

Suicide - coping with loss

Losing someone you care about to suicide is devastating and can make you feel many different ways. This factsheet looks at what support is available when someone you know has taken their own life. It also provides information about investigations that may happen after someone has taken their own life.



KEY POINTS

- Losing someone to suicide can make you feel overwhelming shock and grief. You can get support from people who understand what you are going through.
- When someone dies, they may leave behind practical things you will need to help sort out, such as money matters. You may be able to speak to a money adviser who can talk through any financial issues resulting from a death, including debt.
- When someone has taken their own life, there may be an inquest which looks at where, when and how the person died. We have a factsheet with more information on inquests.
- You might feel that mental health services did not provide enough support to your friend or relative before they died. You could make a complaint or there may be a case for clinical negligence. We have factsheets with more information on both of these options.

This factsheet covers:

1. [Coping with grief](#)
2. [Where can I go for emotional support?](#)
3. [Where can I go for practical support?](#)
4. [What investigations will there be?](#)
5. [How can I help someone who has lost a friend or relative to suicide?](#)

1. Coping with grief

Losing someone you care about is difficult in any circumstance, but people who have lost someone to suicide often say that there are added difficulties.

It is common to feel that:

- you didn't do enough to support your relative or friend,
- you didn't realise how bad they were feeling before they died, or
- there is still a stigma around suicide.

It's important to remember that when someone has taken their own life, it was their decision and not something that you could control.

It is understandable that their death can make you feel very low or depressed. There are places you can go for support where people will understand how you are feeling.

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2. Where can I go for emotional support?

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, as well as group meetings and information factsheets.

Telephone: 0300 111 5065 (9am-9pm, Monday - Friday)

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

Email: sobs.support@hotmail.com

Website: www.uksobs.org

The Compassionate Friends

This service supports bereaved parents and their families. They have a Shadow of Suicide (SOS) group that can put parents in touch with other parents who have lost a child to suicide.

Telephone: 0345 123 2304 (10am-4pm & 7pm-10pm daily)

Address: 14 New King Street, Deptford, London, SE8 3HS

Email: helpline@tcf.org.uk

Website: www.tcf.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care

Cruse offer free, confidential help to bereaved people.

Telephone: 0808 808 1677 (9.30am-5pm, Monday-Friday – excludes bank holidays, with extended hours until 8pm Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays)

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

Website: www.cruse.org.uk

The Department of Health has a booklet for people who have been bereaved by suicide called 'Help is at hand'. It provides advice on both the emotional and practical aspects of grief and you can download it at www.supportaftersuicide.org.uk or order a hard copy by ringing 0300 123 1002.

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3. Where can I go for practical support?

When someone dies there are practical issues that will need to be dealt with, such as telling other family and friends and dealing with financial affairs. The person may have left a will, or have a life insurance policy which will need to be sorted out.

You will also need to tell organisations such as their:

- bank,
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA),
- utility companies,
- credit card companies, and
- the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The government website Gov.uk has information about what to do after a death. You can find this at www.gov.uk/browse/births-deaths-marriages/death

The Bereavement Advice Centre

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

Telephone: 0800 634 9494 (9am-5pm, Monday- Friday, excluding bank holidays)

Address: Simplify, 8 Clifford Street, London, W1S 2LQ

Website: www.bereavementadvice.org

If you are worried that the person who has died had unpaid debts, there are organisations that can help. **National Debtline** gives free debt advice and has an information factsheet 'What to do about debt when someone dies' which you can download from www.nationaldebtline.org or order by ringing 0808 808 4000. Their full details are in the Useful Contacts section of this factsheet.

4. What investigations will there be?

When someone takes their own life, there may be one or more investigations into their death. This process can be very hard when you are trying to cope with your grief at the same time.

Sometimes these investigations can happen very quickly, without you being fully involved. However, they can help you to get answers to questions you may have about your relative or friend taking their own life.

We have provided some information below on what investigations might be carried out.

Inquests

When it seems that someone has taken their own life, an inquest is held.¹ An inquest is a court hearing where a coroner (who is usually a doctor or solicitor) investigates someone's death. An inquest looks at where, when and how someone died.²

An inquest cannot blame a particular person or organisation for someone's death.³

The inquest can give conclusions on how someone died. These include:

- 'suicide',
- an 'open' conclusion this might be if the death could also have been an accident, or
- 'suicide while the balance of his/her mind was disturbed' this might be when a psychotic episode or drugs or alcohol led someone to end their life. .

You should have the chance to be involved in the inquest process and give information to the Coroner.⁴ In some cases you or other family members might be called as witnesses. For example, if you saw or spoke to your friend or relative around the time they died.

If someone was able to take their own life when they were in police custody, prison, or an inpatient mental health ward, then an 'Article 2' inquest may be held. This sort of inquest is more thorough than non Article 2 inquests.⁵

Inquests can be a complicated legal area and so you should get advice from a solicitor. Many solicitors will not have expertise in this specialist area. INQUEST (see below) may be able to advise you of solicitors who can help you.

For further information on inquests, please see our 'Inquests' factsheet. You can download our factsheets and booklets for free from www.rethink.org/resources. Or call 0121 522 7007 and ask for a copy to be sent to you.

INQUEST

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

Telephone: 020 7263 1111 (press option 1)

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

Email: visit website to use email contact form

Website: www.inquest.org.uk

Investigation into mental health care and treatment

Serious untoward incident (SUI) investigation

If a person was getting help from mental health services when they took their own life, the mental health trust usually does an inquiry. You should be given the opportunity to be part of the investigation. This investigation is usually called a serious untoward incident (SUI) investigation. They are not independent as the trust is investigating itself.

Independent investigations

Sometimes independent investigations may be held into someone's death. This happens when there is a 'significant systemic service failure'. For example, there have been a few suicides in one hospital. They will do an independent investigation when there is an article 2 duty to do so. An article 2 duty is when a state agent, which includes the NHS, may be responsible for someone's death. This could apply if someone has taken their life while they were an inpatient in hospital.⁶

The local mental health trust should have a policy on investigations, which you should be able to see. Some NHS Trusts have their investigation policies available online, while some may ask you to make a Freedom of Information request. The policy should look at communication with family and carers and how you will be involved.

Your local Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS) may be able to help you get a copy of this policy. You can find details of your local PALS office here. [www.nhs.uk/service-search/patient-advice-and-liaison-services-\(pals\)/locationsearch/363](http://www.nhs.uk/service-search/patient-advice-and-liaison-services-(pals)/locationsearch/363)

Complaints

You may feel that mental health services were not giving the right support to your friend or relative before they died.

If the internal investigation doesn't answer all your concerns, you could make a formal complaint. This could help you get a more in-depth investigation, or answers to questions that have not been answered. If you are not involved in the investigation process when you should have been, this is also something that you can raise through a formal complaint.

You may want to wait until an inquest has been held before you make a complaint. This may help you find out about other problems that you want to complain about.

There is a twelve month time limit for making an NHS complaint.⁷ If you would like to wait before putting in a complaint you may be worried about the time limit. You could let the NHS complaints department know you want to complain and explain why you are waiting before putting in your full complaint.

You can find more information on complaints in our '**Complaining about the NHS or Social Services**' factsheet. You can download our factsheets and booklets for free from www.rethink.org/resources. Or call 0121 522 7007 and ask for a copy to be sent to you

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5. How can I help someone who has lost a friend or relative to suicide?

You should treat them the same way as you would treat anyone who has lost someone they love. When someone has died by suicide, people often aren't sure what to say in case they say the wrong thing. Sometimes it's helpful for the bereaved person to have someone to listen to them. It is important not to judge them or the person who has died. It can be really helpful to have a friend who can help with practical things or even just to keep in contact.

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS) have information for friends- 'Friends Can Help' – which provides advice to friends on how to support someone who has been bereaved. Their details are in Section 2 of this factsheet.

The **Department of Health leaflet**, 'Help is at Hand' (details in Section 2) also gives advice about how you can best support someone who has lost someone to suicide.

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 Monday to Friday 9am-8pm and Saturday 9.30am-1pm

Address: National Debtline, Tricorn House, 51-53 Hagley Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B16 8TP

Email: visit website to use email contact form

Website: www.nationaldebtline.org

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FURTHER
READING



USEFUL
CONTACTS



¹ s6, Coroners and Justice Act 2009

² As note 1, s10(1)

³ As note 1, s10(2)

⁴ Reg 9. *The Coroners (Inquests) Rules 2013* SI 2013/1616

⁵ As note 1. s5(2)

⁶ Department of Health *Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the investigation of serious incidents in mental health services* paras 4 and 6 November 2015 available from

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/474020/Article_2_advice_acc.pdf (accessed 22 April 2016)

⁷ Reg 12 *Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009* SI 2009/309

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Last updated April 2016

Next update April 2019

Version 5

This factsheet is available
in large print.

Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0300 5000 927

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

Email advice@rethink.org

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 17106
Birmingham B9 9LL

or call us on 0300 5000 927.

We're open 9:30am to 4pm
Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



Leading the way to a better
quality of life for everyone
affected by severe mental illness.

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



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www.rethink.org

Need more help?

Go to www.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 0300 5000 927 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?

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