

Suicide – Coping with loss

This factsheet looks at what support is available when a loved one has died by suicide. It also provides information about investigations that may happen and how to support someone bereaved by suicide. This information is for anyone affected by suicide.

Key Points.

- Losing someone to suicide can cause overwhelming shock and grief. You may find it hard to deal with what has happened.
- You can get support from people and specialist organisations.
- When someone dies, they may leave behind practical things to sort out, such as their finances. You might need help to do this and there are organisations who can support you.
- If it is suspected someone has taken their own life, there will be an inquest. There might be other investigations.
- You might feel that mental health services didn't provide enough support to your loved one before they died. You can make a complaint or there may be a case for a clinical negligence claim.
- You can support someone who has lost a loved one to suicide by listening to them or providing practical support.

This factsheet covers:

1. [How might my loved one's suicide affect me?](#)
2. [How can I get emotional support and talking therapy?](#)
3. [How can I get practical support?](#)
4. [Will there be an inquest or other investigation into their death?](#)
5. [How can I help someone who has lost a loved one to suicide?](#)
6. [What support does Rethink Mental Illness provide?](#)

1. How might my loved one's suicide affect me?

Losing someone you care about is always difficult. But losing someone to suicide can come with extra emotional issues.

What might I be thinking?

This will be personal to you. Everyone will have different thoughts after a loved one has died by suicide. But you may have some of the following thoughts:

- I didn't do enough to support them
- I made the situation worse
- I could've stopped them
- I shouldn't have left them alone
- I didn't realise how bad they were feeling
- How dare they leave me
- I don't understand why they did it
- Why didn't they talk to me?
- I could have done more to help them

These thoughts are common.

How might I be feeling?

There is no such thing as a normal feeling. Grief is a personal experience. Common feelings are:¹

- shock and numbness,
- overwhelming sadness,
- tiredness or exhaustion,
- anger, this might be towards the person who has died, God, or their illness or other things or people,
- guilt, maybe about how you feel, or something that you did or didn't do, and
- intense feelings of loneliness.

These feelings are likely to pass or become easier to deal with in time. Allow yourself time to deal with what has happened. Emotional support may help you to deal with your emotions quicker. See [section 2](#) of this factsheet for further information.

When might I think about getting support?²

It's normal to experience grief if a loved one dies by suicide. If the way you feel is affecting your life, there are things you can try that may help.

You can think about getting support if:

- you feel as though your symptoms have lasted too long, or
- they're having a big impact on your life.

A big impact on your life may be:

- not being able to move on,
- not being able to do the things you normally do, like working or doing things you usually enjoy,
- self-neglect, such as not washing or eating,
- an impact on your relationships with people,
- losing interest in work or studies, and
- giving up on your dreams.

See [section 2](#) of this factsheet for further information on support.

You can read more from the NHS about 'Grief after a bereavement or loss' here:

www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/grief-bereavement-loss

How might my cultural background affect my experiences of bereavement by suicide?³

You might be from the Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic (BAME) community or from a nationality outside of the UK. Losing someone to suicide might be confusing and complicated for you, as it may conflict with your own religion or beliefs.

There may be stigma around mental health and suicide in your community. This might make it harder to reach out and seek help openly about your loss.

You might have feelings of increased shame, fear, rejection and isolation as a result of stigma. This could lead to you not feeling able to tell others that your loss was because of a suicide. It may stop you from talking about your loss inside or outside of your family network.

You may also lack an extended family support network because:

- you are first- or second-generation family, or
- your family is in a different country.

Racial discrimination and racial violence can be contributing factors to why people from BAME communities take their own life. This can make your bereavement and grief more difficult to manage.

You might find it difficult to access support services due to language barriers. Also, there might be a perceived or actual lack of understanding from services about:

- your cultural background,
- how you mourn the loss of a loved one, including funeral arrangements, and
- how you feel about your loss.

Finding the right help for you to be able to openly talk about your loss is extremely important and will be different for everyone. Some people will want to access support from within their own community. Others will want to access specialist support services, and some will want to access both.

You can find more information about '**Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic (BAME) mental health**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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2. How can I get emotional support and talking therapy?

Where can I get emotional support?

You can talk to people about how you're feeling and it's an important step of the grieving process for many people. You can take this step when you feel ready.

You can get emotional support from:

- friends and relatives,
- charities, including emotional support lines and support groups,
- community networks and social circles,
- places of worship and your community networks there,
- your employer's employee assistance programme, if they have one,
- specialist Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic (BAME) support services, and
- specialist suicide bereavement support services.

Emotional support lines aren't the same as counselling services. They are sometimes called 'listening services' and they are staffed by skilled and trained listeners.

They can support you if you want a confidential and non-judgemental safe space to talk. Especially if:

- you're finding it difficult to talk to others who have experienced the loss too, or
- you're experiencing feelings which you think other people may not agree with.

See the [Useful contacts](#) section of this factsheet for details of emotional support lines and other organisations that can support you.

You can find more information about '**Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic (BAME) mental health**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

How can I get talking therapy?

You may be able to get counselling through:

- The NHS,
- private therapy,
- an employee assistance programme through your employer, or
- charities.

How can I get talking therapy on the NHS?

Your GP may be able to offer you bereavement counselling on the NHS or refer you to a local bereavement service with another organisation. Also, you can find details of bereavement services in the [Useful contacts](#) section of this factsheet or search for them at www.ataloss.org

The bereavement might be contributing to you having feelings of depression or anxiety. You can access therapy from your local NHS talking therapy service. They might be able to provide bereavement counselling too.

They're sometimes known as 'IAPT' services. IAPT stands for Improving Access to Psychological Treatments.

You can find your local NHS talking therapy service by:

- searching on the following NHS website: www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/nhs-talking-therapies ,
- calling NHS 111, or
- Asking your GP.

How can I get private talking therapy?

Private therapy is therapy that isn't provided by or funded by the NHS. You will have to pay for it yourself or you may have cover through an insurance policy.

The cost of therapy will be different across the country and by therapist. You can ask about charges and agree a price before you start your therapy sessions.

You may find it easier to get an appointment outside of working hours if you use a private therapist or counsellor.

You can search for private therapists in your local area on the following websites:

- **British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists:** www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists;
- **UK Council for Psychotherapy:** www.psychotherapy.org.uk/
- **Counselling Directory:** www.counselling-directory.org.uk

How can I get talking therapy from charities?

You can search online to see if you can find any charities that provide free or low-cost talking therapy.

You might be able to get bereavement counselling and other support from **Cruse Bereavement Support**. They have a helpline and information on their website. Also, some of their local branches have support groups for people who have been bereaved by suicide. You can find their details in the [Useful contacts](#) section of this factsheet.

What are employee assistance programmes?

Your employer may provide an employee assistance programme (EAP) which includes a counselling service. You can ask your employer to see if there's an EAP service you can use.

You can find more information about '**Talking therapies**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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3. How can I get practical support?

You may have practical issues to deal with following someone's death, such as registering the death or dealing with your loved one's finances.

The government website has a step-by-step guide for you to follow called 'What to do when someone dies.' This gives information about what to do after a death. You can find this at www.gov.uk/when-someone-dies.

You can contact the **Bereavement Advice Centre** for advice.

This is a national service providing free practical advice about what to do after a death. They have guides available for you to follow on their website. You can find their details in the [Useful contacts](#) section of this factsheet.

Where can I get advice on debt?

You can get free, expert advice from debt organisations if:

- the deceased has debts, or
- their death has caused you financial hardship.

You can find details for debt advice organisations in the [Useful contacts](#) section of this factsheet.

You can also search for local debt advisers on the following website: <https://advicefinder.turn2us.org.uk> Select 'debt' from the dropdown menu and pop in your postcode.

On their website, **National Debtline** have useful information called 'Debts after death':

www.nationaldebtline.org/EW/factsheets/Pages/dealing-with-debt-when-someone-dies/bereavement-and-debt.aspx

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4. Will there be an inquest or other investigation into their death?

When someone takes their own life there will be at least one investigation into their death.

These investigations can help you to get answers to questions you may have about the situation.

There must be an inquest. There might also be investigations known as an NHS case note review and a safety incident investigation.

What is an inquest?

An inquest will be held if it appears that someone has taken their own life.⁴ An inquest is a court hearing where a coroner investigates someone's death. A coroner is usually a doctor or solicitor.

An inquest looks at:⁵

- who died,
- where they died,
- when they died, and
- how they died.

The inquest will say how they think that someone has died based on the evidence. They can decide the death was by suicide or they reach other verdicts.⁶

You can find more information about '**Inquests**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

What is an NHS case note review?

The NHS should carry out what's known as a case note review when:⁷

- a patient has died in their care, and
- their family raise a 'significant concern' about the care that the NHS provided to a patient.

Significant concern means:⁸

- any concerns raised by family that can't be answered at the time, or
- anything that isn't answered to the family's satisfaction.

This may happen if the death is accidental, sudden or unexpected.

A case note review means that a clinician will look at the case notes of the person who has died. The clinician will usually work for the NHS, but they won't have been involved with the person's care.

They will look at how well care was provided to the person who has died. If the review finds any issues with the care they received, you should be contacted to discuss this.

Also, NHS trusts should publish details of how they respond to, and learn from, the deaths of patients in their care.⁹ You might find details on the trust's website, or you can contact them about it.

What is a safety incident investigation?¹⁰

A safety incident investigation might be carried out if the death is because of a 'safety incident.'

A safety incident is an incident, which could have led, or did lead, to harm to patients receiving healthcare. The incident will be unintended or unexpected.

A safety incident investigation should happen if there is concern that a safety incident may have contributed to a patient's death. The aim of the investigation is to learn from mistakes and reduce future risk for patients.

The investigation can be carried out by external investigators or the NHS.

You should be told if a safety incident investigation is going to happen, and the process should be explained to you. You should be asked if you would like to be involved.

Can I get more information about NHS investigation processes?

Mental health trusts should have policies on how they investigate deaths of patients in their care. You can ask a trust for a copy of their policy. You may need to make a Freedom of Information request.

You can get more information about Freedom of information requests here: www.gov.uk/make-a-freedom-of-information-request

The trust's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) may be able to help you get a copy of the policy. You can search for PALS offices here: [www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-\(PALS\)/LocationSearch/363](http://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-(PALS)/LocationSearch/363)

What can I do if I think that my loved one's care and treatment contributed to their death?

You can ask the NHS for an investigation if you have concerns that your loved one's care or treatment contributed to their death. You can contact Patient Advisory and Liaison Service (PALS).

PALS are part of the NHS. They offer confidential support, information and advice to patients and their family.

You can search for PALS offices here:

[www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-\(PALS\)/LocationSearch/363](http://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-(PALS)/LocationSearch/363)

Can I make a complaint to the NHS?

You can make a complaint to the NHS if you're not satisfied about something. For example, you may think that:

- the case note review or safety incident investigation didn't answer all your concerns, or
- the investigation process hasn't been followed correctly.

You can find more information about '**Complaining about the NHS or social services**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

What can I do if I think that compensation should be awarded?

You might think that the NHS should award compensation to you or another because their failings lead to the death of your loved one.

The NHS won't award compensation following a case note review or a safety incident investigation.

You would need to make a claim for clinical negligence. Clinical negligence is when healthcare professionals physically or mentally hurt you because of the standard of health care they gave you.

A claim for clinical negligence is a legal process, so if you want to make one it's best to get advice from a solicitor. Also, you can get advice from **Action Against Medical Accidents**. You can find their contact details in the [Useful contacts](#) section of this factsheet.

You can find out more about:

- Clinical negligence
- Legal advice

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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5. How can I help someone who has lost a loved one to suicide?

It may help to:

- Let them know that you care about them and that they aren't alone
- Encourage them to talk if they want to

- Empathise with them by saying something like, 'I can't imagine how painful this is for you, but I would like to try to understand'
- Listen
- Be non-judgemental
- Repeat their words back to them in your own words to show that you're listening and have understood them properly
- Offer to help them with the practical tasks following death
- Keep in contact with them
- Treat them the same way as you would treat anyone who is grieving

It may not help if you:

- Try and find an easy solution for them
- Change the subject
- Talk about yourself
- Judge them, or the person who has died
- Tell them that they shouldn't feel like that
- Tell them that are being silly
- Don't follow through with your commitments

Remember that you don't need to find an answer, or even understand why they feel the way they do. Listening to them will at least let them know you care.

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS) have information on how you can support someone who is bereaved by suicide:

https://uksobs.org/we-can-help/suicide-bereavement/supporting-the-bereaved/supporting-friends-and-family/?doing_wp_cron=1646911125.0830760002136230468750

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6. What support does Rethink Mental Illness provide?

Currently Rethink Mental Illness provides 3 specialist support services for people who are bereaved by suicide. These services provide a range of practical and emotional support to help you through your bereavement.

If your first language isn't English, our services can access an interpreter for you.

Our services are:

Brighton SOS Service

Provides support for people aged 18 and over who are bereaved by suicide. They also support those who are affected by their own suicidal feelings in Brighton and Hove, East Sussex.

Telephone: 01273 709060

Email: sos.mendos@rethink.org

Website: www.rethink.org/brighton-sos

Gloucestershire Support After Suicide Service

Provides support for people aged 18 and over who are bereaved by suicide who live in Gloucestershire.

Telephone: 07483 375516

Email: glossupportaftersuicide@rethink.org

Website: www.rethink.org/glossupportaftersuicide

North Central London Support After Suicide Service

Provides support for people of any age who are bereaved by suicide in the London Boroughs of Camden, Islington, Barnet, Enfield and Haringey. The service can support people outside of the boroughs if the suicide occurred within the boroughs.

Telephone: 07483 368 700

Email: supportaftersuicide@rethink.org

Website: www.rethink.org/ncl-supportaftersuicide

What if I live in an area where you don't have a suicide support service?

You can search the website www.ataloss.org. It is a free signposting site to help you to find the most appropriate support for you and your family.

They aim for every bereaved person to find support when and where they need it. See the dropdown option 'Circumstances of death' here:

www.ataloss.org/Pages/FAQs/Category/organisations-that-can-help?Take=24. There is an option to select 'suicide.' Choosing this option will help you find organisations that can help you cope with suicide

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Further Reading

The organisation Support after Suicide, in partnership with the Department of Health, have a booklet on their website called '**Help is at Hand.**' It's for people who have been bereaved by suicide and it provides advice on both the emotional and practical aspects of grief:

<https://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/resource/help-is-at-hand>

Useful Contacts

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)

SOBS is an organisation set up for people over the age of 18 who have lost someone to suicide. They have a national helpline offering support. They also have group meetings and information factsheets.

Telephone: 0300 111 5065

Address: The Flamsteed Centre, Albert Street, Ilkeston, Derbyshire DE7 5GU

Email: email.support@uksobs.org

Website: www.uksobs.org

Support After Suicide Partnership

A special interest group of the National Suicide Prevention Alliance who focuses on supporting those bereaved or affected by suicide.

Email: online contact form at: <https://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/contact/>

Website: www.supportaftersuicide.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Support

Cruse provides free, confidential help to bereaved people. Some of their local branches also have support groups for people who have been bereaved by suicide.

Telephone: 0808 808 1677

Address: PO Box 800, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 1RG

Search for local branches: www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/local-services

Website: www.cruse.org.uk

INQUEST

Provides information about inquests including the rights of the family to be involved. It has also produced 'The inquest handbook'. INQUEST gives a free copy to bereaved families or you can read it on their website. It also runs an advice telephone and email service

Telephone: 020 7263 1111

Address: 3rd Floor, 89-93 Fonthill Road, London, N4 3JH

Email: online form at www.inquest.org.uk/forms/help-and-advice-form

Website: www.inquest.org.uk

The Bereavement Advice Centre

This is a national service providing free practical advice and information about what to do after a death.

Telephone: 0800 634 9494.

Address: Heron House, Timothy's Bridge Road, Stratford-Upon-Avon, CV37 9BX

Website: www.bereavementadvice.org

The Compassionate Friends

This service supports bereaved parents and their families for the loss of a child.

Telephone: 0345 123 2304

Email: info@tcf.org.uk

Website: www.tcf.org.uk

SOS Silence

SOS silence brings together anyone affected by suicide, whether they be bereaved, having thoughts of suicide, or have attempted suicide. They have a listening support service, and in-person support groups.

Telephone: 0300 1020 505

Email: support@sossilenceofsuicide.org

Website: <https://sossilenceofsuicide.org>

The Samaritans

The Samaritans give people confidential emotional support. In some areas they have local branches where you can go for support.

Telephone: 116 123 (UK) (24 hours)

Address: PO Box RSRB-KKBY-CYJK, P.O. Box 90 90, Stirling FK8 2SA

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Website: www.samaritans.org

Saneline

They provide confidential emotional support. They also provide a free text-based support service called Textcare. And an online supportive forum community where anyone can share their experiences of mental health.

Telephone: 0300 304 7000

Textcare: www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/textcare

Support Forum: www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/supportforum

Website: www.sane.org.uk

Support Line

Support line offers confidential emotional support by telephone, email and post.

Telephone: 01708 765200

Address: SupportLine, PO Box 2860, Romford, Essex RM7 1JA

Email: info@supportline.org.uk

Website: www.supportline.org.uk

Action Against Medical Accidents (AvMA)

(AvMA) is a UK charity which gives free and confidential advice and support to people affected by medical accidents.

Telephone: 0845 123 2352

Address: Freedman House, Christopher Wren Yard, 117 High Street, Croydon, CR0 1QG

Email: visit website to use client form

Website: www.avma.org.uk

Debt and money advice

National Debtline

Provides free, independent, confidential advice on a self-help basis. You can contact them over the telephone, by e-mail or letter.

Telephone: 0808 808 4000

Webchat: visit website to use webchat

Website: www.nationaldebtline.org

StepChange

One of the UK's leading debt charities. They provide free and effective debt advice, and practical solutions.

Telephone: 0800 138 1111

Webchat via the website: www.stepchange.org/contact-us.aspx

Website: www.stepchange.org

The Money Advice Service

Free and impartial advice about money issues.

Phone: 0800 011 3797

Webchat and web-based contact form:

www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/contact-us/pensions-guidance

Website: www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk/en

Mental Health and Money Advice Website

Helping you understand, manage & improve your mental health and money issues. Tips and information on money and debt matters.

Website: www.mentalhealthandmoneyadvice.org

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³ Rivart P, et al. Ethnic minority groups' experiences of suicide bereavement: A qualitative exploratory study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 2021;18(11860)1-11.

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⁶ House of Commons Library. Coroners investigations and inquests briefing paper. Number 03981; 7th May 2019. Page 11.

⁷ NHS England. *Information for families following a bereavement - Reviews of deaths in our care*. www.england.nhs.uk/wp-

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⁸ NHS England. *Information for families following a bereavement*. www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/information-for-families-following-a-bereavement.pdf Page 6 (accessed 16th December 2019).

⁹ NHS. *Implementing the Learning from Deaths framework: key requirements for trust boards*. https://improvement.nhs.uk/documents/1747/170921_Implementing_LfD_-_information_for_boards_JH_amend_3.pdf Page 17 (accessed 19th December 2019).

¹⁰ NHS England. *Information for families following a bereavement – Investigations*. www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/information-for-families-following-a-bereavement.pdf Page 5 (accessed 10 March 2022).

This factsheet is available in large print.

Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0808 801 0525

**Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm
(excluding bank holidays)**

Email advice@rethink.org



Patient Information Forum

Did this help?

We'd love to know if this Information helped you

Drop us a line at: feedback@rethink.org

or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:

RAIS

PO Box 18252

Solihull

B91 9BA

or call us on 0808 801 0525

We're open 9:30am to 4pm

Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



Equality, rights, fair treatment, and the maximum quality of life for all those severely affected by mental illness.

For further information on Rethink Mental Illness Phone 0121 522 7007
Email info@rethink.org



rethink.org

Need more help?

Go to rethink.org for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits and your rights.

Don't have access to the web?

Call us on 0121 522 7007. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and we will send you the information you need in the post.

Need to talk to an adviser?

If you need practical advice, call us on: 0808 801 0525 between 9:30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Our specialist advisers can help you with queries like how to apply for benefits, get access to care or make a complaint.

Can you help us to keep going?

We can only help people because of donations from people like you. If you can donate please go to rethink.org/donate or call 0121 522 7007 to make a gift. We are very grateful for all our donors' generous support.



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