Support and practical guidance for those bereaved by suicide

A free Gold Coast resource in your time of need compiled by Care for Life Suicide Prevention Network
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WE CANNOT KNOW

By Cindy Heddle

We cannot know someone’s pain, 
or grasp the reason they can’t remain. 
We do not know that private place, 
the one that they have had to face. 
We cannot know what takes them there, 
or know the depth of their despair. 
We ask ourselves what could’ve been done, 
what would’ve changed the outcome. 
But it doesn’t help dwelling on the unforeseen, 
or wondering what might have been. 
So we get on with life and hope the pain will ease, 
regardless of the soul’s disease. 
There is a piece of the heart that is gone forever, 
but the bond of love cannot be severed. 
By trusting in the power of self-forgiveness, 
healing will happen where loss lives within us. 
One day at a time has never been more true, 
hoping for others to understand too. 
Let’s open our hearts to people everywhere, 
offer them hope and show them we care.
FOREWORD

If you are reading this resource, then it is most likely you have suffered a tragic loss. And while any kind of death is difficult, losing a loved one to suicide can be especially hard to cope with. It’s sudden, shocking, and may leave you with lots of questions that are impossible to answer.

When a loved one is lost in this way, there is often a significant focus on the person who has died and, while it may be difficult to think about in the moment, it’s equally important to recognise the toll that such a loss takes on those who are bereaved by suicide. In the days and weeks following, you may experience all kinds of emotions and physical reactions; you may even feel that you will never recover from the loss, and wonder how you can possibly carry on. Please know that this is a very normal human response to loss.

Coming to terms with what has happened will take time. There will be times when people don’t understand what you are going through and who don’t know what to say or what to do. It is important to remember you are not alone and, as you walk this journey, you will find people who understand your pain. If you are struggling to connect with friends or loved ones, you may find comfort in reading the stories of others who have walked your journey, or by calling a support service to talk with someone who understands.

In this resource you will find important and helpful information on the practical processes after suicide, along with valuable guidance for grief support and suicide bereavement services on the Gold Coast.

We wish you strength, kindness, and courage on this difficult journey; may this resource provide you with hope, insight, and comfort that you are not alone.

Care For Life Suicide Prevention Network, March, 2019.
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1. WHERE DO I START?

Practical Steps Following Loss to Suicide

Right now you may be feeling overwhelmed at the thought of where to start, and how to begin making arrangements to farewell your loved one, or possibly the funeral has already taken place. Below are some practical guidelines designed to assist you through this difficult period.

Funeral Arrangements

During the initial period following the loss of a loved one, it is important to begin the process of choosing a funeral director to assist you with carrying out the final wishes of both your family, and the person who has passed away. There are many caring and professional funeral directors who are available to help make this period of time as stress-free as possible (given the circumstances). While the details of a funeral director can be found online, or in the yellow pages of your phone directory, you may wish to reach out to your friends, colleagues, or family to ask if anyone can make a personal recommendation.

Once you have chosen a funeral director, they will then liaise with the hospital to make further arrangements to transport your loved one to the funeral home.

Arranging a Death Certificate

Arranging for a Death Certificate is never easy, but by having a clear understanding of the steps involved, the process can be made a little simpler. Below is a breakdown of what you will need to do in order to receive the required documentation.
How to Arrange for a Cause of Death Certificate

If a coronial investigation is not required, a doctor will organise to complete the required paperwork for a Cause of Death certificate.

However, before a Cause of Death certificate can be produced, the details of your loved one must first be registered with the office of Births, Deaths and Marriages. This registration form will be completed by your funeral director and sent to the Registrar on your behalf.

Why Do I Need This Documentation?

In most instances, a death certificate is required whenever addressing financial or legal matters. For this reason, it is wise to create several photocopies and have each one authorised by a Justice of the Peace (JP). If for any reason you require written confirmation of a death prior to the issue of a death certificate, please discuss this in further detail with your funeral director.

Funeral Assistance

When a death occurs suddenly, you may find yourself overwhelmed with the financial costs associated with arranging a funeral. Thankfully, there is help available.

In Queensland, if the costs of the funeral cannot be covered by yourself or your relative’s assets, you may be able to seek funeral assistance from the Department of Justice and Attorney-General.

If you are eligible, the Department of Justice and Attorney-General will organise and pay for a simple burial or cremation on your behalf. Please note: If you have already made payment for a funeral, the Department of Justice and Attorney-General are unable to provide assistance.
Getting on Top of Finances

When a family member dies suddenly, financial situations are often impacted. In these circumstances, you may be able to access financial support and assistance from Centrelink. If you meet the necessary criteria for severe financial hardship, you may be eligible for a one-off Crisis Payment.

As a spouse or carer, some payments may continue for a short time so that you can adjust and seek alternative income support. It is recommended that you contact a Centrelink financial officer, who can refer you to a Social Worker for further advice tailored to your situation.

It is also important to be aware that your loved one’s accounts may be frozen by their nominated bank or financial institution. In most circumstances, their accounts will remain frozen until the estate is finalised. However, if the account is registered under two names, the bank may freeze only half of the account. In most cases, financial institutions, superannuation funds or insurance companies will release enough funds to pay for funeral costs – even prior to finalisation of your loved one’s estate (as long as these expenses are submitted directly to their office). It is always worth getting in touch with your loved one’s bank or financial institution to discuss your options.

Wills and Estate

After the loss of a family member, you will be required to find out if a Will had been written. A Will is a legal document that states how a person’s assets are to be managed in the event of their death; as a general rule, it is managed by the nominated Will executor. If there is no Will, the State Trustee or Public Trustee of a solicitor can provide advice on what you should do. In such situations, Intestacy Rules determine how the estate is to be divided among family members. It is recommended you seek legal advice for further information.
Which Organisations Do I Need to Notify?

The following list contains organisations who may require written notification of your loved one’s death.

- Centrelink, Medicare
- Australian Tax Office, Electoral Office
- Solicitor/Public Trustee
- Bank/Credit Card Provider, Superannuation Fund
- Accountant, Insurance Company
- Employer
- Doctor, Dentist or Other Health Service Provider
- Department of Veterans Affairs
- Telephone/Electricity, Council, Post Office Box
- Car Registration
- Household Help
- Clubs/Associations/Church
- Online Social Media Administrator

Below is an example of the types of information you may need to include in a letter or email.

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is ________________, and I am the _______________[insert eg wife, husband, partner, mother, father] of ________________ [your loved one].

I wish to notify you of the death of:
Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss   Given names:_____________ Surname___________
Date of Birth: _____________
Address: _____________________________
Customer reference number: ___________________________
Date of Death: _____________

Please amend you records.
If you require further information, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Phone: _______________   Email: _________________________
Postal address: _____________________________

Signature: ___________________________   Date: _______________
Coronial Investigations

When a suicide occurs, the details are reported to a coroner. The coroner will investigate the death to confirm the identity of the person, when and where they died, and the medical cause of death. During the coronial investigation, your loved one will remain at, or be transferred to, the Gold Coast University Hospital until an autopsy can be completed. In most cases, this may take up to two days, but in some circumstances, may take slightly longer.

If you were listed as the ‘next of kin’ for your loved one, you will be asked to assist the police officer present with formally identifying your loved one. Emotionally, this can be one of the most difficult parts of the process, and it is recommended you surround yourself with lots of support from friends or family.

Once the coroner has received all relevant documentation from police, an ‘Order for Autopsy’ will be issued. Most autopsies are undertaken at the Gold Coast University Hospital, however in special circumstances, some may be referred to Brisbane. At this point in time, the coroner will liaise with your nominated funeral director and organise for your loved one to be transported to their premises. As the ‘next of kin’ you can request a copy of the autopsy report through the coroner’s office.

If assistance is required for explanation of the autopsy report, the coronial counseling service at QLD Health Scientific Services can be contacted on (07) 3000 9342.
2. GRIEF

What to Expect

Although grief is a natural response to the death of a loved one, nothing can really prepare us for its intensity and confusion. Grief in response to suicide can feel especially intense and complicated. The thought of opening up to friends, colleagues or acquaintances about the cause of your loved one’s death can bring on feelings such as anxiety, panic and shame.

As overwhelming as these feelings may be, it’s important to understand that opening up to someone you trust, and allowing yourself to be honest and candid, may help to ease some of your pain, as well as reduce feelings of isolation. Guilt, shame and blame are all common responses, and one of the kindest things you can do for your health is to not expect too much of yourself during the early stages.

In a family environment where a sibling, parent, or extended member has died, conflict and communication issues can arise. Each person will handle grief in their own unique way. Males and females will often grieve in different ways. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, and there is no specific timeline for grieving. Although reaching out can be difficult at first, asking for help — whether it be from friends, family or a professional — can make a significant positive difference to your wellbeing, and the wellbeing of family and friends.

Common emotional and physical responses when grieving may include:

- Shock and numbness
- Sadness and emptiness
- Anger
- Anxiety and panic
- Feelings of abandonment
- Tiredness, exhaustion
- Difficulty sleeping
- Muscle tension or weakness
- Poor concentration
- Loss or change of appetite
- Nausea, dizziness,
- Flashbacks, nightmares
- Disbelief and denial
- Loneliness or a sense of isolation
- Bargaining
- Guilt, self-blame and regret
- Yearning
- Loss of energy, lack of motivation
- Restlessness
- Aches/pain in head, neck or back
- Forgetfulness
- Confusion and uncertainty
- Breathing difficulties or chest pain
- Vivid dreams
Grief has no end-date. By allowing yourself the time and space to grieve, these emotional and physical responses will eventually lessen in their intensity. Grief doesn’t just disappear. It takes time to heal from losing a loved one. For some, it may take many years. However, the deep pain you feel right now will ease in time, and one day you will find that joy and happiness begin to reappear in your life. When this happens, you may feel guilty – but it’s vital to remember that peace and happiness are important parts of our lives. Likewise, there may be times (even many years later) where you experience deep sadness – particularly on special occasions such as birthdays or the anniversary of their death.

WHEN my beautiful 17-year-old daughter Caitlin took her life, it not only broke my heart, it completely shattered my soul.

For the first 12 months I felt like I was living in a fog — one I thought that I would never be able to get out from again.

But by taking it one breath or one day at a time, the fog has finally started to lift. I can now laugh and am learning to adjust to my new “normal”.

MONICA, ‘CARE FOR LIFE SUICIDE PREVENTION NETWORK’ MEMBER
Self-Care

After losing a loved one to suicide, your whole world will be turned upside down, different people will respond in different ways. For some, in the early weeks it becomes about completing many practical tasks. It can be easy to lose sight of yourself when you’re organising a funeral, trying to sort documentation, and addressing financial issues. Others will struggle to function at all and feel like they are just going through the motions. Wherever possible, it is important that you make time to care for yourself — not only physically, but emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and socially. Some simple ways to take care of yourself during this difficult time may include:

- Surrounding yourself with people who love and care for you, but who will also respect your need to have time alone and grieve in your own way
- Allowing yourself time to simply be sad and to cry
- Taking things one step at a time and setting small goals
- Being mindful of your own needs. Ask yourself: *What will help me the most in this moment right now?* Something as simple as a cup of your favourite hot chocolate, a short walk in the sunshine, or even journaling, can all help provide some comfort when you are feeling overwhelmed
- Asking for help and support from family and friends, as well as letting them know what is/isn’t helpful
- Avoiding making important decisions. It is ok to wait until you feel ready, or have support to do so
- Looking after your health; gentle exercise, balanced/nutritious meals, and sleep are all extremely important for your restoration
- Try some relaxation techniques, such as meditation and listening to music
- Avoiding the temptation to suppress your grief with medication; instead ask your doctor to guide you with interventions appropriate to your situation
- Giving yourself permission to take a break from painful thoughts. Try to keep busy when you can manage, and when overwhelmed, practice different ways to distract your mind
- Right now your focus is likely on your everyone but yourself, but try to remember: a good carer needs to fill their own cup first
- Above all, be patient and gentle with yourself
Children & Grief: Tips for Little Hearts

No matter their age, it’s important to be aware that children are incredibly perceptive to emotions going on around them. While a child’s understanding of death will vary depending on their age, they will be able to sense the sadness around them.

One of the most helpful things you can do for children is to be honest with them and to respect their own need to grieve. Use age appropriate terms and explanations, whilst being truthful with them about what has happened. Avoid explanations that will confuse or frighten them, and be sure to offer lots of comfort. While you may feel tempted to hide your pain, it’s important that the child sees that you are sad, because if little ones don’t see adults grieving, they can become confused by their own feelings of sadness.

It is also important to be aware that young children may not be able to focus on emotional pain for very long and may suddenly appear unconcerned. This is normal behaviour for a child.

Children should also have a chance to be involved in viewing their family member’s body and attending the funeral if they wish to do so. However, a child who is clearly uncomfortable or frightened should never be forced into a viewing or funeral attendance. Talk to your child, ask them how they feel, and respect their wishes. There are also a number of alternative ways for children to say goodbye, such as writing a letter or drawing a picture that could be placed in the casket.

Wherever possible, take advantage of local services that offer support. Allowing your child/children to access support will also greatly assist them in their processing of their grief. For local Gold Coast resources, check the ‘RESOURCES’ section of this booklet.

Multicultural Support

Depending on your cultural background, grief surrounding suicide may be interpreted in different ways. If you are seeking assistance from a bilingual or bicultural service, be assured that there are many professionals who can provide support, counselling and education.
You can also speak with your local hospital’s Social Work Service or Indigenous Liaison Officers, as well as your funeral director, to ensure that your wishes for certain religious or cultural traditions are abided by. Each of these services can also connect you with appropriate counselling and support services in the community.

Supporting a Bereaved Friend

Many people find it difficult to approach someone who has lost a loved one to suicide. Often, they simply don’t know what to say, or are fearful of upsetting the person by ‘saying the wrong thing.’

Below are some suggestions on how to lovingly and respectfully offer support — not just in the days immediately after the death, but also over the months to come, when the effect of the death will often be more deeply felt.

• Allow the person to cry and show how they feel — grief affects everyone: men and women, boys and girls, and the young and old. Everyone should be encouraged to grieve openly if they wish.
• Be open to speaking about the person who has died; say their name and be willing to hear about the circumstances of the death. This helps with the reality of the loss, while also helping to bring up fond memories to hold on to.
• Be comfortable with times of silence
• Be aware that grieving does not have a time limit
• Offer practical support such as cooking, minding children, or buying groceries. However, do not be offended if your offers are, at times, declined.
• Remember special days like birthdays and anniversaries. These can be very lonely and difficult times for those who are grieving.
• Don’t have expectations for someone grieving to do things in a particular way. We are all different.

Knowing When to Seek Further Help

If you find yourself experiencing profound disbelief, hopelessness, intense grief that does not improve over time, or such intense yearning for your
loved one that you cannot function in daily life, you may need to seek further help. It’s important to discuss the possibility of a mental health care plan with your GP if, over time, you continue to:

- Have trouble carrying out normal routines
- Withdraw from social activities
- Experience depression or deep, uncontrollable sadness
- Have constant thoughts of guilt or self-blame
- Believe that you did something wrong or could have prevented the death
- Have lost your sense of purpose in life
- Feel life isn’t worth living without your loved one
- Wish you had died along with your loved one
- Are also experiencing thoughts of suicide

At any time after experiencing loss you may want to talk to someone who is non-judgmental and will listen without bias, such as a grief counsellor.

"FROM personal experience, I found that a variety of supports served different needs during this time and over the years.

Support groups help to let you know that you are not alone. It enables you to share experiences and understand that your feelings are not unique to you. It may be very difficult to join a group but I found that it was extremely helpful.

Help may come from unexpected sources — be open to all opportunities! As a bereaved parent, I found ‘The Compassionate Friends’ a great organisation to belong to.

I would recommend as you progress on, to take all the help you can get.

RAYLEE, BEREAVED PARENT"
3. RESOURCES

Phone & Website Contacts

Centacare
Counselling services throughout Queensland for issues including grief and loss. Ph: (07) 3250 4305 | W: centacarebrisbane.net.au

Griefline
A grief helpline service providing counselling support services free of charge to individuals and families (including online counselling). Ph: 1300 845 745 (landline only) midday to 3am AEST, 7 days a week | W: griefline.org.au

Lifeline
Counselling services for issues including grief and loss, provided by telephone, face-to-face appointment, or crisis online chat. Ph: 13 11 14 (24hrs) | W: lifeline.org.au

Mates in Construction (MIC)
MIC raises awareness of suicide in the Australian construction industry via an integrated program of training and support. In instances where there has been a suicide, critical incident, or injury/death on site, staff will attend to provide practical help and support to workers and families. Ph: 1300 642 111 | W: matesinconstruction.org.au

Mensline
Support, information, and referral services for men with family, relationship or other concerns. Ph: 1300 789 978 (24hrs) | W: mensline.org.au

Newlife Care
Gold Coast crisis care and free counselling (or by donation) for individuals, couples and families. Ph: (07) 5593 3262 | W: newlifecare.nu

Pathways Gold Coast Response Service (PGCRS)
A free outreach service offering emotional support following the loss of a loved one to suicide. PGCRS is an initiative of Care for Life Suicide Prevention Network and Lifeline. Ph: (07) 5579 6008 | E: pathwaysgoldcoast@uccomunity.org.au
Private Social Workers, Psychologists & Occupational Therapists
A Medicare rebate may be available for counselling services with a registered social worker, psychologist, or occupational therapist. For further information and eligibility, see your General Practitioner.

QLife
Telephone, web counselling, and referral services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) people, families, and friends (webchat also available).
Ph: 1800 184 527 (3PM - 12PM, 7 days)
W: qlife.org.au

QLD Health Transcultural Mental Health Centre
Provides connections to local and cultural support services, as appropriate to you. Also provides bereavement counselling.
Ph: (07) 3317 1234

Suicide Call Back Service
Phone counselling services for people at risk of suicide, as well as to people affected by the death of a loved one to suicide.
Ph: 1300 659 467 | W: suicidecallbackservice.org.au

The Compassionate Friends of Queensland
Provides support to families grieving the death of a child of any age, from any cause. Face-to-face or telephone support is available at many locations across the state.
Ph: (07) 3254 2657 | W: thecompassionatefriends.org.au

Support for Children & Adolescents

Kids Help Line
Phone and webchat counselling services for children and young people (aged 5-25).
Ph: 1800 55 1800 | W: kidshelpline.com.au

Paradise Kids
Counselling and support groups for children and families affected by grief (aged 2-11).
Ph: 07 5574 6853 (GC) | (07) 3847 9943 (Brisbane) | W: paradisekids.org.au
**eheadspace**  
Online and telephone counselling and support service, staffed by experienced clinical mental health professionals. For young people aged 12-25 and their families and friends.  
Ph: 1800 650 890 | W: eheadspace.org.au

**Parentline**  
Offers direct access to qualified counsellors for parents, carers and family members who are seeking parenting strategies, or emotional wellbeing support for children and young people.  
Ph: 1300 30 1300 (8am - 10am, 7 days) | W: parentline.com.au

**Red Chocolate Elephants**  
For children bereaved by suicide. Book and DVD by Dr Diana Sands.  

**Local Support Groups**

**Blue Care Grief Recovery Program**  
The Grief Recovery program aims to provide education on the journey of grief and encourages mutual support by promoting effective coping skills that are focused on adults. Free 8-week 2hr structured program with groups.  
Ph: (07) 5534 6177 (Elanora) | (07) 5532 0588 (Labrador)

**Lifeline Suicide Bereavement Support Group**  
Facilitated by experienced grief and loss counsellors and open for people to join at any time. This group helps participants create opportunities to learn new ways of approaching problems, expressing grief, and coming to terms with their loss. **Meetings held first Friday of each month** from 6.00-8.00pm at Lifeline/UCC Building, 2741 Gold Coast Highway, Broadbeach (entrance via rear of building on Jubilee Avenue). Ph: (07) 5579 6008

**Solace Australia (Partners only)**  
Support for those grieving the death of their partner. Provides telephone counselling to widows/widowers. Support meetings are held at the Broadbeach Senior Citizens Centre (33 TE Peters Drive, Broadbeach) on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month, at 10.30am. The first hour is devoted to the needs of the newly bereaved and those who have a special need, such as anniversaries, etc. This is followed by the main meeting from 11.30am-1.30pm. W: http://www.solace.org.au/qld
Online Resources

Beyond Blue
Beyond Blue provides information and support to help everyone in Australia achieve their best possible mental health, no matter their age or location. BB offer a fantastic range of information and support around suicide. Access support via beyondblue.org.au, or the ‘BeyondNow’ suicide safety and planning app (available to download for Apple devices).
W: beyondblue.org.au

My Grief Assist
A supportive online space with a broad range of helpful information on loss and grief.
W: mygriefassist.com.au

Support After Suicide
Offers resources and online community support for those bereaved by suicide.
W: supportaftersuicide.org.au

Queensland Government
Support and information specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Other Useful Contacts

Care for Life Suicide Prevention Network Gold Coast
A group of community workers and individuals dedicated to the prevention of suicide through increasing awareness and building a strong culture of support. We meet monthly and provide resources and information.
W: careforlife.com.au | E: contact@careforlife.com.au

Centrelink
Ph: 132 300

Coronial Counselling Service
A support and information service provided for families whose loved one’s death is undergoing investigation by the Coroner. Coronal Counsellors can also provide information regarding the coronial investigation process.
Ph: 1800 449 171 | (07) 3000 9342
Gold Coast Coroner’s Office  
Ph: (07) 5583 5427

Legal Aid Queensland  
Ph: 1300 651 188

Mental Health Access Line (Triage Service)  
Ph: 1300 642 255 (1300 MHCALL)

National Debt Helpline (Financial Counselling)  
Ph: 1800 007 007

Public Trustee  
Ph: (07) 3213 9288

Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages  
Ph: 1300 366 430

Additional community services that can be accessed for support:
- GP
- Local Health Worker
- Community Health Centre
- School Guidance Officer / School Based Youth Health Nurse
- Local Church Organisations

Inspiring & Helpful Books

The following are a list of supportive books or resources that offer hope, support, and understanding.

- *After Suicide: Help for the Bereaved.* By Dr Sheila Clark
- *Now that the Funeral is Over: Understanding the Effects of Grief.* By Doris Zagdanski
- *What the Dog Saw.* By Malcolm Gladwell
- *Reasons to Live, One More Day, Every Day.* By Jas Rawlinson (jasrawlinson.com)
- *Coping with Grief.* By Mal McKissick
- *I Wasn’t Ready to Say Goodbye.* By Noel Blake
- *Healing After the Suicide of a Loved One.* By Ann Smolin
- *Life after Suicide.* By Brandon Callor
- *No Time to Say Goodbye.* By Carla Fine

You can also check your local library for books/audio books related to grief.
Creative Ways to Honour a Loved One

When a loved one is lost to suicide, you may feel that a traditional ceremony and burial is the only way to say goodbye. However, there are also many creative and equally respectful ways to farewell and memorialise your loved one’s life!

One example is ‘Eternal Memorial Australia’, who can work with you to create an online memorial for your loved one. This is an alternative, yet comforting way to honour and celebrate the achievements and life of your loved one, keeping their memory alive. W: eternalmemorial.com.au
In loving memory
Community Participants Who Contributed To Creating This Resource

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- Leukaemia Foundation. *Grief and Bereavement*
- Queensland Government. *Dealing with Loss and Bereavement*
- Social Work Department, Rockhampton Hospital. *Recovering from a Traumatic Event*
- Social Work Department, The Townsville Hospital. *For You in Your Time of Grief*
- Forensic and Scientific Services, Brisbane. *A Guide to Coping with Unexpected Death*
- Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement. *About Grief*
- NSW Health. *What Will I Do Now?*
- Centrelink