

Has someone close to you died by suicide?

Has someone close to you with a mental illness died by suicide? If so, you are not alone.

When someone close to you dies by suicide, it affects how you feel and are able to cope. When that person had a mental illness, you may feel additional grief that is difficult for you and others to fully understand.

Common responses when someone dies by suicide

If only I'd done more to help, maybe they would still be alive. I feel like this is my fault.

It is not your fault that the person died, but people often feel guilty even though they are not responsible for what happened. Many factors contribute to someone taking their own life. Talking through how you feel can help lessen this feeling of guilt over time.

I feel very confused, I'm not sure what's going on.

- ④ When someone you care about has a mental illness, it is natural for this to affect your relationship. It is common to have complicated feelings such as resentment at the unfairness of the world, guilt or even a sense of relief that the person is no longer suffering.
- ④ Anger is also a common reaction. You may feel angry at the person or angry at mental health services for not doing enough to prevent the suicide. These are normal reactions, and it is important to talk about them, so you can begin to understand and manage them while you are grieving.

I didn't really take in their mental illness, and now they're gone it's starting to sink in.

- ④ After someone with a mental illness dies by suicide, you may find you are grieving for the person they were before the illness, as well as before they died.
- ④ It helps to talk about how you felt when the person was diagnosed and how that affected your life. This can help you understand some of the feelings you have as a result of the suicide.

I feel physically affected – is this normal?

It is common to feel physical effects. Don't be alarmed if you have headaches, nausea, begin to walk or speak slowly, or cannot sleep. However, do tell your doctor if these symptoms persist.

This has hit me hard. I have a mental illness myself.

The suicide of a family member or friend can be particularly hard and you may feel others do not understand. Talk to your doctor or caseworker about the suicide and ask for some extra support – you need it just as much as anyone.

Others say I should be finished grieving by now or that I need to move on.

There is not always a clear beginning or end to grief. Take the chance to grieve in your own way and time. If not, the feelings you do not express may return and be even more upsetting later.

I don't feel comfortable telling my close friends.

They don't seem to understand what I'm going through.

Sometimes people find it difficult to understand mental illness and even harder to understand suicide. Talking to friends can ease feelings of loneliness, so seek out someone supportive to talk to – some will be pleased to help.

I can't imagine a time when living without the person won't hurt this much.

Grief affects everyone differently but with support you can find ways to cope with the loss. Talking to a counsellor or joining a support group can be an important step to look at ways to 'move with' your grief.

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Communication and Support

- ④ Friends or family may feel uncomfortable and not know what to say, but it's important to talk about how you feel. Tell them not to worry – sometimes a hug or someone to listen can be enough. Give them a copy of the SANE Factsheet: *Is someone close to you bereaved by suicide?*
- ④ It's OK to cry in front of family, friends and even strangers. Tears are a physical way to release emotions.
- ④ You may want talk to a professional bereavement counsellor to discuss the emotions you are feeling.
- ④ It's OK to say the person's name out loud. Even though they are no longer living, they are still an important part of your everyday life.
- ④ It can be helpful to talk to people at the mental health service where the person was being treated. Finding out more about the circumstances around their death could help to bring some understanding.
- ④ Talking with others who have been through a similar experience can be a great help. There are support groups for the friends and families of people who had a mental illness and died by suicide.
- ④ The Internet can be a good way to access information and support, particularly if you feel too upset to see people face-to-face or have difficulty travelling. Use well established websites such as the ones listed on this Factsheet.
- ④ It is possible the person's death will attract media attention and you may be contacted. This can be stressful, but remember you are under no obligation to talk to them. If you do, the SANE Media Centre can help advocate on your behalf. Contact media@sane.org or call via the Helpline on 1800 18 SANE (7263).
- ④ If you feel that you can't cope, talk to a health professional such as a GP or someone at your local community health service. Although grief is a normal part of life, sometimes it becomes too difficult to deal with on your own and it could trigger other health problems.
- ④ Children who are bereaved may need special support to help them cope. For more information contact Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800.

For more information

- ④ www.compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au
- ④ www.grief.org.au
- ④ www.lifeline.org.au

SANE Australia also produces a range of easy-to-read publications and multimedia resources on mental illness.

- ④ www.sane.org

Other useful SANE Factsheets on this topic available from the website:

- ④ [Has someone close to you gone missing?](#)
- ④ [Is someone close to you bereaved by suicide?](#)

The State Coroner's Office investigates deaths where the circumstances are sudden, traumatic or unexplained. For more information about how Coroners Courts work, download a *Bereavement Information Pack* from the *ARBOR Resources* page of www.mcsp.org.au.

Where to call for help

- ④ 24-hour crisis telephone counselling
Lifeline: 13 11 14
- ④ National Missing Persons Coordination Centre
1800 000 634
- ④ Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement
1300 664 786
- ④ 24-hour bereavement support
Salvation Army Hope Line
1300 467 354
- ④ SANE Helpline
1800 18 SANE (7263)
helpline@sane.org

Ask these services about support in your State or Territory.