

# SUPPORTING BEREAVING FAMILIES WHO LOST A LOVED ONE TO SUICIDE

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Dealing with feelings of grief after the death of a loved one is never easy, particularly if it was due to suicide. As much as those feelings seem to be long lasting, reports from similarly bereaved people point out that it gets better with time and there is room for hope.

This document (leaflet) contains key messages to bereaving families on how to cope with the loss of a loved one to suicide.

### 1. Notice your feelings and try to express them

Being overwhelmed with feelings during this time is normal whether it is feelings of sadness, anger, shock, denial, guilt, shame, disbelief, or any other feeling.

You may not feel like speaking about those feelings right away, you may want to write them down or record them on your phone until you feel ready to talk.

### 2. Notice your thoughts

You may start having questions such as “why” and “what if” and although you may not readily have the answers, it is important to be aware of your thought processes.

You may also be more forgetful than usual which is normal in times of mourning.

Try as much as possible to put off taking any major life decisions for the time being.

### 3. Find a good listener

With whom you can share your thoughts, questions and feelings openly without fearing being judged or criticized.

This could be a trusted family member, a friend or a neighbor.

### 4. Remember to take one moment or one day at a time

Focusing on the present moment might seem like a hard thing to do. Try maintaining a daily routine of activities, which will help in developing an inner sense of stability.

## REFERENCES

Public Health England & the National Suicide Prevention Alliance. (2015). Help is at hand: support after someone may have died by suicide.

Hope and healing after suicide A practical guide for people who have lost someone to suicide in Ontario <https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/guides-and-publications/hope-and-healing-en.pdf>

Suicide Prevention in the Community A Practical Guide <https://www.healthpromotion.ie/hp-files/docs/HSP00849.pdf>

Wolfelt, A. D. (2009). The understanding your suicide grief journal: Exploring the Ten essential touchstones. Companion Press.



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**5. Remember that it is not your fault.**

Do not accept blame from yourself or others. You are not to blame for the choice made by another person.

**6. Call on your personal faith and values to help you through**

In times of distress, a lot of people find comfort when they practice spiritual or religious rituals they are accustomed to.

**7. Celebrate their lives by making opportunities to remember them**

This may mean talking about the person, remembering good memories you shared together, looking at pictures and videos of them, creating a box with physical memories (letters, cards, pictures etc.), or continuing to do activities you did together.

**8. Take care of your yourself**

After losing a loved one, it may be that you look after everyone except yourself.

Eat well, stay hydrated and get sufficient sleep. Continue to do things you have previously enjoyed as much as you can.

**9. Helping others**

Some people found it helpful to get involved in helping others during these trying times.

This may be in the form of offering support to other bereaved families or to one of the local organizations around. Action can be comforting.

**10. Give yourself permission to get professional help**

If you have tried everything or feel you need extra support, you may seek help at the nearest MHPSS center in your area. Remember asking for help is not a sign of weakness.

**11. Remember that grief is unique**

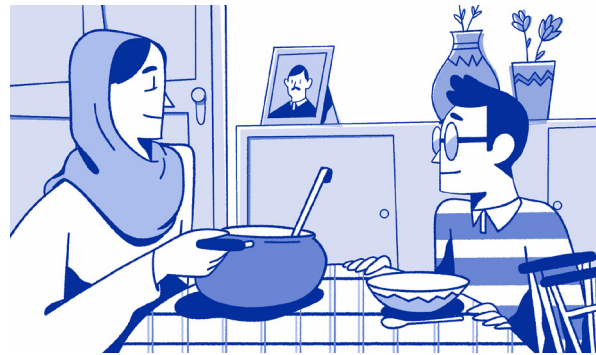
Members of the same family can react differently to the loss of a loved one.

Remember there is no right way or wrong way to grieve. This also applies to the time you need to mourn a loved one. All at your own pace.

**12. Time heals**

There will be days when all you can think about is the loss and other days you will feel that things are getting better. This is natural.

People with similar losses reported that things get better in time and you may find that you are capable of laughing again, of enjoying good company with family or friends, of getting back to your daily activities and of finding peace again.



**AVOID THE FOLLOWING DURING THESE CHALLENGING TIMES**

1. Denying your feelings and avoiding talking about what has happened.
2. Involving in harmful behaviors such as smoking excessively, drinking alcohol, taking drugs or other risk taking behaviors.
3. Not seeking help when you need it.
4. Exhausting yourself with tasks in an attempt to block out the pain.
5. Taking care of others while forgetting to take care of yourself in the process.

**WHAT CAN ONE DO TO HELP SUPPORT A BEREAVING FAMILY?**

**1. Listen more than speak**

Attune to their needs. Whether they choose to speak or not, convey your sincerity in being available for them. Avoid making judgments or giving too much unsolicited advice.

**2. Offer practical help**

Support by taking care of their children if they have any. Do their grocery shopping, prepare them a meal, or any other practical support they may need help with.

**3. Tell them they are in your thoughts**

A simple text message or a phone call to check on how they are doing can help a lot.

**4. Encourage them to participate in group activities**

This helps a lot in easing the sense of isolation they may be feeling at the time.

**5. Stand up for them by fighting the stigma associated with suicide**

Up to this day – based on cultural and religious beliefs, many people hold negative attitudes about dying by suicide. This only adds to the suffering of the affected family and propagates feelings of shame and their sense of isolation.

- a. Start by encouraging those affected to talk about how they feel instead of avoiding it.
- b. When speaking of suicide, use the words “dies by suicide” rather than “committed suicide”.
- c. Break the vicious circle of rumors around the person who died by suicide and/or family related matters by avoiding getting involved in gossip.
- d. Correct circulating misconceptions around suicide by spreading accurate information (check IOM Iraq’s leaflet: Common Misconceptions About Suicide).