



Survivors of
Bereavement
by Suicide

Living through loss

Support after
a bereavement
by suicide

We're sorry for your loss

We're so sorry that you're here, and that this booklet is something you need. Someone has died by suicide, and your world may have been turned upside down. There is no easy way to process that kind of loss, and no right way to feel.

This booklet was created by people who have also been bereaved by suicide. We know the depth of this pain, and we want you to know that you do not have to face it alone. Inside, you'll find gentle support for whatever you may be feeling, practical guidance for the days ahead, and ways to connect with others who understand; whenever you feel ready to take that step.

We hope this booklet offers a small sense of steadiness and reassurance in a time that may feel anything but. We're here, for as long as you need us.

A note on language

The words we use surrounding suicide can carry deep meaning, and often, deep pain. In this booklet, we've chosen language with care, knowing that different people find comfort with different terms. You may have your own way of speaking about your experience, and that's okay too.

The word suicide itself may feel hard to say out loud. But it doesn't have to be a word we avoid. Talking openly, in your own time and in your own way can be an important step toward reducing silence and stigma.

In this guide, we avoid using the term "committed suicide", as the word "commit" can carry outdated associations with crime or wrongdoing, and can unintentionally contribute to feelings of guilt or shame for those left behind when they hear it. Instead, we use phrases like "died by suicide".

You may also see the phrase "the person who died" throughout. We recognise that your relationship with them may have been deeply personal, and using a neutral phrase is not intended to lessen the strength of that bond, but to acknowledge the many different relationships and types of loss people experience. Suicide can have a far-reaching impact, extending well beyond immediate family. Friends, colleagues, neighbours, and even those who knew the person only briefly may experience deep grief, confusion, or distress in the wake of such a loss.

Language matters, and by using words that are thoughtful and non-stigmatising, we hope to make space for honesty, dignity, and compassion in what is often a very difficult conversation.

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If you can only read one thing right now, let it be this

You may be reading this shortly after someone has died. When someone dies by suicide, it can leave you in shock, filled with questions, or feeling emotions you don't recognise. It can also leave you feeling nothing at all. All of this is normal.

In these first days and weeks, you may find yourself struggling to understand what has happened, or simply doing whatever you can to get through the next moment. There is no single way to grieve a loss like this - grief can be messy, painful and confusing. However, it feels for you, please remember: **you do not have to face this alone.**



How you might be feeling

Emotional reactions might include:

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Relief
- Sadness
- Shock

Physical symptoms can include:

- Exhaustion
- Tightness in your chest or throat
- Nausea or loss of appetite
- Restlessness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Finding it hard to concentrate

These reactions can come and go in waves. You may feel several at once, or none at all. This is a natural part of grief. Your body and mind are doing what they can to cope.

Taking care of yourself

You don't need to do everything. Just enough.

Right now, focus on the simple things that matter: drinking water, eating something small, resting when you can. Your body is carrying a heavy weight.

Practical things that may help

It can be hard to think clearly. You might want to ask someone you trust to help with the following:

- Letting close family or friends know what's happened.
- Contacting your GP for support, especially if you're struggling physically or mentally.
- The police or coroner may need to ask difficult questions. Having support with you to take notes, help you process information, or simply sit beside you can help.
- Keeping a notebook to write down names, contact numbers, funeral arrangements, or anything else you don't want to forget.

Who can support you

Grief after suicide can feel isolating. But there are people who understand, and support is available when you're ready to reach out:

- **Support groups and Support lines:** call 0300 111 5065 (9am-7pm everyday) or visit [uksobs.com](https://www.uksoobs.com) to find your nearest support group.
- **Your GP:** For physical symptoms or mental health concerns.
- **Friends who will listen without judgement:** If people offer help, let them. They often want to, but don't know how to ask. Be clear about what you need, moment to moment, even if that's just a cup of tea or someone to sit with you in silence.

Immediate support

- **Samaritans Helpline:** 116 123 (Samaritans - 24/7)
- In an emergency, call 999
- In the UK, you can call NHS 111 and select the mental health option to be directed to your local mental health crisis line

This guide won't have all the answers, and it can't replace the comfort of talking things through with someone who cares, whether that's a friend, family member, or a support service. But it has been created with the voices of people who have been where you are now - people who know the shock, the questions and the ache of losing someone to suicide. They want you to know that, in time, life can begin to rebuild around your loss, and you won't always feel as you do right now. Let this be enough for today.

Me & my grief

You may be reading this soon after someone has died, or in the months and years that follow.

This section focuses on the emotions felt by the bereaved people we've met and the feelings that are intensified when the death may have been by suicide.

Understanding why suicide bereavement feels different

Losing someone you know or love is always painful, regardless of how they died. Yet when that loss is through suicide, grief may suddenly feel different and harder to make sense of.

We often describe suicide bereavement as “grief with the volume turned up.” The sadness, shock and longing are the same as with any loss, but they're often tangled with unfamiliar or uncomfortable emotions like guilt, anger, and unanswered questions.

This doesn't mean you're grieving the “wrong” way. It's simply that suicide adds layers of complexity to an already painful experience. Understanding that suicide bereavement often differs from other types of loss isn't about comparing pain. Rather, it's about helping you recognise what you're going through and reassuring you that the intensity of what you're feeling is a natural response to an incredibly difficult loss.

You're not alone in this experience, and there is support available to help you through it.

The ‘What If’s’

One of the most common experiences after someone dies by suicide is being left with the “what ifs.” You may find yourself going over every detail, asking if you could have done more, spotted the signs, or said something that might have changed what happened.

These thoughts can feel overwhelming, but the truth is, suicide is rarely caused by one single thing. It's the result of many complex factors, and even mental health professionals can't always ‘predict’ or prevent it. Acknowledging these feelings is important, but it's crucial to recognise that it is not your fault. As much as we might want to, it's unlikely we can ever fully understand what led to someone taking their life.

If these questions are taking over, try sharing them with someone you trust, or perhaps a peer support group, where people will understand. Talking about them in a safe space can help lift some of the weight and remind you that you don't have to carry them alone.

In time, many people find that the “what ifs” don't disappear completely, but they take up less space in their daily life. That doesn't mean forgetting. It means finding a way to live alongside the questions, rather than being consumed by them.

Stigma & isolation

Grief after suicide loss can leave you feeling disconnected, even when surrounded by loved ones. Suicide loss is a complex form of grief that can be overwhelming, creating a deep longing for understanding that may feel unattainable. If you're adjusting to living alone, or losing social connections because a person died, it's normal to feel the void.

You may also find yourself pulling back from others. It's common to worry about how to answer questions like “*how did they die?*” or to feel scared of upsetting people with your emotions. Families can be a source of comfort, but sometimes they can be complicated too. Different people grieve in different ways, and this can create tension. Some people cope by shutting down or avoiding the subject, others by looking for someone to blame. Both come from a place of pain, but they can add to the sense of distance and hurt too.

It's also very easy to slip into the role of “being strong for everyone else” which can eventually feel like you have no space to grieve yourself. Remember, you don't need to carry this weight alone. No matter who it is with, talking can help ease the feeling of isolation.

Physical reactions to grief

When we talk about grief, most people think about emotions but grief also shows up in the body. After someone dies by suicide, physical reactions can feel just as overwhelming as the emotional ones, and sometimes even more frightening if they are unfamiliar.

You might notice:

- A heavy, hollow feeling in your stomach
- Tightness in your chest or throat
- Disturbed sleep or vivid dreams
- Exhaustion that doesn't go away with sleep
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering things
- Feeling breathless or on edge
- Being more sensitive to noise or stress

These sensations are a normal part of grief, even if they feel strange or worrying. They don't mean something is "wrong" with you, they're just signs of the toll loss takes on both the body and mind.

As time passes, some of these physical symptoms may ease. But if they don't, or if they start to affect your health in the long term, it's important to reach out to your GP for support.



Emotional reactions to grief

You might find yourself constantly asking, “why do I feel this way?” Understanding some of the common emotions after suicide loss, and why they happen, can help you make sense of what you’re going through.

Anger

Anger is a common and challenging emotion in grief, often taking many forms. Your anger may be directed toward the person who died, yourself, or even others who may not understand your pain. Often, we can feel angry with ourselves for not seeing signs, but remember, many people struggling with thoughts of suicide may choose to conceal their feelings entirely.

Everyone processes anger differently. Some find physical activity or talking about their feelings helpful, while others might release emotions by shouting into a pillow, belting along to a ballad in the car or verbalising their anger. If anger feels overwhelming, seeking support to develop healthy coping strategies can be beneficial. Remember, this is a natural response to bereavement, but excessive self-blame or directed anger can prolong your pain.

“

I feel so guilty when I get angry with you, and I do get angry with you. Angry for the way you make me feel. Angry for the way my life has changed since you died. Angry with you for leaving. Angry with you for so many things – none of which is truly your fault.”

Anxiety

Feelings of anxiety after losing someone to suicide can feel overwhelming and unnerving, especially when they don’t seem linked to any specific thought. However, this is a natural part of grief, especially when a loss is sudden and unexpected.

When someone dies by suicide, it can shatter your sense of predictability in the world and everything might suddenly feel out of control. This heightened sense of fear can leave your mind and body feeling constantly on edge. But it’s important to remember that you are not ‘overreacting’, this is your body’s way of processing something deeply painful.

Confusion

After someone dies by suicide, it’s very common to feel confused. You might find yourself going over and over the circumstances, trying to piece things together or make sense of what has happened. Questions can feel endless, and the lack of clear answers can leave you feeling lost.

This confusion is a natural part of grieving. Suicide is sudden and often comes without explanation, which makes it especially hard to process. Over time, the fog can lift a little, even if you’re left with questions that will never be fully answered.

Despair & sadness

Feeling deep sadness or despair is one of the most common reactions when someone dies, and one you may recognise, but after suicide it can feel much stronger.

It can feel like an emptiness that won’t go away, as though life has lost its meaning or will never get better. For some people, these feelings come in waves, but for others, they feel constant and overwhelming. At times, the weight of it all may even make you question your own wellbeing or worry that you’re not coping.

If these feelings start to feel unbearable or you’re concerned about your mental health, please reach out for professional support.

Guilt

Experiencing guilt when someone dies by suicide is a common but painful part of the grieving process. You may find yourself questioning if there was something you could have done differently, replaying “what ifs” or “if onlys”.

It’s easy to slip into self-blame, however, it’s essential to remember that this guilt is not a reflection of your responsibility. The reasonings for someone to end their life is complex and deeply personal.

Acknowledging these feelings is important, but it’s crucial to recognise that it is not your fault. You are not alone in your grief, and healing takes time.

Longing

When someone dies suicide, it can feel as though not only the person has been taken away, but also the future you had imagined with them.

You may find yourself pulled towards places they spent time, or avoiding them because the memories feel too painful. It’s also common to think you’ve spotted them in a crowd, hear their voice, or even reach for the phone expecting them to answer.

These moments can feel strange or unsettling, but they’re a natural part of adjusting to loss and a reflection of the space they held in your life.

Relief

Feeling relief after losing a loved one to suicide can be a complex and conflicting experience. Because of societal or personal expectations around grief, these feelings may be accompanied by guilt or shame, but they do not mean you loved them any less.

For some, especially those who saw how much their loved one was suffering, relief can come from knowing that their pain has ended, even while deeply wishing things had turned out different.

This feeling can be confusing and feel difficult to admit, but it’s a natural part of grief for many. Be kind to yourself, and remember that feeling relief does not mean you cared any less.

Shame

Sometimes people may feel shame when they’ve been bereaved by suicide because of the stigma still surrounding mental illness and suicide itself.

In environments where emotional vulnerability or death by suicide is taboo, this grief can become isolating, making survivors feel they must hide their pain or avoid speaking about how their loved one died.

These factors often lead to survivors fearing the reactions or judgements of others -but the truth is, being impacted by suicide in any form is valid and deserves to be spoke about.

Shock & disbelief

Feelings of shock are a natural response in the early days and weeks following a loss, and can be your brain’s way of acting as a buffer to a wave of intense and unfamiliar emotions.

Everyone experiences shock differently. Some feel it immediately, while for others, it takes time to fully sink in. Feeling numb or in shock following a bereavement doesn’t mean you aren’t grieving, it’s simply a part of the process, be patient with yourself.

The ripple effect

Suicide can have a far-reaching impact, extending well beyond immediate family. Friends, colleagues, neighbours, and even those who knew the person only briefly may experience deep grief, confusion, or distress in the wake of such a loss. Each person had their own unique relationship with the person who died, and so everyone's grief will look and feel different. Some may cry openly, while others keep busy with practical tasks. Some may need space, while others long to talk.

This can be hard to navigate, but try to remember: different does not mean uncaring. Just because someone grieves in a quieter or more practical way doesn't mean they're hurting any less.

Communication can feel tricky, especially if family members are worried about saying the "wrong" thing or causing more pain. But often, simply talking or even admitting you don't know what to say can help ease the silence. Families may not always grieve in sync, and gently letting each other know what you need (whether that's space, conversation, or company) can reduce tension and bring a sense of togetherness in a difficult time.

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At first, it felt like we were all grieving in separate corners. I wanted to talk about him all the time, while my sister shut herself away. It caused tension between us, because I thought she didn't care. Over time, I realised she was hurting just as much - just differently. Once we started talking honestly about that, it brought us closer again.”

Parents

Part of what makes losing a child so painful is that it feels against the natural order of life. As parents, we expect to see our children grow up, not to outlive them. That sense of "this shouldn't have happened" can make the grief feel even harder to bear and simple questions, like "do you have children?", become difficult to navigate.

Alongside these emotions, there are often extra layers of loss. You may grieve not just for your child, but also for the future you imagined; milestones, grandchildren, and all the years you thought you'd share.

Family circumstances can sometimes make things more complicated too:

- **Step-parents** may have been deeply involved in a child's everyday life and care, yet find that their grief is overlooked or unacknowledged. Not being seen in their role can add another layer of hurt.
- **Divorced or separated parents** sometimes feel excluded from family mourning, or even unfairly blamed for what happened. On top of the heartbreak, this can create painful rifts at a time when support is most needed.
- **Single parents** may feel judged by others, particularly if relatives didn't approve of their lifestyle or choices. They may also face the added strain of caring for other children while carrying their own grief.

Over time, some parents find comfort in small ways of staying connected to their child. Grief may always be part of your life, but so will the love you carry for your child.

Partners

When a partner or spouse dies by suicide, it can feel like your whole world has fallen apart. This is the person you chose to share your life with, and when they die, especially by suicide, you may not just be mourning them, but the loss of the future you thought you had together.

The grief can feel tangled. If you had been supporting your partner through mental health struggles, you may be left with exhaustion, frustration, or even a small flicker of relief mixed in with heartbreak - quickly followed by guilt for feeling that way. If their death came without warning, it can feel like the ground has been pulled from under you. And for many, painful questions arise: "Wasn't I enough reason to stay?". Thoughts like these are painful, but very common and whilst they might seem to overshadow all the good memories you had right now, it won't always be this way.

On top of the emotions, there are the practical realities of suddenly managing life alone - you may find yourself managing a household, paying bills, raising children, or dealing with work and legal matters. Your social life can feel different too - a world that often seems built for couples can leave you feeling isolated and set apart.

Some partners face additional challenges. If your relationship wasn't widely known or accepted, you may feel excluded from funerals, decisions, or even simple recognition of your grief. And if you were separated or divorced, that doesn't mean you stopped caring. Losing an ex-partner can still hurt deeply, even if others don't understand.

Grief also changes over time. In the first months, many describe feeling numb as the shock carries them through. Later, as that numbness fades, everyday moments can hit harder: hearing a favourite song, marking an anniversary, or simply sitting down to dinner without them. For some, the second year can feel even tougher than the first.

“I've had to learn to shop, travel, and sleep alone. I've donated some of his things but kept others I just couldn't part with. From the outside it might not look like much, but every small step has been huge for me.”

Siblings

“I was completely devastated. But each time I went into the village, everyone asked me how my mum was - as if I had no feelings about it at all.”

Grieving as a sibling can feel complicated. Often, people might focus on your parents first - not because they don't care about you, but because they may not know how to begin the conversation. Still, it can feel painful and isolating when your loss is overlooked. In those moments, you may choose to keep your feelings private, or with people you trust, use their concern as an opening to share how you're coping too.

Losing a sibling also shifts the balance of family life. You might suddenly become the eldest, youngest, or only child. Roles and responsibilities can change overnight, and you may find yourself feeling protective of your parents or other siblings - while they, in turn, become more protective of you.

For twins, the loss can be even more profound. If you've lost an identical twin, it can feel as though part of yourself has gone too. That unique bond can make the grief feel impossible to explain, and it may be harder to find others who truly relate to what you're going through.

Whatever your role in the family, your grief matters just as much as anyone else's. Being a sibling doesn't make your pain smaller or less important.

Children

Losing a parent to suicide can shake the foundation of your world. Whether it happened when you were a child or an adult, the effects are often deep and long-lasting. For some people, the secrecy that sometimes surrounds suicide means they only discover the true cause of their parent's death years later, which can stir up emotions they thought had settled and leave them facing questions they never had the chance to ask.

Grief after losing a parent can feel like more than just sadness. There can be confusion, anger, and a painful sense of being abandoned. If you were a child at the time, you may have had few opportunities to talk openly about what happened, leaving feelings of guilt or a damaged self-esteem. Even as an adult, it can be hard to reconcile your parent's death with the person you thought they were, or with the role they played in your life.

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I had to work really hard to overcome the belief that I was unlovable.”

Alongside your own grief, you may also have had to witness the pain of another parent -someone who may have been emotionally vulnerable or unable to offer the support you needed while they struggled with their own loss. Seeing a parent break down for the first time can be frightening, especially if they've always been your anchor.

It's common to carry these kinds of beliefs or unanswered questions for years, especially if you felt you couldn't talk about the death at the time. But none of this is your fault. These feelings are a reflection of a traumatic loss, not of your worth.

Wherever you are in your life now, your grief is okay. Talking about your experience, whether with a friend, a support group, or a professional can help you start to challenge those old beliefs, and to understand that your parent's death does not define who you are.

Grandparents

If you were closely involved in your grandchild's upbringing, the bond you shared with them may have been just as deep as that of a parent. You may have watched them grow, cared for them, celebrated milestones, and imagined a future that now feels suddenly lost.

“I can't get over it. It was like losing my son.”

Alongside your own grief, you may also be coping with the pain of seeing your child (their parent) suffering. This can create a double layer of heartbreak: grieving for your grandchild while trying to hold steady for the rest of the family. It's natural to want to protect others from more pain, but it's important to allow space for your own grief too.

You may also find that people overlook your loss, focusing their concern on the parents. That can leave you feeling invisible or unsure where to turn for support. Remember, your grief matters just as much. Finding someone you can talk to, whether that's a friend, another grandparent, or a support group, can make a real difference.

Friends & extended family members

When someone dies by suicide, friends and extended family often find themselves in what feels like a grey area of grief. The focus usually falls on immediate family, and can often leave you feeling overlooked, even though you may feel this loss just as deep.

It's common for a lot of friends to feel guilty or unsettled by the intensity of their grief, especially if it seems like others around them are coping more easily. You might worry that you're feeling too much, or that your sadness is somehow unusual or excessive. These feelings are natural, even though they can be confusing or make you question yourself.

The bond you shared with the person who died may have been unlike any other relationship in your life. Perhaps you spent time together every day, they were the person you told everything to, or simply felt uniquely understood by them. Losing someone so close can leave a hole that feels impossible to fill, and it's natural for that loss to affect you deeply.

You may find yourself replaying moments in your mind, wondering if you could have done something differently, or feeling conflicted about the way you're coping. These thoughts do not mean your love or care was lacking -they are a normal part of processing such a profound loss.

Practical support

Practical support for the days and weeks ahead

When someone dies by suicide, the practical side of things can feel overwhelming. On top of the shock and grief, you may suddenly find yourself faced with tasks you never imagined having to take care of such as telling other people what's happened, planning a funeral or sorting out finances.

This section is here to walk you through some of those practical steps. You don't have to do everything at once, and you don't have to do it all alone. Take things one step at a time, and lean on the guidance and support that feels right for you.

Sharing what's happened

Telling other people that someone has died by suicide can feel very overwhelming. You may not know where to start or how much to share, and that's completely understandable.

You don't have to share everything

You might choose to say, "*They died by suicide,*" or "*They took their own life.*", and that is enough. Some people might ask questions you don't want to answer and it's okay to say so. You're allowed to keep your boundaries.

You might find it helpful to write down a few short sentences in advance, maybe in the notes app on your phone, so you don't have to find the 'right' words every time. And if making those calls feels impossible, ask someone you trust to do it for you. Try to give yourself breaks between telling people too, saying it over and over can feel exhausting.

Telling children and young people

Children and young people will experience this grief in many of the same ways that you do, but they may express it differently as their understanding develops over time.

Being authentic about your own grief can help children understand that sadness is natural. Having this conversation may feel scary, and you might worry about choosing the 'wrong' words, but focus on having an honest, reassuring conversation.

If possible, the news should come from someone the child knows and trusts, ideally in a familiar, comfortable background. You don't need to explain everything at once; start with enough for them to understand what has happened in words they will understand rather than metaphors or analogies that may create confusion.

- **Be honest** – You don't need to tell them every detail, but, reassure them it wasn't their fault and that they are safe and loved. Hiding the truth often breaks trust when they learn it later.
- **Use language they understand** – It can feel scary not understanding what is happening around you. Try and adapt your words to their age but stay clear and direct. Let them ask questions and check they understand.
- **How Much Do I Tell a Child?** – Start simple and answer questions as they come. Young children process grief in short bursts and may revisit the conversation many times. Be patient, and give them space to talk when they are ready.
- **How Much Will a Child Understand?** – Younger children may not fully understand that death is permanent and you may need to explain it to them multiple times in different ways. From around age nine upwards, most children understand the permanence of death, but they may hide their feelings, appearing to cope while still struggling inside.
- **Changes in a Child's Behaviour** – Children may become clingy, regress to younger habits like bed wetting, hide away or get angry. Stay patient and help them feel safe.
- **Funerals and Viewing the Body** – Try and let older children decide whether they want to attend a funeral and prepare them for what they'll see or experience. Attending the funeral can be important to some children and can help them accept the reality of the death.
- **Returning to School** – Inform the school so they can provide additional support, some schools have a staff member trained to help bereaved children. Let your child know you've spoken to their teachers so they don't feel they need to explain.

Support for children and young people

Although SoBS supports adults aged 18 and over, we recognise that many people we support are caring for grieving children. These organisations may be helpful:

- **Winston's Wish**
Support for bereaved children and families
www.winstonswish.org
08088 020 021
- **Child Bereavement UK**
Online resources and support for bereaved children and families
www.childbereavementuk.org
0800 028 8840
- **Hope Again (Cruse Bereavement Support - for young people)**
Advice from other children and young people about coping with grief
www.hopeagain.org.uk
- **Safe Harbour**
A free illustrated storybook designed to help children understand and talk about suicide loss.
www.childhoodbereavement.ie/safeharbour

Speaking to the police and coroner

In the early days following a death by suicide, you may need to speak with the police and, later, the coroner. This can feel overwhelming, especially when you are still in shock, but understanding what to expect can help.

Police

The police will usually be the first official contact. Their role is to confirm the death, gather information, and prepare a report for the coroner. This may involve taking a statement from you or others who knew the person. You are not under suspicion - their questions are part of the standard procedures that follow an unexpected or unexplained death. If you find the conversation too distressing, you can request to have someone you trust present. You can also ask to have breaks if needed.

Coroner

A coroner investigates the cause and circumstances of certain deaths, including suspected suicides. This process may involve a post-mortem examination and, later, **an inquest**.

The inquest process

An inquest is a legal investigation held by a coroner to establish the facts about someone's death. In the case of a suspected suicide, it aims to determine who died, when and where it happened, and how they died. This process can feel daunting when you're already grieving, but you have the right to support, to ask questions, and to be involved as much as you wish.

The coroner's team will gather evidence, which might include statements from family or friends, medical notes, or details from anyone who found the person. They may also collect

personal items such as notes, photographs, or recordings. You can ask for receipts for anything taken, and in some cases, these may be returned after the inquest.

When the inquest takes place, the coroner will share their findings. Some people find this helps bring a sense of clarity or understanding, while others may find it difficult or distressing to hear. Both reactions are completely natural.

*Unless the circumstances are suspicious, inquests are not usually held in Scotland. Instead, the Procurator Fiscal will investigate the death and make a determination based on written information provided by relevant parties. This process is not public, and communication often happens through correspondence rather than in-person contact.

Planning the funeral or memorial

A funeral director will help guide you through the practical steps like paperwork, legal requirements, and the ceremony itself. If there is an inquest, you can still begin to make arrangements, although the burial or cremation may need to wait until the coroner releases their body.

If decisions feel too much right now, remember there is no time limit about how soon a funeral must happen once the coroner has released the body. Take the time you need to plan something that feels right for you.

"I was afraid I'd get the funeral wrong, but in the end, it felt right because it was about who they were - not just how they died."

Costs and support

Funerals can be costly, and it's okay to ask for clarity. Funeral directors should give you a clear breakdown of costs, and you have the right to compare prices before making decisions. Some people may be entitled to financial help through government bereavement benefits, charitable grants, or funeral payment schemes. You can find more information at www.gov.uk

Personal choices

You can decide how formal or informal the funeral will be. Some people choose traditional services whilst others create personalised ceremonies that reflect the person's life, values, or passions. You might include music, readings, photographs, or tributes from friends and family. There are no rules about what a funeral "should" look like.

When there's just too much to do

There are often many practical tasks to deal with after someone dies, from letting people know, to handling official paperwork. It can feel overwhelming on top of everything else.

One thing that may help is the Tell Us Once service. Offered by most local authorities on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), it lets you inform multiple government departments in one go, instead of contacting each one separately. The service is free to use and can take away some of the stress of repeating details over and over.

www.gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once

Irwin Mitchell supports us to help people bereaved by suicide, offering understanding and legal guidance during life's most difficult moments.

Irwin Mitchell is offering expert legal support to people dealing with the loss of a loved one.

They understand how disorienting and vulnerable life can feel after a bereavement, especially when the circumstances are unclear or unexpected.

If you are the spouse or dependent of a loved one who could have been prevented from taking their own life, you may be able to make a medical negligence mental health claim.

How They Can Help

- **Initial contact:** Through our partnership with Irwin Mitchell, you can speak with their legal team. This is an opportunity for an informal chat to share your situation and explore what next steps might be available. You can contact the team by telephone or the online enquiry form.
- **Local support networks:** With teams based across the UK, they may also be able share details of local support services and support groups to connect you with.



Please call **0800 121 6567** or visit uksobs.com/resources-for-you/inquest-support

Telling the workplace

Going back to work after losing someone to suicide can feel daunting. You may be wondering how much time you can take off, what to tell your employer, or how you'll manage once you return. It's a lot to think about, especially while you're grieving. The important thing to remember is this: you don't need to rush.

Taking time away

Most workplaces offer some form of compassionate or bereavement leave, though the amount of time varies. However much time you take, try to use it to rest and adjust without pressure to "get back to normal".

Talking to your employer

When you're ready to return, think about what you'd like your colleagues to know. Some people ask their manager to share the news for them, so they don't have to repeat it themselves.

Life after a loss can look very different. You might be dealing with extra paperwork, dealing with a home left behind, or taking on new responsibilities - all whilst managing the emotional or physical impact of grief. Letting your manager know about these things can make it easier for them to support you.

It can also help to mention important dates that may be especially difficult - like birthdays, anniversaries, or religious holidays, so that there's understanding if you need time or flexibility around them.

Returning at your own pace

Going back to work doesn't have to mean full speed ahead straight away. Employers should consider "reasonable adjustments," which might mean working from home, time off for appointments or the inquest, or even flexible hours.

What to expect

Work may feel different for a while. Concentration, memory, and energy can all be affected, and that's normal after a bereavement. Try to set realistic expectations, with your manager, but also with yourself. Be honest about what feels manageable to start with.

Colleagues may not always know what to say. Some might avoid the subject, others may ask questions you're not ready for. If it helps, you can ask your manager to let people know whether you're open to talking about your loss, or if you'd rather not.

“

Going back was both helpful and overwhelming. Routine gave me some structure, but I worried what others thought. One colleague reminded me: just showing up was my 100% that day — and that was enough.”

Grief affects everyone differently.

For some, going back to work brings routine and stability but for others, more time away is needed - and sometimes, returning to the same role just doesn't feel possible. Life after a suicide loss can feel so different that the work you did before no longer fits.

This doesn't always mean a complete career change, but it might mean adjusting, taking on fewer responsibilities, moving into a new role, or finding work in a place that feels more manageable. What matters most is finding a way forward that supports you in this new chapter of your life.

Dealing with media attention

Media coverage following a death by suicide can transform your private grief into public scrutiny, adding another layer of distress during an already devastating time. Understanding your options can help you navigate this challenging situation.

When a death becomes public

Sometimes, deaths by suicide can attract media attention, especially if the person was well-known, the location was public, or an inquest is taking place. These hearings are often open to the press and sadly, bereaved families have little legal protection from being named or contacted by journalists.

You are under no obligation to speak with reporters or provide statements. If contacted, you can simply say “*no comment*” or ask to be left alone. Consider designating one family member or friend to handle media enquiries if you prefer not to engage directly. Remember that refusing to cooperate doesn't prevent coverage, but it protects your energy for grieving.

If journalists contact you repeatedly, document these interactions and request they respect your privacy. Avoid social media temporarily, as posts can be screenshot or used without your permission. Ask friends and extended family to avoid sharing details publicly, even with good intentions.

Addressing harmful coverage

When reporting is inaccurate, sensationalised, or breaches media guidelines, you can file complaints. The Samaritans provide specific guidance on responsible suicide reporting and can help you challenge inappropriate coverage.

The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) handles formal complaints about newspaper and magazine content.

Press Complaints:

Independent Press Standards Organisation
Gate House,
1 Farringdon Street,
London EC4M 7LG

0300 123 2220

www.ipso.co.uk

Consider asking supportive friends to monitor coverage so you can choose what, if anything, to read. Remember that public attention, while painful, typically fades quickly. As hard as it may feel, focus on the people and communities who truly matter to you.

“

One of the most devastating feelings at this time was linked to the reports in the press. The local papers printed the story and from that moment my private pain became public.”

Moving forwards in grief

In the aftermath of losing someone to suicide, it can feel impossible to think about the future - all our energy is consumed simply by surviving and managing the many practical challenges it brings.

The truth is, we rarely “recover” in the way that people might imagine. Instead, we slowly learn to adapt to a life that looks different from the one we once knew. Over time, we may begin to find our own path to making peace with what has happened and start to live a new kind of life - one that we didn’t anticipate but that can still hold purpose and meaning.

This section is about learning how to live alongside your grief. It offers ideas for coping with the days and months ahead, ways of finding meaning and connection, and reminders that moving forward does not mean leaving your loved one behind.

“

Grief is not about “getting over it”, it’s about finding ways to carry your loss with you.



Navigating firsts and anniversaries

The months and years that follow a death by suicide often bring many “firsts” - birthdays, anniversaries, religious holidays, and all the ordinary days that suddenly feel different without your loved one. These moments can stir up strong emotions, sometimes when you least expect them. Many people often find that the lead-up to a significant date can feel even harder than the day itself.

It can help to think ahead about what might feel right for you. Would you prefer company, quiet time, or doing something meaningful to remember them? Some people light a candle or spend time in a place that was significant to them, whilst others choose to keep the day as normal as possible.

“The first Christmas without him felt unbearable. In the end, we kept it simple - just a walk and a meal together. It wasn’t what we used to do, but it felt manageable.”

Gentle reminders for difficult days:

- Be kind to yourself - these days are often harder than we expect.
- Let others know what you need (or don’t need).
- Have a “plan B” in mind, so you can change things if one idea feels too much.

Anniversaries and special dates can stir grief not just in the first year, but many years later. That doesn’t mean you’re going backwards, it’s a natural part of carrying your loss with you.

“

It’s been years since my son died, but every birthday I still feel the ache. The difference now is that I can carry it without it breaking me.”

Finding ways to carry your grief

To begin with, especially as you face those first's, it can feel like this pain will never ease. You might find yourself moving between waves of intense grief and brief moments of calm, sometimes within the same hour. This is a natural part of grieving, and it's common to feel as though this grief will never fade.

“

At first I couldn't see beyond the next hour. But slowly, with the help of others, I found ways to breathe again. Hope came in tiny pieces, and eventually I realised I was living as well as grieving.”

Many people bereaved by suicide say that, often when they least expect it, a little space for hope begins to appear. Not all at once, and not in a straight line - but gradually. Then one day, maybe there is a little more space.

It isn't that your grief becomes smaller; it's that you find ways to grow around it. There may be mornings when, just for a moment, you “forget” what has happened and then feel guilty for doing so. There will also be moments of laughter, times you can enjoy a walk, a meal, or a favourite TV show. And, with time, your memories may focus less on how your loved one died and more on who they were and the life you shared together.

“

I still feel the pain of losing my daughter. But it no longer rules my life. I have found a way to live while carrying it with me.”



Put your feelings on paper

You might not feel ready to talk to anyone, but putting your thoughts on paper can sometimes help ease the mental load. Whether it's journaling, writing letters to the person who has died, or simply jotting things down when emotions feel overwhelming, writing can create a little space to process what's inside.

A STRAIGHT
GRIEF ISN'T
ROAD

Finding ways to stay connected

As we mentioned, when someone dies by suicide it can sometimes feel as though all the attention is on how your loved one died. But their life and who they were matters so much more.

One small way to support ourselves through grief is to create moments of connection such as listening to their favourite song, planting a garden, or cooking their favourite meal. These acts of remembrance can bring both tears and comfort, sometimes in the same moment.

Ways our community stay connected:

- Some people make a memory box with photos, letters, or little objects that remind them of the person who died. Looking through it with family or friends can bring tears, or laughter, or even both at the same time, and help keep their stories alive.
- Others plant something in the garden, maybe a tree, a flower garden, or dedicate a small corner of the garden to their loved one. Watching something grow can feel like a quiet reminder that they're still part of your world.
- Music can be powerful too. Playing their favourite song might make you cry one day and smile the next, but either way it can bring a sense of closeness.
- Everyday things can also help. Cooking their favourite meal, going to a place you used to visit together, or sharing a funny story about them with someone else keeps them present in your daily life.
- On special days, like birthdays or anniversaries, lighting a candle in their memory can be a simple but meaningful ritual.

“I love to play his favourite song if I ever find myself really missing him. Sometimes it brings a smile, other times it brings tears. I like to imagine him dancing around the room like he always used to do and that brings me a little bit of comfort.”

Building a community

Connecting with others who have been bereaved by suicide can bring a kind of understanding that's hard to find anywhere else. You don't have to explain yourself, or worry about what other people think. The people beside you already know what you're going through because they've lived it too.

“When I joined my first SoBS peer support group, I realised I didn't have to pretend anymore. Everyone in the room knew that kind of pain. For the first time, I felt less alone.”

Many people say that talking with others who've been through a similar loss helps them feel less isolated. Hearing, *“I've felt that too,”* or simply listening to someone else's story can remind you that the feelings you're experiencing are a natural part of this kind of grief.

At Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SoBS), all our services are run by people who have also been affected by suicide. We know what it means to walk this path, and we're here to walk alongside you.

In-person support groups

We have over 100 in-person and virtual support groups across the UK. Each group is led by trained volunteers who have also been bereaved by suicide. The groups are safe, confidential spaces where you can share as much or as little as you want. Sometimes just sharing a space and spending time with people who “get it” can be a huge relief. You can find your nearest group at uksobs.com.

Virtual support groups

If getting to a group in person isn't possible, we run online sessions that work in the same way. You can join from home, in a space that feels comfortable for you. Some of our groups are also designed for particular communities, such as men-only or LGBTQ+ spaces. Find details and sign up at uksobs.com

Moving forward doesn't mean leaving them behind

The truth is, you'll always carry this loss with you. Some days it might feel like it's all you can think about. Other days you might manage a few tasks, or even notice yourself looking a little towards the future. Switching between those feelings is completely natural.

There will be days when grief still feels overwhelming. But over time, many people find that more space opens up around it. Moving forward isn't about “getting over it” or “moving on.” It's about finding ways to live that honour

your loved one while also giving yourself permission to keep going. Remembering them with love can sit alongside finding moments of peace, purpose, and even joy.

The way ahead won't be the same for everyone, and it won't be a straight line. But it is possible to build a life that holds both your loss and the hope of what still lies ahead.



Supporting someone who is bereaved

You may have found this booklet whilst looking for ways to support someone you care about through their journey with suicide bereavement.

If that's you, thank you. Wanting to be there, even when you don't know what to say or do, matters more than you realise. We know it's never easy, and that supporting someone who is grieving can feel daunting -but it doesn't have to be about finding the perfect words or "fixing" things. It's about showing up, listening, and walking alongside them in their grief.



Finding the words: talking about suicide with care

The words we use when talking about suicide can carry a lot of weight. They can help to break down stigma, or without us realising, reinforce it.

We developed this section with people who know this subject most deeply: our community of survivors—one of the UK's largest network of people bereaved by suicide. Their voices and experiences remind us how powerful language can be in creating connection.

“Committed suicide”

The word commit comes from a time when suicide was a crime. Unfortunately for many grieving families, this word reinforces stigma and shame.



Instead try:
“Died by suicide” or “Took their own life.”

“Successful” / “Failed” suicide

This language can frame suicide as an achievement and surviving as a failure. For young people especially, this language can feel very confusing.



Instead try:
“Suicide attempt” or “Survived an attempt.”

“Attention seeking”

Speaking up about suicidal thoughts takes enormous courage. It reflects a deep pain that needs listening to.



Instead try:
“They are reaching out because they are struggling.”

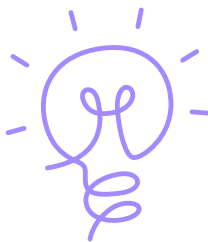
“You’re not going to do anything stupid are you?”

Phrases like this might sound harmless or well-meaning, but for someone experiencing suicidal thoughts they can feel dismissive, embarrassing, and shut down the chance to talk openly.



If you’re worried about someone you know, the best thing is to be direct. Ask them plainly, ‘are you thinking about suicide?’
Remember, talking about suicide does not put the idea in someone’s head.

Honest, safe conversations can make all the difference.



SoBS Top Tips

- Try to use human-first language -someone’s experience with suicide is just one part of who they are.
- Don’t stress about saying the ‘wrong’ thing. These phrases are deeply rooted in everyday language -what really matters is showing kindness and compassion when we speak.



Keep talking

Silence can be one of the hardest things after a suicide loss. Friends and family often stay quiet because they're afraid of saying the "wrong" thing. We hope the guidance above helps you feel more confident -but please don't let fear stop you from reaching out. What matters most is showing you care.

Even if you don't know what to say, a simple, "I'm so sorry for your loss" can mean more than you realise. You can't take their grief away, but you can remind them they don't have to face it alone.

“

The best support I had was someone who just sat with me. No advice, no pressure - just presence.”

Suggestions from our community:

- **Acknowledge the loss:** *"I was so sorry to hear about {name}. I want you to know I'm here."*
- **Show care without pressure:** *"I've been thinking of you. Would you like some company today? Don't feel pressure to reply."*
- **You might feel silly asking such a big question** like *"How are you?"* when you know their world has just been turned upside down. Try starting small *"How have you been today?"* or *"Would it help if I brought over some food, or just sat with you for a while?"*

What helps:

- Use the person's name if it feels right.
- Give people space to talk about their loved ones.
- Allow silence.

Our support checklist:

Here's what people in our community said helped them:

- ✓ **Just be there.** It may sound simple, but grief can feel incredibly isolating, and when that grief involves suicide, stigma can sadly cause others to pull away. Even if they don't accept your offer of support straight away, knowing you're still there in the weeks and months ahead makes a real difference.
- ✓ **Lend a hand.** In the midst of grief, routine tasks often slip through the cracks. Cooking, taking out the bins, even sorting laundry can quickly feel overwhelming. If you want to help, be specific: *"Can I drop off a meal?"* or *"I'm heading to the shop, can I pick some essentials up for you?"* Small, practical acts can ease a huge weight.
- ✓ **Listen without fixing.** Grief can bring up a lot of conflicting thoughts and emotions, some of which can feel uncomfortable, like anger. Try and listen without judgement, and let their words guide the conversation. They might need to tell you the same sorry more than once, and that's okay. Repeating it could be part of how they begin to process what's happened.
- ✓ **Share memories.** Don't be afraid to say their name. Perhaps share a story, a photo, or a kind message you once received from them; something that captured who they were. These things might not feel right to share straight away, but in time, they can bring real comfort. Laugh about a funny story, cry together over a happy one and let them know that they're not alone in remembering their person.
- ✓ **Be there for the firsts.** The first birthday, religious holidays, or anniversary without their loved one can be especially tough. A simple *"I'm thinking of you today"* can mean so much. The same goes for milestones like weddings, graduations, or new babies. Even happy events can stir up grief and thoughts of what could have been. A quiet check-in beforehand shows you understand.
- ✓ **Fill up your own cup.** Your grief matters too. You may have known the person who died and be carrying your own grief, even if you weren't a close family member. Try not to compare your grief to others. Every connection is different and every loss is personal. At SoBS we're here for anyone affected by suicide loss.

Further support

How can SoBS support you?

We're pushing for a world where no one has to face the impact of suicide loss alone. SoBS is a peer led organisation run by people who have been through suicide loss themselves, which means you'll always be met with compassion and real understanding.

You can use our support in whatever way feels right for you. Some people talk, others just listen, and sometimes it's enough simply to be with people who know this kind of pain.

In-person support groups

Our peer support groups meet in community spaces up and down the country. They aren't formal or clinical, just people coming together who understand what it means to live with suicide loss.

To find your nearest group, visit uksobs.com/how-we-can-help/support-groups

Online support groups

If attending a group in person isn't possible, we also run groups online. You can join from the comfort of your own space, and come and go as you need.

Because grief is different for everyone, we also offer specialist online groups -like men-only and LGBTQ+ groups. Visit our website for the full list.

Visit our website for the full list: uksobs.com/how-we-can-help/virtual-groups

National telephone support line

You might call our support line because you're having a difficult day, need to hear another voice, or just want to say out loud what's on your mind. When you ring, you'll find someone who listens without judgement and gives you space to talk.

Open every day, 9am – 7pm

0300 111 5065

Email support

Some people find it easier to write things down. If you don't want to talk out loud, or if it isn't easy to speak about suicide at home, you can email us instead.

email.support@uksobs.org

Community forum

Our forum has thousands of members who have all been affected by suicide. It's open day and night, so you can connect with others whenever you need to. Whether you want to share your story or read about others' experiences, it's a place where you don't have to feel alone.

Visit uksobs.com/forum

Suicide recognises no social, ethnic or cultural boundaries – and neither do we. Our services are open to anyone impacted by suicide aged 18 years and over.

Additional support

Alongside SoBS, there are many organisations that are able to offer support. Some focus on particular communities, so you might find comfort in connecting with people whose experiences feel close to your own. Others offer emotional and practical support for anyone who needs it, and some offer one to one counselling.

Bereavement support

Cruse Bereavement Support

Cruse Bereavement Support

Support for anyone experiencing bereavement to understand their grief and cope with their loss.

Telephone Support | One-to-one Support | Support Groups

0808 808 1677

www.cruse.org.uk

gr'ef encounter

Grief Encounter

Support for bereaved young people and their families.

Telephone Support | Counselling | Group Workshops

0808 802 0111

www.griefencounter.org.uk

Suicide&co

Suicide & Co

Specialist support for anyone bereaved by suicide.

Telephone Support | Counselling | Digital Support App

0800 054 8400

www.suicideandco.org

W&Y Widowed and Young

Widowed and Young (WAY)

Social and support network for widowed men and women under 50.

Community Support | Online resources

www.widowedandyoung.org.uk

Support for parents and families



Child Death Helpline

A freephone service for all those affected by the death of a child.

Telephone Support

0800 282 986



Compassionate Friends

Peer support to bereaved parents, siblings & grandparents.

Telephone Support | Email Support | Peer Support

0345 123 2304

helpline@tcf.org.uk



If U Care Share

Supporting families affected by suicide.

Telephone Support | Online resources

0191 387 5661

www.ifucareshare.co.uk



R;pple Suicide Prevention

An online tool providing immediate support to people searching for harmful content related to suicide or self-harm. It redirects users to mental health resources, helplines, and messages of hope in real time.

Online resources

www.ripplesuicideprevention.com

Support for children & young people



Papyrus – Prevention of Young Suicide

Support for children and young people under 35 who are struggling with suicidal thoughts, and for anyone worried about them.

Telephone Support | Email Support | Digital Safety Planning

0800 068 4141

pat@papyrus-uk.org

www.papyrus-uk.org



Child Bereavement UK

Support for children, young people, parents and families when a child dies, and when children face bereavement.

Telephone Support | Face-to-Face Support | Guidance & Resources

0800 02 888 40

support@childbereavementuk.org

www.childbereavementuk.org



Winston's Wish

Support for children and young people after the death of someone important to them.

Telephone Support | Live Chat | Email Support

08088 020 021

ask@winstonswish.org

www.winstonswish.org

Specialist and community support



The Farming Community Network Helpline

Support for farmers, farming families and people in rural communities through difficult times and periods of change.

Telephone Support | Community Support

03000 111 999

fcn.org.uk



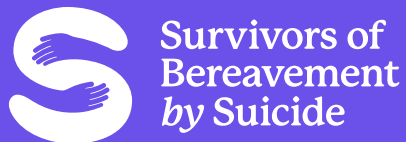
Switchboard

Advice, support and information for members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Telephone Support | Email Support | Online support

0800 011 9100

switchboard.lgbt



If you're holding this booklet, it means your life has been touched by suicide. We are so sorry.

At SoBS, we understand this kind of loss because we've been there ourselves. The pain is complicated, the questions are endless, and it can feel like no one else could possibly understand. But you don't have to go through it alone.

Whether it's sitting with others in a group, talking on the phone, or reaching out online, our support is here for you in different ways and at your own pace.

Scan the QR code to see all the ways we can walk alongside you, for as long as you need us.

