

People who have lost a loved one through suicide are left feeling very hurt, confused and alone. They may have feelings of shock, guilt and rejection and these feelings will continue for them long after your own grief has healed. You may wish to know how you can help them. This information may give you a guide.

Do and Don't suggestions

for family and friends of those newly bereaved by suicide

DO

1. Allow them to tell the same story over and over again, *without* your comments about your own losses. Listen, then listen some more – be comfortable with silence and tears. Reassure them by your warmth and interest that you care.
2. Maintain contact often, personally or by telephone. Contact need not be for long periods. As bereaved people seldom call for help, you need to make the time to call on them.
3. Do offer practical help – for example, making a meal, taking care of children, mowing the lawn etc.
4. Do look them in the eyes. Ask them, “What do you need now?”, “Is there someone you’d like me to phone and have them come over?”
5. Offer to dial phone numbers for them if they are unable to focus, but then hand the phone back if possible - some sense of control is important.
6. Talk about the deceased person and (if culturally appropriate) use their name in conversation.
7. Allow them to express their feelings, especially anger, guilt, blame and sadness and let them know you understand what they are saying.
8. Let them know that *LIVING Beyond Suicide* can provide volunteers to walk with them through the next few days & weeks and ask if you can phone 1300 76 11 93 for them
9. Be non-judgemental.
10. Allow them extra time to manage ordinary tasks – take it all slowly.
11. Encourage the bereaved to talk about their loved one’s endearing qualities.
12. Accept each person as unique and avoid comparing with other’s losses.
13. Be aware of those who may be grieving but forgotten, for example, children, grandparents, and friends.
14. Give them hope that there will come a time when they will laugh more than they cry - but it won’t be for awhile yet.
15. Your presence, just being there, is so important...offer a hug or touch on an arm or shoulder when appropriate – this will bring more comfort than all the rehearsed remarks you could imagine.
16. Offer to arrange a free *Bereaved Through Suicide* newsletter: 8332 8240

DON'T

1. Don't use the term 'committed suicide' as it implies a criminal act (like 'committed a crime') and it would be more appropriate to say 'suicided', 'died by suicide' or 'took their own life'.
2. Do not ask for details about the suicide, such as how or why.
3. Don't rush them to do anything as it can be very hard to focus on anything.
4. Don't try to fix people.
5. Don't say, "I know how you feel" – even if your experiences are similar.
6. Don't panic if someone begins to sob uncontrollably and don't try to cheer them up or calm them down prematurely. Tears are often very healing... and this is something worth crying about!
7. Don't show if you are shocked – just listen and allow silence.
8. Don't use clichés and platitudes to try and make people feel better, such as "She's in a better place now", "You're so strong" or "Time heals all wounds". These may leave the person feeling misunderstood and isolated.
9. Don't impose 'shoulds', e.g. "You should go back to work" or "You should be feeling better by now".
10. Avoid using terms like 'gone', 'passed on' or other euphemisms for death.
11. Don't use the grieving person's story as an opportunity to tell your story.
12. Avoid simplistic explanations for the suicide. Suicide is very complex and there are usually many contributing factors.
13. Don't compare losses or the coping styles of others – they can only take in their own story at this stage
14. Do not try to accelerate the process of bereavement. Be assured they are doing all they can to work through their grief and shock. Be patient.
15. Beware of inappropriate comments including "You have other children", "You must forget him", "You'll get married again", or "It was God's will". Such comments can be very hurtful.
16. Don't say, "Let me know if you need something" – offer to do *specific and practical* things.
17. Don't expect them to 'get over it'. Grief can be a long process with many ups and downs over time.

Adapted with permission from Compassionate Friends Victoria,
and 'After Suicide: Help For the Bereaved' by Dr Sheila Clark

Living Beyond Suicide 1300 76 11 93

For free practical and sensitive support in the hours and days after a suicide

Visit www.anglicare-sa.org.au/living-beyond-suicide

Email: lbs@anglicare-sa.org.au