide you through the process.

LawAccess NSW has a printable checklist of other organisations to be notified on their website ([www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au](http://www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au)).



### **Social media and online accounts**

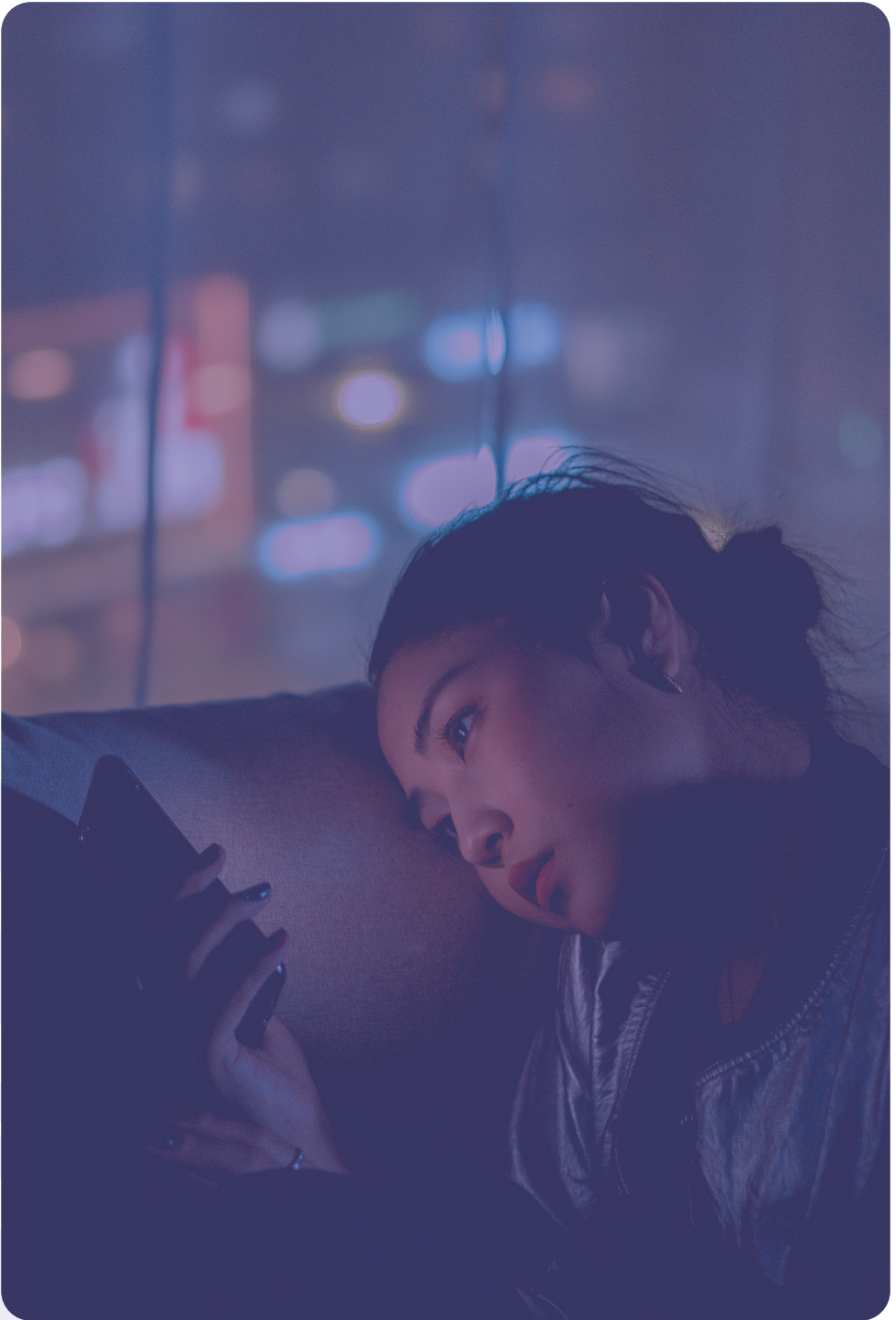
Your loved one may have online accounts, social media and apps, which also need to be closed. This includes:

- Email
- Cloud storage, such as Dropbox
- Social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat, etc.
- Online payment processing accounts such as PayPal

You will need to contact the relevant companies. Depending on the company, you may be given access to their account so that you may view information, download images or videos that you and other people may want to keep, and remove the account.

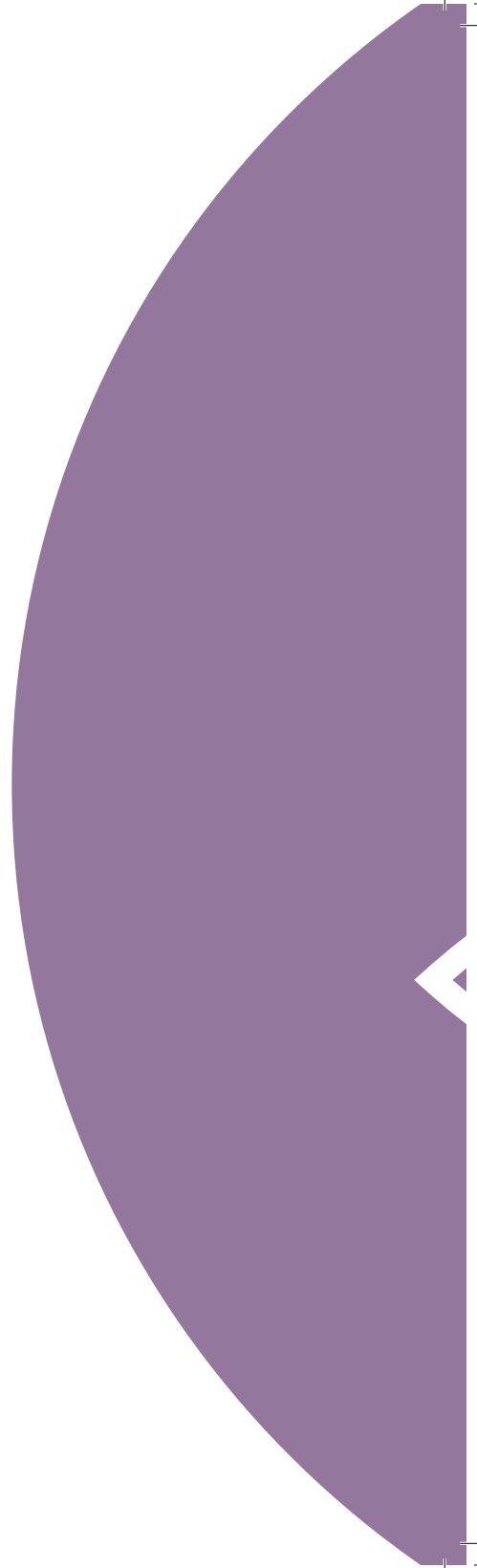
Social media may also be a way for you and other family and friends to remember your loved one.





# 3

## LOSS, GRIEF & TRAUMA







# LOSS, GRIEF & TRAUMA

## Grief

Grief is our response to loss.

When someone we love dies, in whatever way, we can experience pain and sadness, missing them and longing for them to be here with us.

Each of our experiences of grief is unique and different. Each of us will need different ways to express and cope with our loss.

Not all the below will be experienced by everyone. It is important to remember that while grief is a normal and natural response to loss, it can also be a very difficult experience especially when grieving loss to suicide.

Some of the experiences include:

### EMOTIONS

Shock, disbelief,  
sadness, distress,  
numbness, anxiety,  
fear, anger,  
helplessness.

### THOUGHTS

Confusion,  
forgetfulness,  
racing mind, difficulty  
in making decisions,  
poor concentration.

### BEHAVIOURS

A need to withdraw  
from social activities,  
intolerance of  
others, tearfulness,  
restlessness.

### PHYSICAL

Change in appetite,  
disrupted sleep,  
tiredness, headaches,  
muscle tensions.

### SPIRITUAL

Loss of meaning,  
loss of direction,  
questioning faith/  
beliefs, searching  
for understanding.



## Grief after suicide

When a death is due to suicide, there are a range of complex and often intense experiences that can be difficult to manage.

These could be:

- feelings of guilt and a sense of letting the person down.
- feeling responsible that it was not prevented.
- experiencing the suicide as a reflection of the quality of your relationship with them.
- a sense of shame and stigma, that other people will think negatively about you and your family.
- blaming others.
- a persistent need to ask “why” or “what if” - trying to make sense of and understand why it happened.
- feelings of rejection and abandonment.
- unresolved feelings or issues due to the suddenness of the death.
- a sense of relief and the accompanying guilt, if your loved one was experiencing years of pain, illness, chronic mental illness or substance use.
- anger towards the person who has suicided.

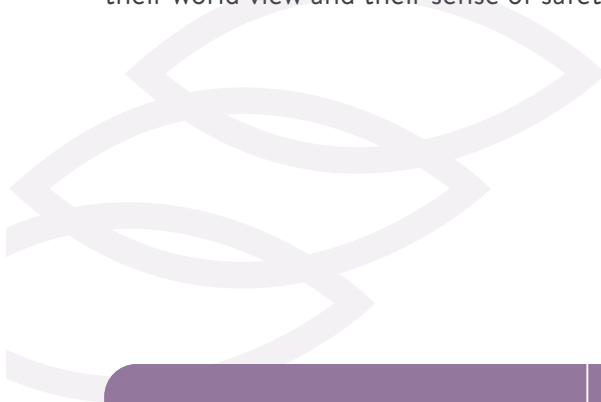
Sometimes people assume that they will feel angry; at the system, at someone who they blame or at the person who died. This can be part of your experience, but it is not always the case. Many people do not feel angry, particularly with the person who died. They have an understanding of the distress and difficulties that the person was experiencing.

It is important to eventually understand that there is a limit to your responsibility. Suicide is complex and complicated with no single cause or contributing factor.

## Trauma

Grief is not the only experience for many people bereaved by suicide. Trauma is usually present as well. This may be for those who found the person but others may also be traumatised by the impact of the death.

The word *trauma* derives from the Greek word for wound. It is an event of such intensity that it wounds a person's sense of themselves, their value and worth, their world view and their sense of safety.



BEHAVIOUR	THOUGHTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• easily startled by noises</li><li>• restlessness</li><li>• increased irritability</li><li>• withdrawal or detachment from others, loss of interest in social activities</li><li>• avoidance of certain places or situations that are reminders of the experience</li><li>• seeking control over tasks and events</li><li>• changes in eating or sleeping</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• flashbacks or re-experiencing what you may have seen while awake, or in dreams</li><li>• pre-occupation with what happened, repetitive thoughts, asking 'why?'</li><li>• confused or slowed thinking</li><li>• difficulty concentrating or making decisions</li><li>• experiencing memory problems</li></ul>

Experiencing both grief and trauma is intense and difficult.

In grief, we long for the person and want to move towards them to be with them; in trauma, we want to avoid the memory of their death and the images. It can be very beneficial to speak with a trained person to assist in navigating your way through this.

As with grief, people react to trauma in different ways. Some of the more common reactions are listed below. We don't expect that everyone will experience all of these reactions.

These symptoms can be distressing, however there are ways to work through trauma. In many cases, these symptoms decrease in the weeks following the traumatic experience.

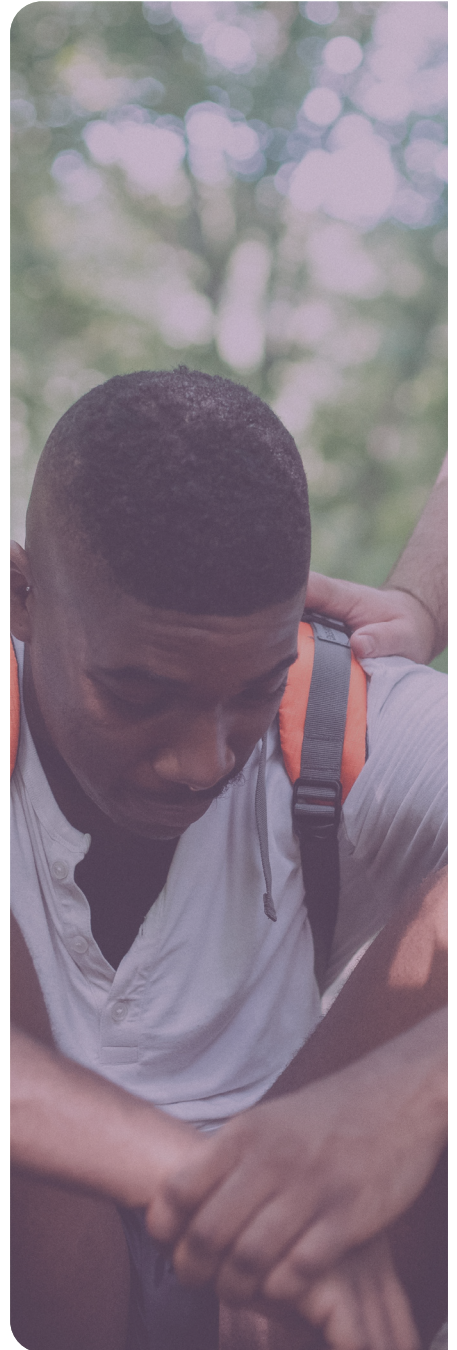
EMOTIONS	PHYSICAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• increased anxiety, panic attacks feeling unsafe</li><li>• troubled or distressed when exposed to other disturbing events e.g. in the news</li><li>• worry about others</li><li>• feelings of abandonment, isolation, powerlessness</li><li>• feeling out of control or that life and the world are out of control</li><li>• numbness and/or have mood swings</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• palpitations, trembling or sweating</li><li>• breathing difficulties</li><li>• headaches or muscle aches</li><li>• digestive problems such as nausea or a change in eating patterns</li><li>• sleep problems</li><li>• tiredness and fatigue</li></ul>

## Stigma

Many people find death difficult to talk about. When the death is a result of suicide, it can be even more difficult for others to know what to say or do.

Although this is changing, some people who are bereaved by suicide experience what we call stigma. This could mean that you may be concerned about what others think of you because of your loss to suicide, you may not want to tell others that the death was due to suicide, or you might notice that others seem distant or remain silent about your loss and the person who died. There is a later section which may help others better understand your experience and how to support you.

These experiences can be stressful and add to the sense of isolation you may be experiencing. One of the ways to break down this sense of isolation is to connect with others who have lost someone to suicide. This is where support groups can be extremely beneficial. The support section has information about groups that are available.



## Different relationships

Many of the experiences and issues of losing someone to suicide are shared in that others will have similar responses. It's also good to acknowledge that your relationship to the person who died can affect your experience of grief – whether the person was your parent, partner, sibling, child, friend or work colleague. There are resources and books available on the Postvention Australia website ([postventionaustralia.org](https://postventionaustralia.org)) that discuss these perspectives of grief that can be very helpful.

Also, if there was distance in your relationship, your grief may be different to if it was close and harmonious.

There are sometimes conflicts between family members due to differences in expressions of grief, or when family or friends blame other family and friends for the death.

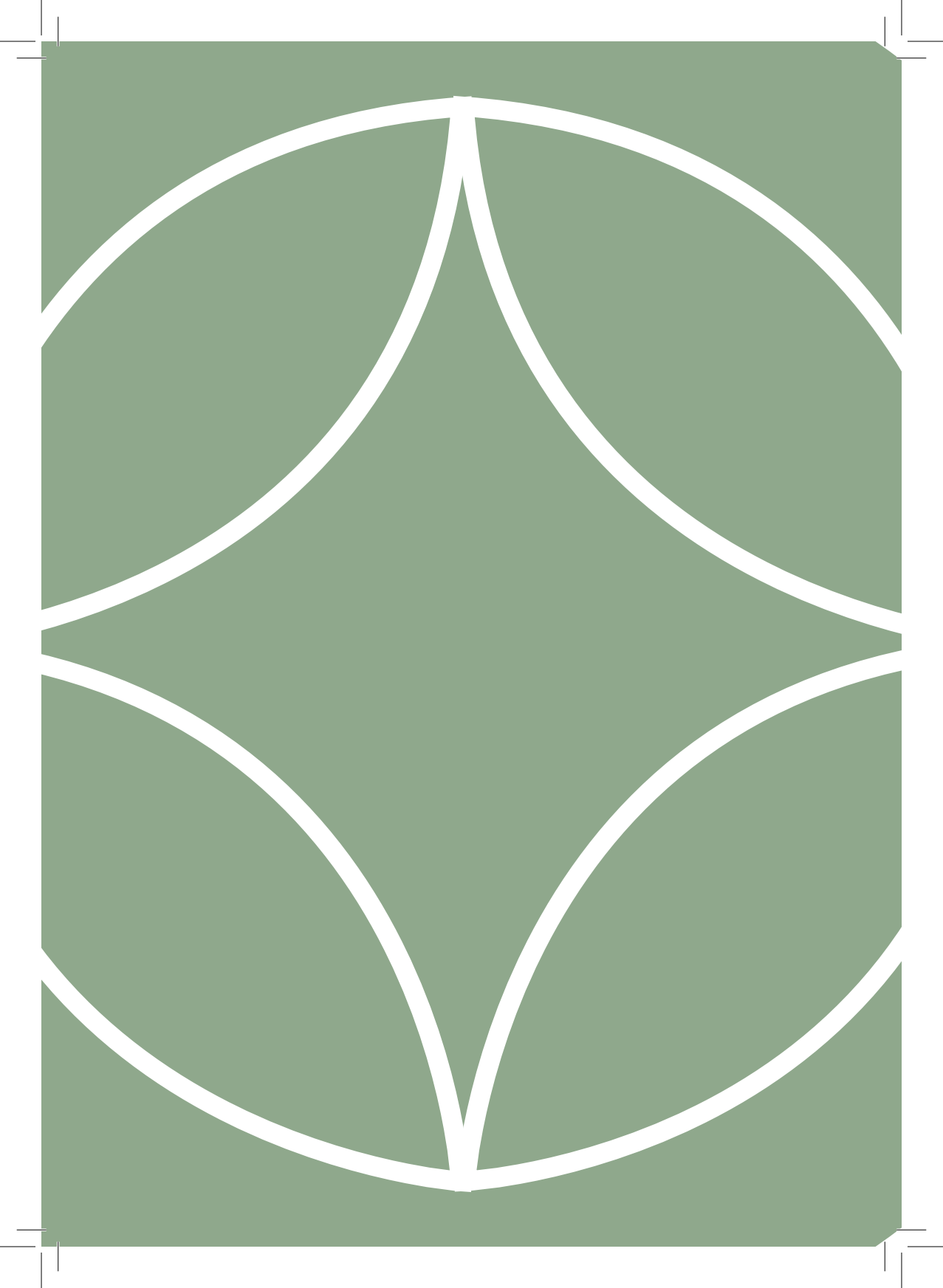
This may be handled through communication and understanding and supporting each other's way of dealing with their grief. Family counselling may also be a useful option.



4

# CARE & SUPPORT







## CARE & SUPPORT

The complexity and intensity of loss to suicide means that learning how to manage and cope is important, though not always easy. It is helpful to have a strong support network who provide emotional and practical support. There are things you can do for yourself, and it is also good to consider seeking additional assistance.

Family and friends may not always be available or may not have the skills that you need at this time. There are a range of supports available, which can be found in the support section of this booklet.

### Self-care in grief

Sometimes giving yourself permission to “just be”, without putting any pressure on yourself to achieve something or feel a certain way, can be freeing and important for your self-care and relieving stress.

Some other approaches you can try include:





## LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

- Eat a healthy diet, frequent small amounts of nutritious, easily digested food
- Light exercise can assist by using up excess adrenaline
- Use physical nurture, massage, spa baths, early nights, and get some fresh air by going for short walks
- Avoid increased use of alcohol, smoking, prescription medication and other drugs
- Avoid too much coffee and tea as this can disrupt sleep
- Keep a journal to record your thoughts and feelings, especially if you are unable to sleep
- Spend time with nature
- Gardening
- Make time to do things that you enjoy – you can give yourself time away from the pain. This may include:
  - Painting, drawing
  - Playing or listening to music
  - Making things with your hands such as cooking, knitting, woodworking
- By looking after yourself, you can also support those around you
- Be with your grief – give yourself the space to cry and mourn
- Come to accept that you will carry the grief and sadness with you from here on with different intensities yet over time it will become more manageable.

## TAKING THINGS AT YOUR OWN PACE

- Spend the time you need alone to think, remember, pray, meditate, mourn
- Forgive yourself if you are confused, distracted, make mistakes or have trouble remembering things – remember that your mind needs time to heal
- Prioritise daily tasks, do only what is essential
- Use voicemail to screen phone calls; choose who you will talk to
- Find distractions, to provide time out from the pain
- Remember that it is okay to laugh though it may not feel comfortable
- Start to understand what distresses you and figure out ways to limit your exposure to these, whether it be certain people, places or things, until you can approach and process them in your own time
- Say ‘no’ when you need to
- Collect information, read simple books about surviving suicide, or about grief and trauma, when you are ready
- When you are ready:
  - Rearrange and store the person’s belongings
  - Make resolutions for new and renewed directions in your life and in the life of your family

## REMEMBERING YOUR LOVED ONE

- Find ways to honour the life of the person who has died
- Talking and sharing stories with others, cooking their favourite dish, listening to music or watching movies they liked, are all ways to remember the person you have lost
- Review photos and mementoes
- Visit the burial site or another special place
- Keep treasures, a memory box, journal, photo album
- Create a memory book for family and friends to write stories, memories, messages
- Create or build a special memento for your loved one: a garden, a video, photo album
- Prepare for special days and holidays with your family/friends. Christmas, birthdays, and anniversaries can be difficult times.
- Plan a visit to the memorial site, light a candle or maybe spend some time at the person's favourite place.

## REACHING OUT FOR SUPPORT

- Talk to a trusted person who will listen with understanding to your thoughts and feelings
- Be with people you are comfortable spending time with in conversation or in silence
- Write notes to relatives and friends when you need to tell aspects of your story, or to express feelings
- Remember that it is okay to ask for help with everyday tasks like meals, cleaning and child care
- Try to stay connected and accept help from those around you. Other times, you may need to be alone
- Develop a resource list, phone numbers of people and places to contact when the going gets tough. Seek individual counselling, suicide bereavement specific services, or a support group.

It is important to reach out for support if you feel overwhelmed.

Visiting your GP or accessing 24/7 support lines can be a helpful first step; these include the **Suicide Call Back Service** on **1300 659 467** and **Lifeline** on **13 11 14**.

There are also specialist services that understand the experience of suicide loss and can be a valuable source of information and support; these include **StandBy Support** available on **1300 727 247**.

### Some activities when difficult feelings arise

When uncomfortable emotions arise, you can try some of these exercises:

- Notice the physical sensations: Is your throat tight? Is your heart beating fast? Is your stomach in knots?  
Just recognising these sensations is an important step.
- Reflect on your feelings: Can you name the feeling? Acknowledge that these feelings are natural, and try not to suppress them.
- Breathe: Focus on your breaths and the sensation of your breath – in your nose, your throat and the movement of your chest. You can also try breathing with a count, for example, breathing in for four counts, holding your breath for four, and exhaling for six counts. This may have a calming effect and help you regain a sense of control.
- Express your feelings: Write about your loss in a journal; write a letter saying the things you never got to say; make a memory box, scrapbook, photo album, video, artwork, poetry or music.
- If you need a break from these feelings, you may need to engage in a distracting activity or connect with others.
- If it is overwhelming, remember that it is okay to reach out for help from family, friends, a mental health professional, a crisis support line.



## How to talk about what's happened

In the very early days, it can be difficult to even say the word 'suicide'. It can feel too traumatic, confronting and hard to believe. Initially, you may find that you choose not to tell others about the cause of death because it feels easier. However, this may result in a feeling of unease and create distance in your relationships with others. This in turn may also lead to a lack of support and a sense of isolation. Being as open and honest as you are comfortable is recommended.

Over time, you may find that it becomes more comfortable. However, there can be interactions and conversations that continue to be challenging after losing a loved one to suicide. You may find that some people avoid speaking about what has happened or about the person who died. Alternatively, you may find that others ask questions that feel insensitive and intrusive, for example, "how did they die?" or "why did they do it?". Other times, you may be caught off-guard by a question, such as "how many kids do you have?".

It can help to prepare yourself for some of these conversations by having a response prepared and practised so these situations feel manageable. A good principle to keep in mind is that it is okay for you not to answer, to only partially answer or to give a full answer. This will depend on how you are going at the time, and with whom you are talking. You may be comfortable to share more with some people than others. If you sense that someone is genuinely caring and concerned, you may say more than if someone has asked impulsively out of curiosity. A helpful phrase when you don't want to speak about it is, "I don't want to talk about it at the moment".

Essentially, it is up to you how much or how little you say during any conversation.

### Challenging stigma

Eventually if you feel comfortable, you may wish to speak up when friends, family, colleagues or the media express false beliefs and negative stereotypes about your loved one's suicide. Hearing things like "that was so selfish", "he couldn't cope with life", and "they didn't consider what this would do to you" may upset you.

You can give yourself space to disengage if you are not feeling ready for these conversations. Other times, you may choose to respond with more informed explanations about these beliefs, for example:

- "The majority of people who are suicidal do not want to die. They are in pain, and they want to stop the pain".
- "Anyone may be vulnerable when facing difficult circumstances or when experiencing feelings of depression or hopelessness".



## Returning to work

Eventually you may begin to think about re-engaging with the routines and structures of everyday life. For many, it is a financial necessity to return to work. For others, it is a means of keeping occupied; the routine and normality of working may provide some relief.

For others, returning to work can be difficult. Some postpone returning to employment, concerned about the additional stress created by work.

Some tips include speaking with your workplace before you return to find out what flexibility can be offered. You may need more time off, or prefer to ease into returning to work for a few days a week, or perhaps you would benefit from lighter duties.

You can also speak to your GP to consider the options.

There are resources available online at the Postvention Australia website ([postventionaustralia.org](http://postventionaustralia.org)) and StandBy website ([standbysupport.com.au](http://standbysupport.com.au)) should your workplace want to know how to support you better in your return to work. There is also a later section, “Supporting the Bereaved”, which you may want to share with your manager and workplace as a good first step for them to understand more about suicide grief and how it may impact you.

*“I try and take some time off in the lead up to anniversaries as I know I find them too hard to be at work.”*

StandBy LEAG member

*“The little things they did made so much difference. Not one of them was scared to talk to me about anything, they would do their usual joking around and didn’t exclude me. My boss gave me some cards that were different colours. If I just couldn’t talk or wanted to be left alone I could put up the red card up, but I never did, in that office they understood what I was going through.”*

StandBy LEAG member



## Where to find support

There is a comprehensive and up-to-date NSW Post-Suicide Support Service Directory available online on the Postvention Australia website ([postventionaustralia.org](https://postventionaustralia.org)). If you do not have access to the online directory, phone **Postvention Australia** on **1300 024 357** and you will be assisted to find what you are looking for.

### Types of support available

There are a range of options to consider when thinking about whether you or someone you know could benefit from some additional support, including:

- Suicide bereavement-specific services (or “postvention” services)
- Crisis support
- Counselling for individuals, couples, families, or friendship groups
- Support groups/peers with lived experience



### Suicide Bereavement-Specific Services

These are services (also known as “postvention” services) which cater specifically for those bereaved or affected by a suicide death. This can include individuals, families and friends, witnesses, first responders, communities, workplaces, and service providers.

These postvention organisations cover a range of services, such as counselling from professionals trained in suicide bereavement support, information and resources, guidance during the practical processes like the coronial process, community information and training events, and more.

### StandBy Support After Suicide

StandBy supports anyone bereaved by suicide including: individuals, families, friends, associates, witnesses, communities, schools and workplaces. The support is free of charge and available to anyone, regardless of when the loss occurred. They can be contacted 24/7 and are available to:

- Talking with you, your family or friends over the phone, at your home or meeting at a location that suits you
- Helping to decide what sort of help you would like for yourself, family or group
- Explaining how you can help your family or friends
- Practical assistance for things like dealing with Police, the Coroner and funeral arrangements
- Information and resources for individuals, children, workplaces and others
- Support to access other local services
- Peer support from trained staff who are also bereaved by suicide
- One-on-one connections and support groups with other people bereaved by suicide

### Contacts

Website: [standbysupport.com.au/find-support](https://standbysupport.com.au/find-support)

Phone: **1300 727 247** (Available 24/7)



## Indigenous Suicide Postvention Service

The Indigenous Suicide Postvention Service is the main national Indigenous service for individuals, families, and communities affected by suicide. The service can:

- work with local Elders, community and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations to ensure a community response is put in place to support bereaved individuals and families
- travel to provide support if invited by the family or we can provide advice to Community Leaders or Elders and local services on how best to respond
- meet with individuals and families to discuss their needs
- provide practical social support, link people with a range of local social, health and community services and where appropriate continue to work with local services to ensure care and support continues beyond the immediate aftermath of the traumatic incident
- advocate on behalf of families to assist them access the supports they need in their time of grief.

## Contacts

Phone: **1800 805 801** (available 24/7) for a Postvention Advocate

Website: **[www.thirrili.com.au](http://www.thirrili.com.au)**

The phone is answered by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Advocate. Further information available on their website.

There are more resources for specifically Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander post-suicide support on the Postvention Australia website (**[postventionaustralia.org](http://postventionaustralia.org)**).



### Crisis support

If you are in need of immediate emotional support, crisis support services and counselling are available to talk with you. Many of these support services are easily accessible through phone, online chat, and text and most are also available 24/7.

For emergencies, call **Triple Zero** on **000**.

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, please call Triple Zero (000).

### Suicide Call Back Service

Phone: **1300 659 467**

Website: [suicidecallbackservice.org.au](https://suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

24-hour national telephone counselling service and online counselling service for people who are suicidal or bereaved by suicide, and bereavement resources.

### Lifeline

Phone: **13 11 14**

Website: [lifeline.org.au](https://lifeline.org.au)

24-hour national telephone crisis counselling, online counselling service and resources.

### Counselling and mental health services

Counselling for individuals, couples, families or friendship groups can be beneficial. This is an opportunity to focus on your own experience, ask questions, speak about what might be worrying you and to very specifically work out what will be helpful to you. You may need to “shop” around to find the right fit. The NSW PSS and StandBy can assist you in locating counselling support.

The **Suicide Call Back Service** and **Lifeline** listed above also have telephone and online counselling available.

### MensLine Australia

Phone: **1300 789 978**

Website: [mensline.org.au](https://mensline.org.au)

24-hour national telephone and online counselling service for men.

### **BeyondBlue**

Phone: **1300 224 636**

Website: **[beyondblue.com.au](http://beyondblue.com.au)**

24-hour national phone information service and online chat service.

### **Kids Help Line**

Phone: **1800 551 800**

Website: **[kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)**

24-hour national telephone and online counselling service for young people aged 5-25.

### **Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling Services**

Phone: **1800 011 046**

Website: **[www.openarms.gov.au](http://www.openarms.gov.au)**

Confidential telephone, 24-hour counselling, support and referral for war and service-related mental health conditions as well as relationship and family matters. It is available to current and former ADF members, ADF Reservists who have served in domestic or international relief operations, DVA Health Card (white or gold) holders and their family members.

### **QLife**

Phone: **1800 184 527** (3pm-12 midnight, 7 days a week)

Website: **[www.qlife.org.au](http://www.qlife.org.au)**

Twenty10 incorporating GLCS NSW is the NSW provider for QLife (Australia-wide anonymous, LGBTI peer support and referral).

### **Support groups**

Many people bereaved by suicide find group support to be very comforting and helpful. Groups can help validate grief experiences and you can experience understanding and a sense of belonging by being with those who have similar experiences. Support groups can complement other postvention services like counselling. Groups are sometimes facilitated by professional counsellors or by trained peer supporters. StandBy can assist you in locating group support (phone **1300 727 247**) or you can visit Postvention Australia's Service Directory at **[postventionaustralia.org](http://postventionaustralia.org)**.



5

**CHILDREN  
& YOUNG  
PEOPLE**







## CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

When someone takes their own life, it can have a ripple effect across families and communities, including children and young people. One of the many challenges faced by those who are grieving is responding to the needs of children and young people. There may be questions about whether to tell children what has happened and how to go about this.

There are some resources and services available to assist in thinking about these questions on the Postvention Australia website ([postventionaustralia.org](https://postventionaustralia.org)). You can also phone StandBy on **1300 727 247**.





## Communicating about suicide

What you tell children and how you tell them will depend on your knowledge and understanding of your child and what they know about death and suicide already. It is preferable that children are told the truth in a gentle, compassionate yet straightforward way; that is, saying that someone they know and love has died and that they took their own life. It is also preferable that the person who tells them is someone they are comfortable with, who they trust and who will continue to care for them. This might be a parent, but if parents are too distressed it may be better that it is someone else.

It's often assumed that children won't know or understand what suicide means. However, many children from as young as eight years old do understand what it is to take your own life. Even if you think the children are not aware of what has happened, they are extremely sensitive and may have picked up that something is wrong or that they are not being told the full story. Or they may have overheard you or others talking about it.

It will usually be up to you to choose the time to talk about the death. You can sometimes find cues in their play and other behaviour indicating that the child is ready for conversation about the death. More information about how to talk with children about suicide is available at the Postvention Australia website ([postventionaustralia.org](https://postventionaustralia.org)).

## If you've told a different story

It's not too late to tell your child if you have already told them a different story about the circumstances of the death.

You may want to explain that sometimes adults can have difficulties talking about these things and you didn't know how to best explain it at the time. Correcting information about the death allows you to establish a strong and trusting relationship with the child.



## Grief expressions of children

It can appear that children are coping well as they might not cry or seem sad like adults do. But their grief comes in bursts, going from playing to being sad and back again quickly. The child may also express their grief through play, repeating the same game or story repeatedly or perhaps including themes of death in their play. These types of behaviour and play are normal for any grieving child. Generally, children express grief differently to adults.

- No two children will grieve in the same way. It will depend on their age, their personality, their connection to the person and a range of other factors.
- Children may not be able to verbalise how they are feeling, but they may express it through behaviour and the way they interact with others.
- For younger children, grief may be expressed through changed sleeping patterns, temper tantrums, worries about being separated from family members, refusing to go to school or through repetitive play.
- For older children, they may isolate themselves, have trouble sleeping, or fear rejection or abandonment from friends and family.
- For both younger and older children you may notice that they revert to behaviour more typical of a younger child for a period of time and experience unexplained physical symptoms.
- As a carer you may notice children returning to younger behaviours, such as wetting the bed, or becoming clingy, anxious, and demanding of your attention. They may need to ask the same questions many times.
- Grief for children may come and go. At times they may seem not to be affected, but it does not mean they are not feeling the loss.
- Children's responses to grief and loss can also be shaped by those who care for them. It can be helpful to maintain routines and consistent people around them to provide support.

## Some helpful ideas to support children

- **Practical resources.**

There are free practical resources for children provided by organisations like StandBy and Support After Suicide including grief journals and activity books.

- **Children take things literally.**

It's best not to say "They went to sleep. We lost them. They've left us." Instead you could say the person got sick and made their body stop working.

- **You don't need to hide your grief.**

It's OK for children to see you are grieving. This helps them learn how to grieve and learn that it is okay to talk about and show their feelings.

- **It's important to keep the usual routines.**

This helps to provide a sense of safety, however, there may be times to not stick rigidly to routines.

- **Memories and staying connected with the person.**

It's normal for children to worry about forgetting the person who died, what they looked like, how they sounded. Helping them stay connected by talking about special times, creating a photo album or memory box can assist with this.

- **Spend time with your children.**

Play and spend time doing activities together. You can include them in some of the activities mentioned in "Care and Support". Using play can be a means to find out how they are going and coping.

- **Staying connected with others.**

Encourage the child to spend time with their friends and remain connected. Let them also have a break if they need some time to reflect.

- **Others who need to know.**

It helps the children to have support and not have to keep it a secret. If you are able to, or another trusted adult, you can tell their teacher, childcare staff or others they spend a lot of time with.

This helps to give some sense of control and safety for both you and the child, by providing the appropriate information to teachers and peers, putting in ways of supporting the child if distressed, e.g., phoning the parent, taking the child to a quiet place in the school, letting them take a break, making arrangements around special occasions such as birthdays, holidays, Mother's/ Father's Day. Including the child in these decisions can also be helpful.

BeYou has a Suicide Postvention Toolkit for schools on their website ([beyou.edu.au](https://beyou.edu.au)). Postvention Australia also has further resources on the website ([postventionaustralia.org](https://postventionaustralia.org)).

## Grief expressions of young people

Young people are already going through complex transitions in their age group, including behavioural, social, cognitive, emotional, physical and spiritual developments. Many young people are exploring their identity, their independence, and relationships with peers during this time.

During adolescence, grief has the potential to accelerate or delay development. Young people can often feel overwhelmed and confused by the intensity and range of feelings they are experiencing. Their limited life experience may not prepare them to handle intense feelings in safe ways.

Many young people feel conflicted about seeking support from their parents as they are also striving for independence. They may feel alienated from peers and struggle to concentrate at school. These factors can create vulnerability, which may lead to isolation, confusion and increased risk-taking behaviour.

## Helpful things to consider for young people

- Sit with the young person and let them talk, cry or be silent. If communication is difficult, it is sometimes in the car or during shared activities that conversations can be shared.
- Acknowledge their pain and distress.
- Make opportunities to share memories or photos of the person who died.
- Encourage them to spend time with their friends and remain connected. Let them also have a break if they need some time to reflect.
- Many of the activities mentioned in the section “Care and Support” can be suggested to the young person, including:
  - Write a letter or card to the person who has died
  - Engage in creative activities like drawing, painting, making music, writing poetry, etc.
  - Making playlists or mixes of music and songs that are meaningful
  - Share memories with others who knew the person who has died
  - Make a memory book or box – collect photos, poems, sketches, sayings, quotes, stories and mementos
  - Exercise or engaging in sports
- Be aware of your own grief and/or feeling of helplessness. It helps build trust if you are honest and open about your own grief too.
- Try to keep calm in the absence or presence of strong emotional responses from the young person.
- Prepare for special days and holidays like Christmas, birthdays and anniversaries. This can include creating a new ritual or visiting the cemetery, lighting a candle, or spending time in a place special to the person who has died.
- There are practical resources for young people provided by StandBy including a grief journal and accompanying resource and accompanying resource, which can be found on the StandBy website ([standbysupport.com.au](https://standbysupport.com.au)).
- Emphasise the importance of talking about feelings whenever they may be down or sad. Explore possible key people that the young person can talk to, which may include you, another carer, relative, a teacher, counsellor, or friends.

If your child is in crisis or emotional distress, or it may be that they may not be comfortable in speaking with you or another adult, highlight the Kids Helpline as a good starting place for them to call, text or online chat. This national telephone and online counselling service is available 24/7 for young people aged 5-25 on **1800 551 800** and their website [kidshelpline.com.au](https://kidshelpline.com.au).

## Should my child attend the funeral?

This can be a difficult decision. It may be helpful to give the child an informed choice. If your child would like to be involved, it can be a good idea to include them in the process and ask them how they would like to take part. This provides them with a sense of control and safety. Ways to involve the child includes choosing a favourite song, writing a letter, or drawing a card.

Prior to attending the funeral service, it would be helpful to discuss with the child where it will be held, what will happen at the funeral, what they will see and who will be there, so that they are prepared.



## Returning to school

It is important to have a conversation with the child about what they want their classmates to know. Contact the school and advise them of the death and circumstances before your child goes back to school.

You may also want to rehearse with the child what they will say to their friends or teachers so that they are well prepared. Maintain contact with the teachers and inform them of any anniversary dates and extra stressful times. It may also be helpful to discuss with the school potential issues in making gifts or being involved in events such as Mother's Day or Father's Day.

There are resources and support services for the suicide bereavement experience for children and young people, as well as resources for schools, available online at the Postvention Australia website ([postventionaustralia.org](http://postventionaustralia.org)).

If your child is in crisis or emotional distress, or it may be that they may not be comfortable in speaking with you or another adult, highlight the Kids Helpline as a good starting place for them to call, text or online chat.







6

**COMMUNITIES**







## COMMUNITIES

There are particular communities or groups that have unique experiences that need to be acknowledged and require an informed and sensitive response. These groups are often marginalised and misunderstood, and very often have a higher risk of suicide.



### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

#### Suicide grief for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

There are some common feelings that may be experienced by people going through suicide loss. Shock, sadness, distress, numbness, anxiety, fear, anger, helplessness and many other feelings and thoughts. It may assist to understand that your experience occurs in a context of intergenerational trauma and dispossession. Fortunately, there is specialist, culturally sensitive support available.

There are many unique aspects of suicide grief that may affect you as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person:

- You may long to return to country or home – this may feel like the right place to process your grief, but this may be hard if you live in a different area.
- There may be an expectation to attend cultural events around Sorry Business, funerals, ceremonies and support family members. This may impact your work, housing, financial or education commitments.

- You may feel regret, guilt or self-blame for doing something (or not doing something).
- You may face challenges in finding adequate and accessible culturally responsive post-suicide support and care.
- There may be more complex needs due to the intersection of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity with different categories such as gender, class, LGBTQIA+, location, access to health services and education, trauma, and many more.

### Services and resources

The Indigenous Suicide Postvention Service is the national Indigenous service for individuals, families, and communities affected by suicide.

The service can:

- work with local Elders, community and Aboriginal and /or Torres Strait Islander organisations to ensure a community response is put in place to support bereaved individuals and families
- travel to provide support if invited by the family or we can provide advice to Community Leaders or Elders and local services on how best to respond
- meet with individuals and families to discuss their needs
- provide practical social support, link people with a range of local social, health and community services and where appropriate continue to work with local services to ensure care and support continues beyond the immediate aftermath of the traumatic incident
- advocate on behalf of families to assist them access the supports they need in their time of grief

Contact a **Postvention Advocate** on **1800 805 801** (available 24 hours, 7 days a week).

Further information is also available at their website [www.thirrili.com.au](http://www.thirrili.com.au).

There are more resources for specifically Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander post-suicide support on the Postvention Australia website ([postventionaustralia.org](http://postventionaustralia.org)).

## Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)

### Context and suicide grief for people from CALD communities

The challenges that each specific CALD community face after a suicide are as varied and complex as the communities themselves. Unique factors and challenges that contribute to mental health and suicide bereavement in CALD communities include:

- A lack of information and understanding about suicide can limit and/or be a barrier to conversation
- Stigma, shame and guilt
- Specific religious beliefs and practices
- Migration and resettlement
- Breakdown of traditional culture, inter-generational conflict, changes in family roles
- Racism and discrimination
- Language barriers, especially surrounding mental health and suicide
- More complex needs due to the intersection of being from a CALD community with different categories such as gender, class, LGBTQIA+, location, access to health services and education, trauma, and many more.

### Services and Resources

The Transcultural Mental Health Centre (TMHC) is a NSW Health state-wide service and works with health professionals and communities across New South Wales to support positive mental health for people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

There are also translated mental health resources available on their website at [www.dhi.health.nsw.gov.au/tmhc](http://www.dhi.health.nsw.gov.au/tmhc).

You can call the **Mental Health Line** on **1800 011 511** or go to their website.

There are more resources and services specifically for post-suicide support for CALD communities on the Postvention Australia website ([postventionaustralia.org](http://postventionaustralia.org)).



## LGBTQIA+

### Context and suicide grief for LGBTQIA+ people

The elevated risk of suicidality among LGBTQIA+ people is not due to sexuality, sex, or gender identity in and of themselves, but rather due to discrimination and exclusion as key factors. Many LGBTQIA+ people may not be able to access suicide prevention and postvention supports, due to fear of discrimination and/or fear of being ‘outed’.

LGBTQIA+ postvention faces many challenges unique to the LGBTQIA+ community including:

- the much-needed validation of “queer grief”
- erasure of queer identities by families, institutions, and heteronormative and cis-normative communities, impacting the legitimacy of grief experienced by LGBTQIA+ individuals and exclusion from grieving rituals such as funerals
- the interconnectedness between LGBTQIA+ peers, as well as an individual to LGBTQIA+ communities and LGBTQIA+ cultures and histories
- more complex needs due to intersections with various categories such as class, location, CALD background, and many more.

### Services and Resources

#### **Twenty10 incorporating GLCS NSW**

Twenty10 incorporating GLCS NSW works with people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, intersex, questioning, queer, asexual and more, LGBTQIA+ people and others of diverse genders and sexualities, their families and communities.

Helpline (3pm-12am): **1800 184 527**

Website and Chat support: **[www.twenty10.org.au](http://www.twenty10.org.au)**

#### **QLife**

Twenty10 incorporating GLCS NSW is the NSW provider for QLife (Australia-wide anonymous, LGBTI peer support and referral). Information about QLife and its services are available at their website: **[www.qlife.org.au](http://www.qlife.org.au)**

#### **ACON**

ACON offers programs and services to people in regional NSW such as counselling and carecoordination. See their website for more information on services in your local area. Website: **[www.acon.org.au](http://www.acon.org.au)**

There are more resources and services for post-suicide support for LGBTQIA+ communities on the Postvention Australia website (**[postventionaustralia.org](http://postventionaustralia.org)**).



## Religion & Faith

### Context and suicide grief in religious and faith communities

The relationship between religion, faith and suicide (and thus suicide bereavement support) can be quite complex. Whilst religion and faith can be a comforting source of support, sometimes religious beliefs can be barriers to or limit understanding of mental health and suicide. It can also create barriers to help-seeking for both suicide prevention and postvention support.

There may be moral and religious objections to suicide, for example, which may lead to increased blame on the bereaved family and potential isolation from the religious community. If the religion is a minority religion, this may also impact access to religion-specific support systems and services.

After losing someone to suicide, you may also begin to have questions around your spirituality:

*Was the divinity or spiritual entity involved in what happened? How? Is suicide a punishment? What kind of afterlife will people who die by suicide experience?*

Religious leaders and communities can also be of great support after a suicide, as well as acting as gatekeepers to identify individuals who may be at risk of suicide. Religion can also play a major part in conducting memorial and funeral services for the bereaved families.

There are more resources and services for post-suicide support for religious and faith communities on the Postvention Australia website ([postventionaustralia.org](https://postventionaustralia.org)).





## Rural & Remote

### Context and and suicide grief in rural and remote communities

A person's risk of suicide in Australia increases the further they live from a city, which may be attributable to less support for mental ill-health in remote areas. Within rural and remote populations, those most at risk include men, young people, farmers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In remote parts of Australia, farmers die by suicide at five times the rate of non-farmers. There are many factors evident such as: isolation (both physical and emotional), a sense of history and family duty or legacy, increased access to means, alcohol use and enhanced gender roles and concepts of masculinity which hinder help-seeking behaviour, lack of specialised services. The “feast or famine” nature of farming also increases stress and reliance on social networks. Isolation, along with lack of social connectedness, can increase suicidality and create barriers to seeking suicide prevention and postvention support.

### Services and Resources

#### **Centre for Rural And Remote Mental Health (CRRMH)**

The Centre for Rural And Remote Mental Health (CRRMH) is a state-wide organisation that is committed to improving the mental health, wellbeing and resilience of rural and remote residents. Links to services and resources are available on their website.

Website: [www.crrmh.com.au](http://www.crrmh.com.au)

Phone: **02 6363 8444**

Email: [crrmh@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:crrmh@newcastle.edu.au)

#### **MensLine**

MensLine Australia offers a confidential telephone (24/7) and online (4pm-10pm/7days) support, information and referral service for men with family and relationship concerns. The service is staffed by qualified professionals experienced in men's issues.

Website: [www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)

Phone: **1300 78 99 78**

There are more resources and services for post-suicide support for rural and remote communities on the Postvention Australia website. ([postventionaustralia.org](http://postventionaustralia.org)).

## Veterans

### Context and suicide grief in Veterans

Suicide among the veteran population occurs at almost twice the rate of the general population. This can be due to a combination of factors; military personnel can be repeatedly exposed to trauma, moral injury, a lack of access to mental health care, institutional issues, military transitions from the Australian Defence Force, and a growing sense of disconnection in society, economic issues due to deployments, relationship problems, along with quick turnaround between deployments.

### Services and Resources

#### Defence Member and Family Helpline

The Defence Family Helpline provides support and information for Australian Defence Force members and their families. The telephone helpline is available 24 hours, 7 days a week and is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists. You can also contact the helpline while living overseas.

Website: [www.defence.gov.au/members-families/Defence-Helpline.asp](http://www.defence.gov.au/members-families/Defence-Helpline.asp)

Phone: **1800 624 608**

Email: [memberandfamilyhelpline@defence.gov.au](mailto:memberandfamilyhelpline@defence.gov.au)

#### Open Arms

Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling Services provides confidential telephone, 24-hour counselling, support and referral for war and service-related mental health conditions as well as relationship and family matters. It is available to current and former ADF members, ADF Reservists who have served in domestic or international relief operations, DVA Health Card (white or gold) holders and their family members.

Website: [www.openarms.gov.au](http://www.openarms.gov.au)

Phone: **1800 011 046**

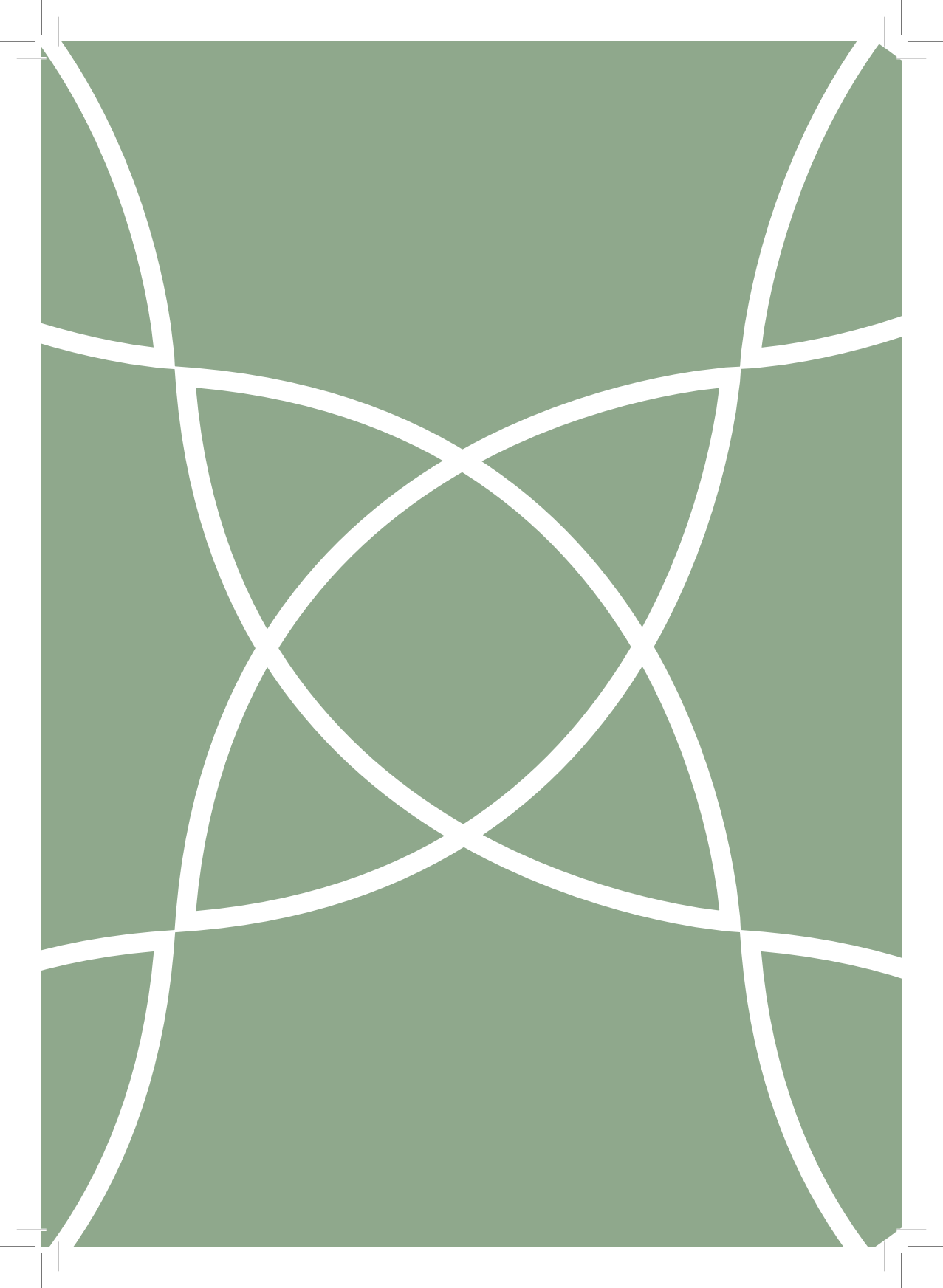
There are more resources and services for post-suicide support for veterans and veteran's families on the Postvention Australia website ([postventionaustralia.org](http://postventionaustralia.org)).





**7**

# **SUPPORTING THE BEREAVED**





# SUPPORTING THE BEREAVED

## How others can support you

Sometimes it can be difficult to articulate what you might need from friends and family after experiencing a death by suicide. Below are some tips that people bereaved by suicide have found useful to share with others around them. You might find it useful to provide this section to people in your life, or to develop a list of your own needs.

### 1. Listen and sit with me

I may have intense emotions that could include anger, sadness, fear and guilt. Be prepared for any or all reactions. You cannot take these away, but just by being there, listening and showing you care can be comforting. Let me talk freely and openly. You don't need to offer any advice, for now just sit with me.

### 2. Keep in touch regularly

There may be times when your offers are refused but keep trying. If you don't know what to say, be honest and say, "I don't know what to say, but I am here for you". A note or text in between other contact with words such as "Thinking of you" and "I miss them too" lets me know I am not alone.

### 3. Share memories

Don't be afraid to talk about the person who died and what they meant to you. It is important for me.

### 4. Understand the healing process takes time

It can take months or years to find a liveable place for my loss. Remembering birthdays and special days can be particularly difficult.

### 5. Offer practical support

I may need assistance with accessing information, medical/psychological support or meeting other responsibilities. It may be helpful for you to be my driver, make essential phone calls, or assist me in meeting my children's needs. Offer practical support such as making a meal, doing the shopping, gardening or washing.

### 6. Be aware of language

The language you use should not judge the way my loved one died.

### 7. Be kind to yourself

You may also be affected by the loss and have your own grief to work through.



*"Sometimes when people want to help someone who has been bereaved by suicide, they say 'If there's anything I can do, let me know'. But I've found the people I support sometimes find this helpful. It can make a big difference if you can think of something concrete you can do and suggest that to the person you want to support instead".*

## Someone I know has lost someone to suicide – what can I say or do?

When you know someone who has lost a loved one to suicide it is sometimes hard to know what to say or what to do to help. It is not unusual to feel at a loss, to feel that nothing you do can make a difference. The most important things are to be there and to listen. The intensity of the grief and trauma will be overwhelming for most people and that you can be there and offer comfort and support is most important.

It is unlikely that you can say anything that will take the depth of loss away, but it can be immensely comforting that you are willing to be present, listen and perhaps do some practical tasks to help.

The following is a guide to help you support your friend or family member:

- Reach out to the bereaved; you may want to give them space out of fear of saying the wrong thing or making the situation worse, however, this silence often reinforces the isolation, stigma, and shame that the bereaved person may already feel.
- If you are unsure of what to say, express concern and explain that you don't know what to say, rather than avoiding the person.  
*"I can't imagine what you're going through. I don't really know what to say, but I'm here for you if you need someone to listen."*
- It is usually best to make contact in person, but sending a private message online or a text could be enough to let them know you are thinking of them.  
*"I just wanted to let you know that I'm thinking about you and I'm here for you if you need anything or want to talk."*





- Offer to perform practical tasks like cooking a meal, or doing cleaning or washing, or picking up groceries. Actions, as well as words, are an act of care.
- Sometimes your offers to talk or help may be refused, but try again at a later time.
- Also, bereaved people may not always have the energy to let you know what they need in terms of practical assistance. Making a specific offer of something you can imagine that needs doing, for example, meal preparation, child care, gardening, can help the bereaved person immensely.

## Additional advice for the workplace

People cope with grief in different ways. For some, grief can be completely debilitating, and the bereaved person may need time off work. Others may prefer to be at work as a way of keeping a routine and coping with their grief.

It's important to understand that, at first, the bereaved person may be in a state of shock and overwhelmed by grief. In addition to sadness, reactions can include problems with concentration and memory, fatigue, and loss of confidence.

Discuss options with your employee about time off work and any changes in duties when they return and come up with a plan together. Check in regularly to see how they are going. Listen to the response and try to understand.

Other things you can do include:

- If the employee is receiving counselling, offer them time off for appointments.
- Offer support for employees affected by suicide through flexible work hours or reduced hours when they initially come back to work.
- You could ask the bereaved person how their grief is affecting them, what they would like their colleagues to be told in relation to the death, and what you and the wider workplace can do to support them.
- Provide information to all employees about suicide and bereavement. Sharing this section of the booklet or providing the web page on supporting someone bereaved by suicide is a good start. Inviting a counsellor to speak with staff can build confidence and understanding about offering support.
- Ensure appropriate policies and procedures are developed and implemented. These should cover managing a crisis situation for an employee returning to work following a suicide attempt and losing someone to suicide.
- Put up posters and information about where employees can go for support. This might be details of your organisation's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or other helplines and support services.

- For managers in workplaces where employees are exposed to suicide, acknowledge it when it happens – check in with them to ensure they are ok and direct them to where they can get support if needed.

### If an employee has taken their life

If someone in your workplace has taken their life, staff will look to you as a leader for guidance in this sad and distressing time.

Some things for you as a manager to be aware of:

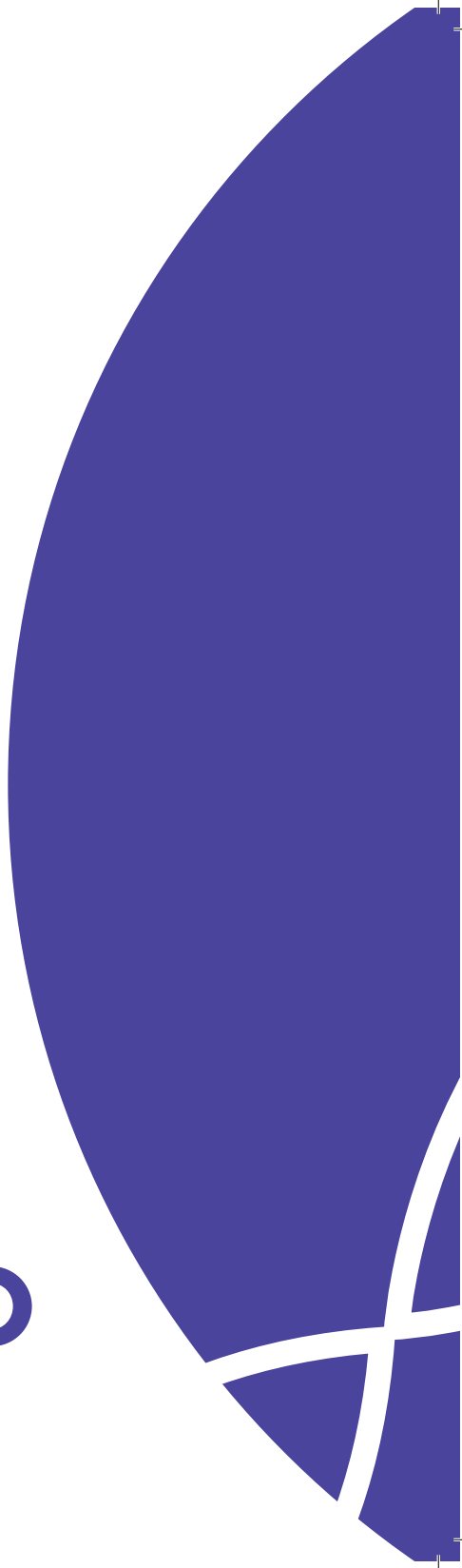
- Be prepared to respond to an employee's suicide. Learn what support your workplace can offer staff. If your workplace has an EAP or a HR team, ask them if they offer counselling referrals following a suicide.
- Allow staff to grieve and direct them to the appropriate support.
- Understand the policies and procedure in place, for example be aware of the organisations communication strategy for how (and if) the broader organisation will be informed about the death of a colleague, and for addressing the external contacts coming through (e.g. police, friends, press, etc.). This may not be your direct responsibility, but it is important as a manager to be aware of it.

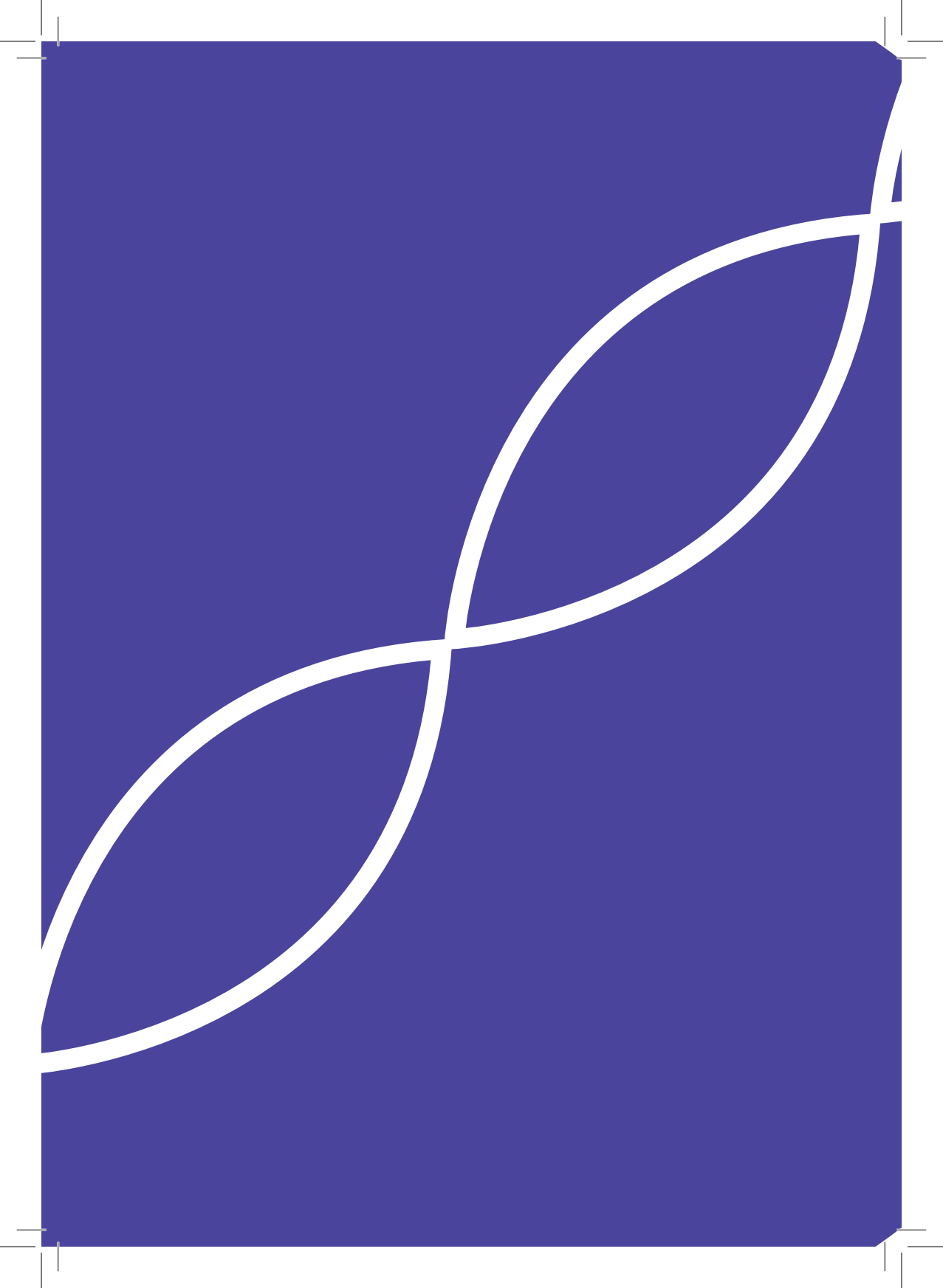
There are more resources and services for post-suicide support for workplaces on the Postvention Australia website ([postventionaustralia.org](https://postventionaustralia.org)) and StandBy website ([standbysupport.com.au](https://standbysupport.com.au)).



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# THE ROAD AHEAD







## THE ROAD AHEAD

For most people the grief and trauma of suicide is a long road.

You may sometimes think that you will never recover or feel like yourself again. There are many people who have suffered this devastating loss who go on to live satisfying and fulfilling lives. At times, they will have thought that they could not manage life following the suicide. The depth of the loss may never fully leave you, but even when it feels impossible to recover, know that there are others who know this experience and who have learned to live with it.

### **Anniversaries and special occasions**

Some days may be more difficult than others. Occasions like birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and any special days you may have spent together with your loved one can bring a fresh wave of sadness. Although it can be draining, the pain felt on these occasions is a natural part of grief.

Sometimes the anticipation leading up to a special day can be more difficult than the day itself. You may wish to talk to friends or co-workers and explain the significance of the day. They may be able to act as a support person for you during this time. It may also be helpful to make plans for these days in advance, to relieve stress in the lead-up to the day.

For example, you may wish to talk with close family and friends about things you want to do on the day in honour of your loved one – this can be done together or alone.

This could include:

- Starting a new tradition or ritual like lighting candles
- Sharing stories with family and friends
- Writing poems, letters, drawing, painting, to remember them
- Listening to music or watching a movie they liked
- Doing activities or visiting places that were important to them
- Setting a place at the table for them

You may also decide to do nothing. Either is completely fine. It is important to remember that there is no right or wrong way of doing things. It is entirely up to you what you decide to do and how you decide to remember the person.

It may also be important to take a flexible approach; you may have decided on what you would do, and included friends and family, but it's good to have a plan B as you may change your mind on the day about what you would like to do.



*“We have adopted the tradition of making our loved-one’s favourite foods, such as on the anniversary of my brother’s death I make coffee scrolls. Going to the coffee scroll shop was something that my brother and I did together. I remember the special attachment and the bond that I had with my brother. The quality of our bond has and will have a lifelong effect on me. Our bond has not been taken away by our separation – our bond was strong and the essence of our love still resides within me.”*

Person with lived experience

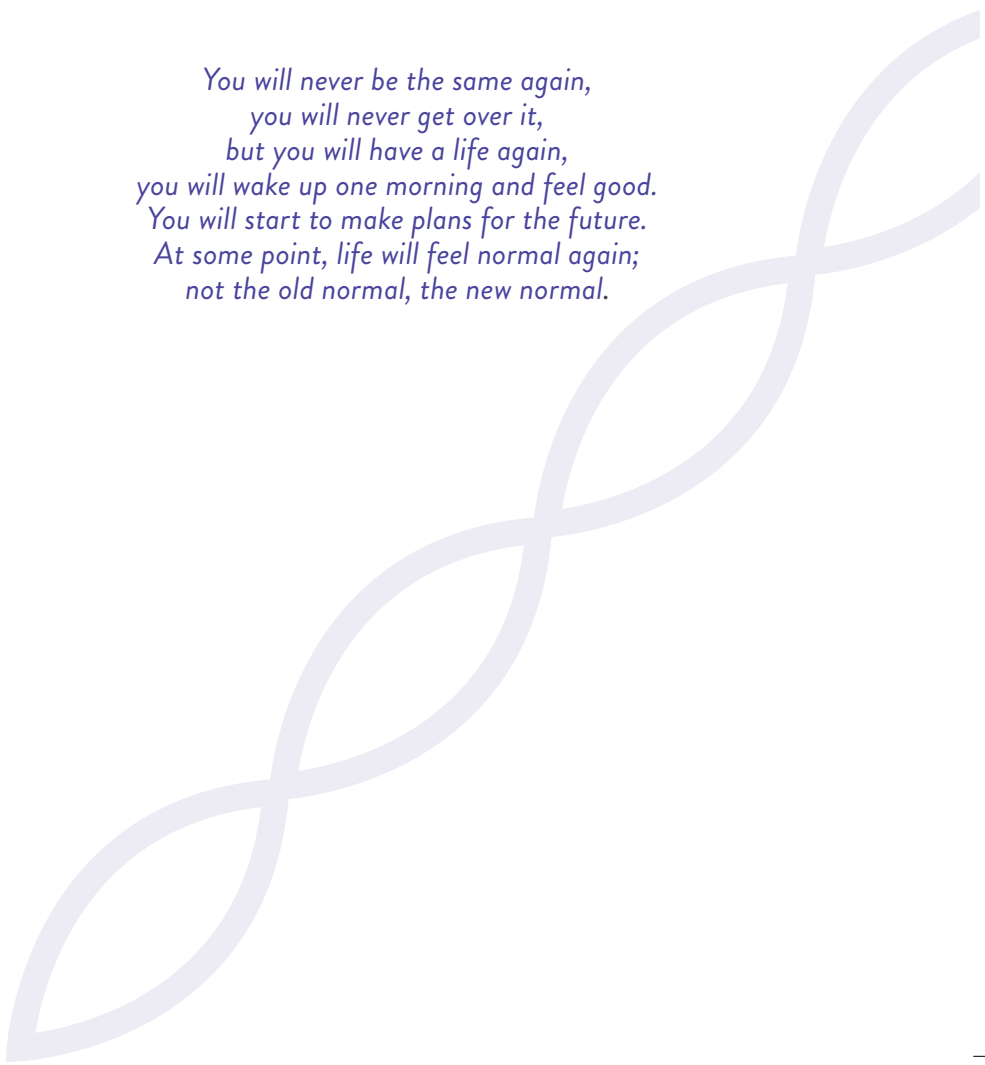
## A new normal

You will learn to grow your life around and with the loss – so that your loved one will always stay in your heart and in your life, without forgetting them or leaving them behind. There is no set timeline for your grief – you can take your time to experience your loss and find your way to a “new normal”.

It is important to reach out for support and assistance when you think it will be helpful.

Research indicates that those who reach out often have better recovery.

So, whilst it may never fully leave you, life can become a ‘new normal’.



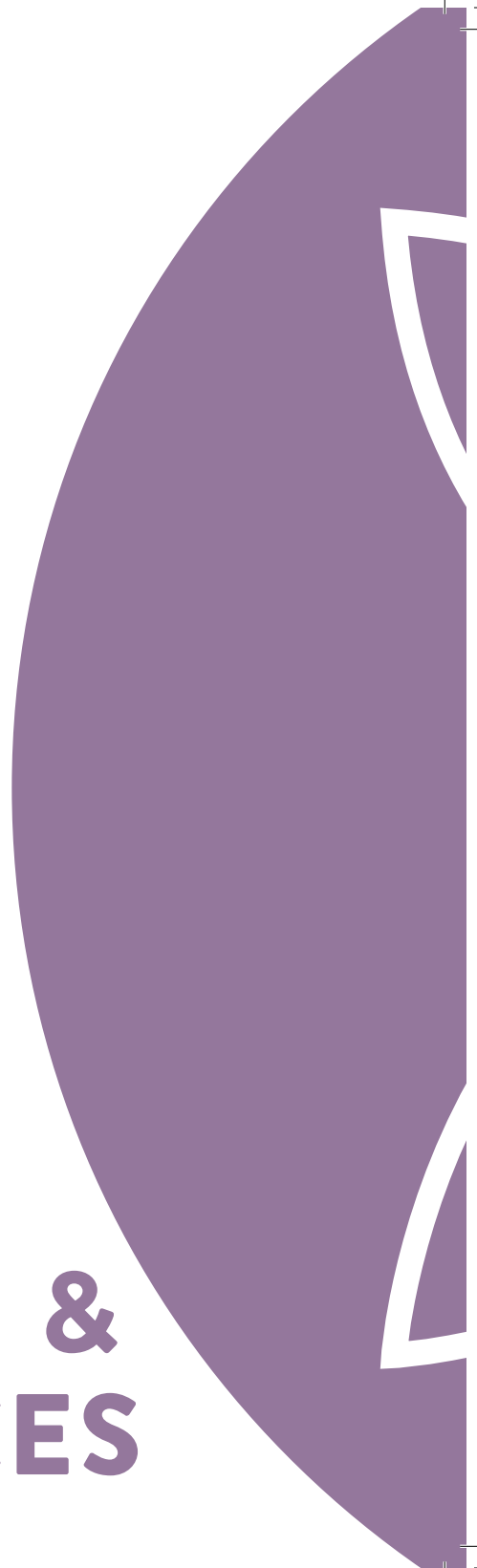
*You will never be the same again,  
you will never get over it,  
but you will have a life again,  
you will wake up one morning and feel good.  
You will start to make plans for the future.  
At some point, life will feel normal again;  
not the old normal, the new normal.*

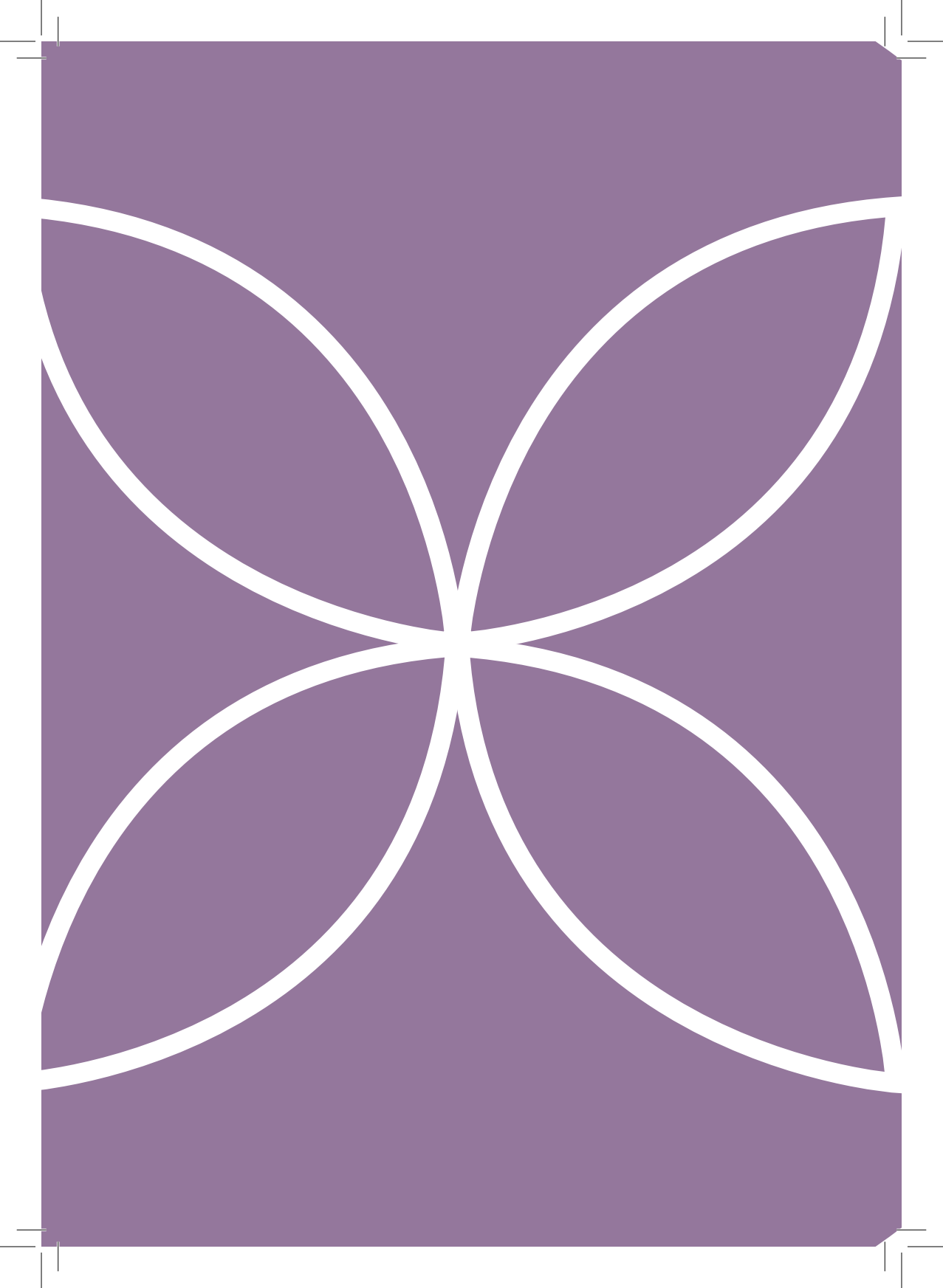




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## SERVICES & RESOURCES







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A comprehensive, online directory of services is listed on the Postvention Australia website [postventionaustralia.org](http://postventionaustralia.org).

Listed here are the key services available in NSW.  
Each of these services will be able to put you in contact with other supports that you may require.

### Postvention Services

#### **StandBy Support After Suicide**

Phone: **1300 727 247** (24 hour)

Website: [www.standbysupport.com.au/find-support/](http://www.standbysupport.com.au/find-support/)

StandBy supports anyone bereaved by suicide including: individuals, families, friends, associates, witnesses, communities, schools and workplaces. The support is free of charge and available to anyone, regardless of when the loss occurred.

#### **Support After Suicide** (Jesuit Social Services)

Phone: **1800 943 415**

Email: [aftersuicide@jss.org.au](mailto:aftersuicide@jss.org.au)

Website: [www.supportaftersuicide.org.au](http://www.supportaftersuicide.org.au)

Support After Suicide is one of the programs providing support in NSW. Counselling, groups and online support are available in New South Wales and Victoria. Their website provides an extensive library of free resources and publications for those bereaved by suicide.



### **Indigenous Suicide Postvention Service**

Phone: **1800 805 801** (24 hour)

Website: **[www.thirrili.com.au](http://www.thirrili.com.au)**

This is the national Indigenous service for individuals, families, and communities affected by suicide.

### **Postvention Australia (PVA)**

Phone: **1300 024 357**

Email: **[info@postventionaustralia.org](mailto:info@postventionaustralia.org)**

Website: **[postventionaustralia.org](http://postventionaustralia.org)**

PVA has a comprehensive post-suicide support service directory and a range of resources available online.

### Crisis Support

If you need immediate crisis support, please contact the following 24-hour support lines through phone, online chat or text:

For emergencies, call **Triple Zero** on **000**.

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, please call Triple Zero (000).

### Suicide Call Back Service

Phone: **1300 659 467** (24 hours)

Website: [www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

A free 24-hour national telephone counselling service and online counselling service for people who are suicidal, caring for someone who is suicidal, bereaved by suicide or are health professionals supporting people affected by suicide. Bereavement resources are also available on the website.

### Lifeline

Phone: **13 11 14** (24 hour)

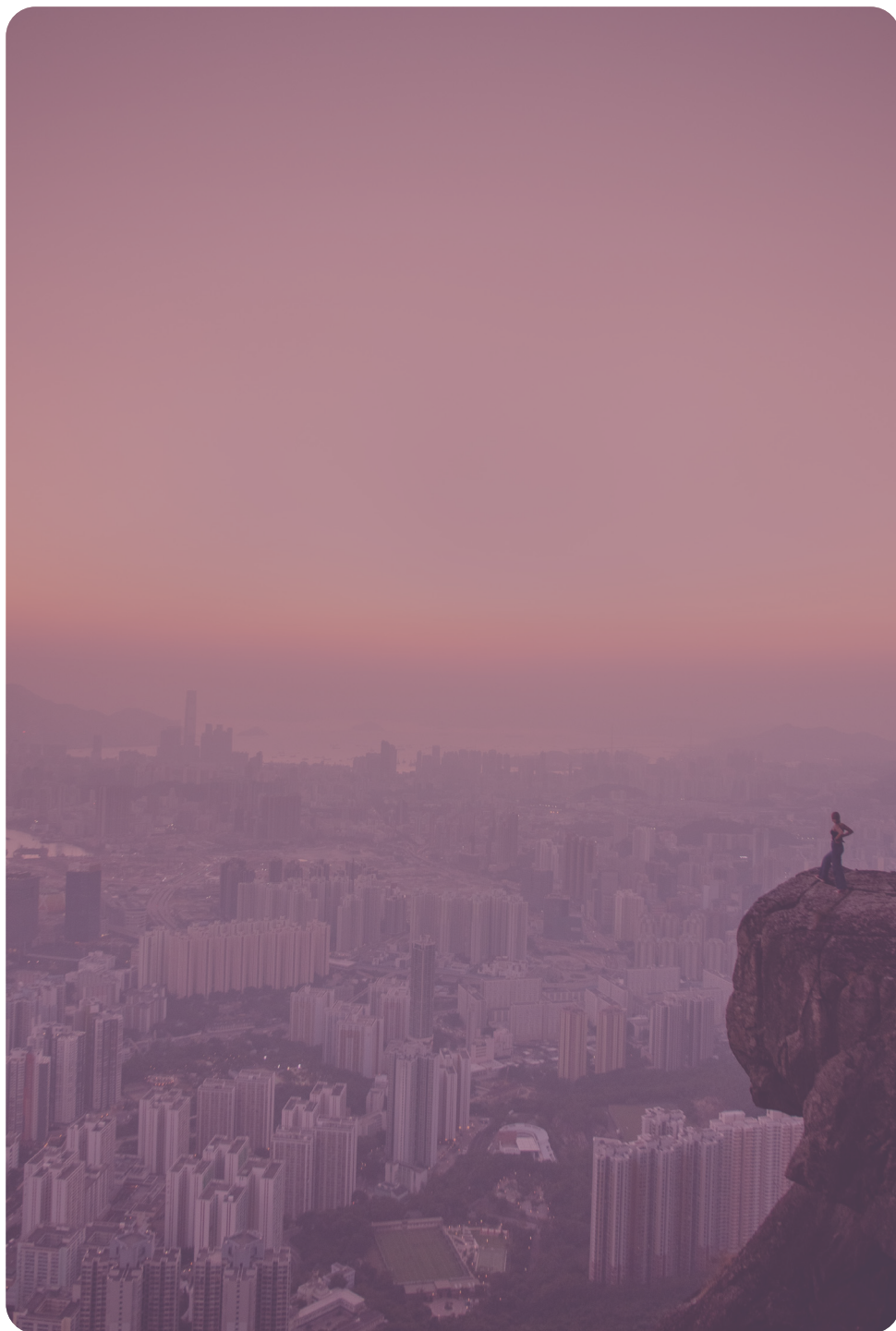
Text support: **0477 13 11 14** (12pm - 2am)

Website: [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

Lifeline is a national service, providing all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24-hour crisis support, text and online counselling services and resources.







1300 024 357  
PO Box 134 Summer Hill NSW 2130

[info@postventionaustralia.org](mailto:info@postventionaustralia.org)  
[www.postventionaustralia.org](http://www.postventionaustralia.org)

