



*Caring, Support, Awareness, Education*  
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### *Out of the Shadowlands*

*We, as survivors, have stepped out of the shadowlands of despair at the loss of a much loved member of our family, or a dear friend — and although each day may have been, and for some may still be, an extreme effort to rise and face another day — we are still here! We are survivors and as we face each personal memorable event, we take another step out of the shadowlands of our grief towards the hope of healing.*

### Take care

We all feel pain when we lose a loved one, but there are positive steps you can take to aid healing in the grieving process. This is intended to be a guide to help you through your grief — things to do when it seems that there is nothing to be done. Some thoughts that may help.

- **It is so hard to accept what you may feel:**
  - You can expect to feel shock for a while
  - You may struggle to believe that this could have happened
  - You may feel anger
- **Hurt is normal:**
  - You are hurting
  - To feel intense pain after the loss of a loved one is normal
  - You might be frightened by your pain, both physically and emotionally
  - It's healthy to allow yourself to feel your pain
- **You may feel alone:**
  - Everyone will experience loss at some time in their lives
  - Loss is a part of life

- Somehow the support of mutual suffering eases pain
- **Remember you are human and worthwhile:**
  - Your self-esteem may have suffered, your thoughts may be full of guilt, worry, anger, condemnation and self-deprecation. These thoughts are normal symptoms of the stress you are feeling
  - It is ok to ask “why?” but it’s important to understand that sometimes we may never know why.
- **Look after yourself:**
  - Rest as much as possible
  - Try to accept help if offered
  - Productive work sometimes helps. Do as much of that as is comfortable
  - Be gentle with yourself
- **It’s okay to need comforting:**
  - Accept support from family, friends and co-workers
  - An emotional wound is real. It can be disabling and painful, it’s okay to need comfort.
  - Feel free to seek the help of a professional grief counsellor
- **The question of suicide:**
  - You may be having suicidal thoughts. Know that they are a natural symptom of severe emotional pain and that there is no need to act on them
  - If you are afraid these thoughts are getting out of hand, seek professional help at once
  - The feeling will lessen with the passage of time, you can count on that, you will begin to recover
- **Do your mourning now:**
  - Everything else can wait. An emotional wound requires the same priority attention as a physical wound. Set aside time for mourning
  - If you resist mourning, you will be interfering with the body and mind’s natural stages of repair
  - If you postpone the healing process, grief can return with intense emotion months, even years, later.
- **It’s okay to feel sad:**
  - Sometimes behaving as though you have more energy, enthusiasm or happiness than you actually have can be helpful in your healing process
  - Crying has its own special use. It is a cleansing, marvellous release for men as well as women
- **Duration of grief does not equal love:**
  - Remaining distraught for a long period of time is not proof that you ‘really loved’. In other words, don’t feel duty-bound to feel pain for any longer than it is actually there
  - As you continue to heal, you will find that you can think more clearly, become more decisive, your concentration improves and your view of life is brighter
  - It’s okay to laugh!
- **It’s okay to feel anger:**
  - Sometimes you may feel angry at the loved one who suicided, at God, at the medical profession and even yourself

- It's okay to act out your anger in a way that does not hurt yourself or others

▪ **Changes:**

- Try not to take on any new responsibilities or make any major decisions

## How will you survive

- One second, one minute, one hour, one day at a time. Think in small time frames, the task of surviving doesn't seem as daunting then. See also Self Healing Tools.
- Draw on the strengths you have within you which have gotten you through prior troubled times. You do have these strengths even though you may feel weak and lost at this time.
- Your emotions may be chaotic and confusing and may clash against each other -this is normal. You may question your sanity-this is normal. You may question every interaction you had with the deceased- this is normal. You may obsess about their last minutes, try to imagine their thoughts, their pain-this is normal. You may find the ordinary happenings of life trivial – this is normal. You may feel that you are too broken to ever recover- this is normal. There may be a great deal of work to be done on your grief journey – it can only be done at your own pace and not at the expectation of others.
- Speak with others bereaved by suicide. Contact us to find details of a local support group or ask your GP or Community resource centre to find where a support group might be. Look in the front pages of your local telephone book or speak with a local ambulance officer (these wonderful men and women sadly deal with suicide and attempted suicides often so may be able to recommend you to a service locally). The local funeral director may also be able to help. If you are too traumatized to search, ask someone close to you to do it for you – your friend may be glad to at last be able to do something useful.
- Read books on grief and coping and stories of others who have survived the loss of a loved one through suicide. There are also many websites. Search on sites like YouTube for video stories. Keywords: suicide bereavement, suicide loss and grief, survivors of suicide (this term means that you can “survive” this shattering of your very being).If your loved one had a mental illness, learn more about the illness- it may help you understand more about them.
- Seek out professional counselling help eg psychologists, counsellors, social workers who specialize in grief support. Again, your GP or one of those mentioned above may be able to direct you to the appropriate person.
- Look after your physical health –eat small healthy meals\*, drink 6-8 glasses of water each day (dehydration causes mental confusion- you've enough to deal with without even more), get a little exercise and catch a little sun and fresh air. Sleeping can be extremely difficult- limit drinks with caffeine, try meditation, talk with your pharmacist about possible natural remedies or you GP. Learn from other survivors what worked for them.
- Alcohol and self medicating/drugs can make problems worse.
- Give yourself permission to smile – think about the things your loved one did that made you smile and allow yourself to smile at these bittersweet memories.
- Allow yourself to take time out to appreciate the people who are grieving with you. Their style of grieving may be different from yours but it doesn't mean their grief is of less value. Learn about different grieving styles.

- If you feel you cannot fully fulfil your parenting duties, ask trusted relatives/friends to help you in supporting your children. Your children need to know you still love them so speak with them frequently- sometimes, to them, the person who died seems to have become the only one you care about.
- Unfortunately, great traumas have been part of the human condition since the beginning of mankind. Cultures have used spiritual beliefs to help them make sense of their world and those with religious/spiritual beliefs will attest that much of the teaching of their particular faith deals with overcoming the hurts of life. Some of you will gain great comfort from your belief at this time and others will greatly question their faith – this is normal, go where ever your questions have to take you.
- Even with all these suggestions, in the end it will be your solutions that get you through. In time, your loss and your grief will become part of your life story, it will be part of you but not all of you. You will be able to function to a “new” normal.

\* Fresh fruit and veges like apples, bananas, grapes, mandarins, carrots, beans, celery, sprouts etc need little or no preparation. Baked beans, canned vege soups, healthy frozen meals, cheese on toast, a boiled egg, weetbix etc take little preparation.

## Grieving Aids

We have listed below some things that might help you progress through your grief. This is not a complete definitive list and not all of these ideas will work for everyone. One or more might however work for you.

### ▪ Crying

Crying will help you release your pain and sorrow and can have extraordinary healing power. You are likely to cry a lot or maybe you might find crying difficult. However, allowing yourself to cry when you need to, and when it is appropriate can help you release all the emotions that you have building inside.

### ▪ Writing

You might want to write. Keeping a journal of your feelings and thoughts can help you release them by putting them on paper. It's best if you write by hand, rather than using a computer. There's something about the action that helps with releasing the thoughts and feelings. You might want to write poetry, or the story of your loved ones life and your shared experiences. You might find writing letters to your loved one helps you say all the things you didn't get to say and help you release them.

### ▪ Therapy

You might feel the need to seek the assistance of a psychologist or counsellor. Laying bare your innermost thoughts to someone might help you work through your grief. This professional might be able to help you focus on one aspect at a time and deal with them through to some kind of conclusion. Whilst going through this process you might find answers to all or some of your questions as you sort through your emotions and thoughts and make sense of them all. Therapy doesn't work for everyone but might work for you.

### ▪ Rituals

The rituals you perform daily are one of the things we all do to help us through each day and to progress in our grief. Rituals represent an act of participation and is an important step in dealing with our grief.

These rituals might include:

- Something you say to yourself every day or a silent prayer you pray each day
- Blowing a kiss to a photograph of your loved one
- Screaming in the car or shower when you are alone
- Lighting a candle at a special time
- Taking time out for a cup of tea and spending time with yourself.

### ▪ **Support Groups / Online Support**

Finding a support group and making the time to attend and to participate can provide great comfort as you communicate and share with others who have lost loved ones to suicide. If you want to find out where and when your local support group meets, please check our website ([www.sosbsa.org.au](http://www.sosbsa.org.au)) or contact us. The SOSBSA facebook page also operates as an online support community.

### ▪ **Telephone**

You might find that talking to your friends and pouring out your emotions on the phone or in conversation helps you gain understanding of what you are feeling and what has happened. You might have a close friend who is happy to talk to you regularly and listen to you say the same things over and over again, or someone else who is bereaved by suicide. Sometimes you might not want to talk about your pain and experience, but rather talk about the mundane details of life. Over time you will find a return to a new 'normal' and the conversations will move from your pain to your life and theirs.

### ▪ **Being a Caregiver**

Caring for someone or something else can help you divert your feelings. You might care for a particular place in memory of your loved one, e.g. take part in restoring a park or perhaps a house. You might take care of your loved ones pets or children, visit nursing homes, children's wards in the hospital. It could be anything at all, it might help you to care for someone or something as you miss caring for the person who has died.

### ▪ **Physical Exercise**

Undertaking any form of physical exercise, walking, running, working out at the gym, playing a sport, gardening. Physical activity will help you to sleep better at night and releases important energy and is important to your physical and emotional wellbeing.

### ▪ **Remembrances**

You might want to undertake one of the activities outlined in the Fact sheet on Memorial Projects, such as compiling a photo album, including birthday cards, sympathy cards, letters sent to and from your loved one. Doing something to honour your memories of your loved one will help you to focus on their life rather than how they died. You may also find music and / or poetry helpful.

### ▪ **Humour**

It is a well known fact that laughter is good for the soul. If you can allow yourself to appreciate humour it will help you to be in the here and now, rather than focusing on the pain and the past. You could go to see a funny movie, tell jokes or share funny stories. It's always good to laugh.

### ▪ Arts and Crafts

You might like to do arts and crafts and create things. You might find it possible to release your emotions and to also release some of the tension that grief can cause. Realising that you are still able to create something beautiful or practical might help you feel better about yourself and remind you that you are able to achieve something and will help build your self-esteem and faith in yourself.

### ▪ Work

Work can be the key to unlocking your mourning heart and it can be exceptionally useful. When we work we achieve things and most of us have to communicate with others in some way when we go to work. It will allow you to have something else to focus on and provide release from your thoughts and the pain of loss. Being around others who are performing normal daily tasks might at first feel trivial and somehow hurtful, but in time it will remind you that life goes on and you can go on with your life. You might find the emotional support you need from someone in your workplace, and through the conversations that you share with others.

## QLD Helplines

Standby Brisbane 07 3250 1856

Standby Response Service 0438 150 180

(24 hour mobile crisis response to suicide bereavement)

Sunshine and Cooloola Coasts 0407 766 961

## National Helplines

LifeLine: 13 11 14 (24 hour)

Mensline: 1300 789 978 (24 hour)

Suicide Callback Line: 1300 659 467 (24 hour)

National Hope Line: 1300 467 354 (24 hour bereavement support)

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

Kids Help Line: 1800 55 1800 (24 hour)

SANE Helpline: 1800 18 SANE (M-F 9am-5pm)

*Photo by Pia Koskelainen*