

# supporting someone who has experienced suicide loss



Supporting someone who has lost a loved one to suicide can be a challenging experience. You may want to help them but might also worry about saying or doing the 'wrong thing'. You might also feel uncomfortable talking about suicide. However, the support of a family member or friend can make a real difference in helping the person who is grieving to get through their difficult time. [Here are some ideas for how you can support someone after a loss.](#)

## Understand grief

Grief is a natural emotional response to the loss of someone one had a close relationship with. People who are grieving usually experience a range of emotional and physical feelings. They may experience many ups and downs during the grieving process. It is helpful to learn more about grief to better understand the experience of the person who has lost a loved one due to suicide.

## Acknowledge their loss

Not contacting someone after their bereavement can often make them feel worse. Reaching out and letting them know that you're there if they need any support can be very helpful. Ask them if they would like to talk or simply want some company. It is also important to understand that people grieve in different ways, and some might prefer to maintain a distance for a while instead. It is best to give them space if they ask for it, and check in regularly.

## Let them grieve

There is no 'right' way to grieve. It is helpful to allow the person to express their emotions, at their own pace. Grief does not have a time frame and they might experience waves of sorrow and pain even after months of their loss. Continue to check-in and

let them know you are there for them.

## Focus on listening

Listening is the most important thing you can offer to the person who is grieving. Try to focus on the person and respect what they choose to share with you rather than trying to find out more. Avoid speculating about why the suicide happened, as that could make them feel worse.

## Examples of what not to say to the person who is grieving

*"I know how you feel"*  
(refrain from saying this unless you are also a suicide loss survivor)

*"You are so strong."*

*"They are in a better place now."*

*"Look at all you have to be thankful for."*

*"It is time to move on with your life."*

*"Time heals all wounds."*

## Offer practical support

The person who is grieving might not know what they need or find it

difficult to ask for support. Rather than saying, "let me know how I can help", ask specific questions such as:

- *What are you eating tonight?*
- *Can I prepare something for you?*
- *Can I help you tell other people about the death?*
- *Can I buy you groceries from the market?*
- *Would you like to meet up for a chat today?*

## Help them seek additional support

It is okay to need some support through grief and there is no reason that the person should have to do it alone. You could help the person seek additional support, if they are interested. You could mention services listed in the help sheet, and encourage them to connect with one of these services. You could also book an appointment on their behalf (if they consent) or even accompany them in their first meeting if you can.

## Look for signs of suicide

Sometimes someone who has experienced a loss by suicide may experience suicidal thoughts themselves. It is important to look out for signs of suicide and encourage them to seek professional help.

### Help them connect to a peer support group

Peer support groups offer a safe space to openly share thoughts and feelings and learn tips for coping better. It could be helpful to connect the person with people who understand the experience of suicide loss.

### Share positive memories and stories

You might feel uncomfortable talking about the person who died or fear that it might bring up painful feelings. But many people who are bereaved find it comforting to talk about the memories and share stories of the person who has died. After some time has passed, you could share positive memories of the deceased person.

### Be sensitive when discussing the death with others

Respect what details of death the family members choose to disclose with others. When referring to suicide, use sensitive and non-stigmatizing language. Use words like “died by suicide” or “took their life” rather than saying “committed suicide”. Avoid passing judgments about the person who died.

### Look after yourself

Supporting and taking care of someone who is grieving can be emotionally and physically stressful. So, it is important to ensure that you are taking care of yourself in order to offer support to someone. Make sure that you are eating regularly, sleeping well and doing things you find relaxing.

( Outlive is a suicide prevention programme for young people by Sangath, The Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy, and Quicksand. Learn more at [www.outlive.in](http://www.outlive.in). )

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