



POSTVENTION
AUSTRALIA

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR THE BEREAVED
BY SUICIDE

Loss, grief and 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. Often we think of the emotions and feelings of grief but it also affects our thoughts and behaviours as well as our physical wellbeing.

Each of us will need different ways to express and cope with our loss. 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.

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 of shame, that this reflects on you in some way
- a persistent need to ask “why” - trying to make sense of and understand why it happened
- feelings of rejection and abandonment.

Sometimes people assume that they will feel angry; at the system 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.

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. The symptoms can be distressing, however there are ways to work through trauma.

Stigma

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.

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 on the Postvention Australia website has information about support groups.

For more information and support

Postvention Australia | 1300 024 357 | postventionaustralia.org | info@postventionaustralia.org
Information and resources

StandBy Support After Suicide | 1300 727 247 | standbysupport.com.au
24/7 national phone response; support and resources

National Indigenous Postvention Service | 1800 805 801 | thirrili.com.au
24/7 national phone response; community support and advocacy

Support After Suicide | 1800 943 415 | supportaftersuicide.org.au | aftersuicide@jss.org.au
Counselling and group support (NSW and VIC); national online support