



After a suicide

Information & support for living after a suicide

Bereavement by suicide is usually shocking and unexpected. The grieving process is often far more challenging to navigate than other types of bereavement. For every loved one lost, there are friends, children, family and colleagues left behind. During the first few hours after a loved one has died, it can be very difficult working out where to turn and what to do with yourself.

Knowing where to begin and taking that first step can be the hardest bit. We hope we can relieve some of the pressure by providing you with short pieces of information, links and resources local to Somerset and other national help, to guide you on your way.

THE POLICE

Due to the nature of suicide, the police are required to carry out a full investigation of events surrounding the death. This is to rule out anything untoward and the possibility that a crime may have been committed (suicide itself is no longer considered a criminal act).

As part of the initial investigation, access to your loved one's body and the location where they took their own life may be restricted, along with the seizing of some of their possessions – you have a right for all of these to be returned to you on completion of the investigation and an

inventory for them should be issued to you. You should be aware that photos and evidence taken at the scene may be used at a later date in the coroner's report. They will also retain any note/letter found at the scene.

You may also be asked some questions to help the police establish any underlying mental health issues – you are NOT a suspect; being honest and open will only help to speed up the process.

IDENTIFYING THE BODY

There are circumstances where you may be required to identify the body, if for example the police discover your loved one you would be asked to confirm their identity. This will be before the post mortem, it can be done in person or through photographs.

Whether or not it is required, you have a right to visit your loved one and also have the option to request time alone with them after completion of the post mortem. This is a very personal decision and can only be made by you. However studies show that most people felt it was a positive decision and helped them come to terms with the reality of the death.

POST MORTEM

If your loved one is known or suspected to have died as a result of suicide, then a post mortem examination is likely to be requested to establish the cause of death. This will normally be conducted within two to three working days.

Please note that if you are bereaved on a Friday, the police will inform you where the body is being taken. However, there will be no further action taken until the working week starts. Unless identification is needed, you won't be able to see your loved one or be provided with any further information until after the post mortem has concluded.

Once completed, the initial findings will be released. At this point you will receive a death certificate. The full post mortem outcome will not be released until a later date at the inquest. If necessary, an amended death certificate will then be issued.

This can feel like an agonising wait, therefore the Somerset Coroner's Service do offer support services throughout this difficult time.

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/births-ceremonies-and-deaths/somerset-coroners-service/>

<https://www.dbth.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/WPR32780-Post-Mortem-Guide.pdf>

RELEASING THE BODY & REGISTERING THE DEATH

Unfortunately, there is no set timescale for releasing the body. However, the coroner will endeavour to release it as quickly as possible. Once you have received the death certificate, it must be registered within five days at a local Registry Office.

If possible you should take as many of the following:-

- Death Certificate (Required)
- NHS Number
- Birth Certificate
- Driving Licence
- Council Tax Bill
- Marriage/Civil Partnership Certificate (If applicable)
- National Insurance Number (of deceased)
- Passport
- Proof of Address (utility bill or similar)

You will NEED to be able to supply the following:-

- Date and place of death
- Address of Deceased
- Full Name of Deceased (including maiden name)
- Date and Place of Birth

<https://www.gov.uk/register-a-death>

THE FUNERAL

It is always worth speaking to a funeral director for advice before planning the funeral. All good directors will be able to provide you with a breakdown of costs and what services those costs include, such as laying out the body, use of the chapel of rest and hearse and purchasing the coffin. We all want our loved ones looked after and to be in the best possible hands. It is worth bearing in mind that funerals can be expensive. However, costs can sometimes be covered by the deceased's estate. There is also help available to those in need.

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits/claiming-bereavement-support-payment/>

<https://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/bereavement>

"As funeral directors, we are entrusted to look after the deceased with the uppermost care and respect. The care that you gave to someone you loved is passed to us and we take that very seriously.

When someone passes away we bring them into our care and they rest at our premises in North Petherton. Our mortuary area is spotlessly clean. Families can bring in blankets, photos or teddies if they wish and we place these with their loved ones. They can provide clothing - from favourite slippers to a loved aftershave - we always dress them with the highest amount of respect. We always call the deceased by their first names - often each day when we enter the mortuary area we always say hello and we check each person every day.

One family found great comfort in messaging us every evening with a goodnight message for their loved one, which we relayed to them before we left the office. It is the smallest of touches that mean the most and we will do all we can to ensure that families know their loved one is being cared for.”

TELLING PEOPLE ABOUT YOUR LOSS

Other than family and friends, you will probably need to contact the following:-

- GPs/Hospitals
- Other health professionals, dentists, opticians or community nurses for example
- Persons employer
- Pension company
- Insurance company
- Bank(s)
- DLVA / Passport Office

There are many potential difficulties to face when it comes to telling people that your loved one has taken their own life. Should you tell people or not? There is no right answer. However, there are many positives to being honest. One of the main factors is that it allows your family and friends to support you in the best possible way.

This doesn't however mean you owe people details of the death. Cause of death and method of suicide are a very personal and upsetting subject and you are under no obligation to disclose this information unless you want to.

<https://www.thebereavementregister.org.uk/>

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/births-ceremonies-and-deaths/tell-us-once/>

THE MEDIA

Sadly, with suicide, some cases can make it into the media.

You are under no obligation to talk to the press. It is preferable to some people to give a statement to the media - this allows them to have their truth spoken, which can be a comfort as

opposed to a fabricated story being run without their input.

There are guidelines the media are advised to follow.

<https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/media-guidelines/>

MONEY & DEBTS FROM THE DECEASED

Circumstances vary greatly from case to case regarding personal finances, so it is always best to seek legal advice as soon as possible if you are able.

It is best to try and gather as much paperwork as possible such as bank/insurance documents, utility bills and, most importantly, the will, if one has been left. There are useful resources available to help you navigate potential debts that may have been left by the deceased.

<https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/family-and-care/death-and-bereavement/dealing-with-the-debts-of-someone-who-has-died>

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/family/death-and-wills/dealing-with-the-financial-affairs-of-someone-who-has-died/>

CORONER'S INQUEST

An inquest is a court hearing to discuss the facts found during the investigation process and allow the coroner to answer four questions:-

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Who was the deceased?● When did they die? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Where did they die?● How did it happen? |
|--|--|

It is NOT a trial and is usually concluded in half a day or less. In some cases it can last several days. If attending the inquest, you should be prepared to hear details and statements read out that may be difficult and upsetting to hear.

Medical details will be read out which some may feel can be quite cold. The details will include toxicology reports, details of the cause of death and organ weights, which you may find upsetting to hear or read. There is no set timescale for an inquest date and in some cases it may be over twelve months before it takes place.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/859076/guide-to-coroner-services-bereaved-people-jan-2020.pdf

The Coroners' Courts Support Service (CCSS) is an independent voluntary organisation whose trained volunteers offer emotional support and practical help to bereaved families, witnesses and others attending an inquest at a Coroner's Court.

<https://coronerscourtsupportservice.org.uk/>

SERVICE REVIEW

If your loved one was involved in NHS mental health services at the time of their death, there may be an internal review. NHS Trusts want to learn about why patient safety incidents happen, and how they can reduce the likelihood of the same incident happening in the future. The aim of these investigations is to understand the circumstances that led to the incident, and identify procedures, practices or areas in the system or organisation that might need to be changed or improved. It is not to determine cause of death, blame an individual or hold an organisation to account. There are other channels for these processes where necessary. You may be invited by an investigator to put forward any questions for them to consider as part of their investigation.

It's worth noting that an NHS investigation is a separate process to an inquest and so may happen before the inquest or may start after an inquest is completed. You may be contacted by someone from the organisation to invite you to contribute to the investigation, for example, in sharing any questions you might want the investigator to consider. If your loved one was an adult (with additional care and support needs), there may be a Serious Case Review for agencies and individuals to learn lessons to improve the way they work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and adults. Serious Case Reviews are part of a national process led by the Local Safeguarding Adult Board

learn-together.org.uk– Serious Incident Investigation resources

HOW TO TELL CHILDREN INVOLVED

This is a situation that is dependent on the ages and maturity of the children involved. In most cases (age appropriate) it is best to be truthful about what has happened. You should try to engage the children and encourage them to open up about their feelings and talk to you.

There are lots of great resources and relevant literature to help you navigate the topic.

"It is natural for a parent or carer to want to protect their child from pain after the death of someone important, especially a death by suicide. However, a suicide can quickly become public knowledge with police visits, an inquest, media interest and social media, and your child may hear rumours and fragments of information. An honest explanation of the facts, in language appropriate to a child's age, given by people they can trust and who will continue supporting them, is often the best protection you can give your child."

- Winston's Wish

<https://www.winstonswish.org/explain-suicide-to-children/>

<https://www.winstonswish.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WW-Ways-to-talk-about-suicide.pdf>

STIGMA & TABOOS AROUND SUICIDE

There is still unnecessary stigma around the topic of suicide. Talking about and raising awareness of a subject can never be a bad thing. This stigma can lead to those left behind feeling ashamed and angry, not seeking the help they need and deserve and ultimately can colour our perceptions about our own feelings.

It is worth noting that the way people treat or act around those left behind is not always a direct judgement on them. It is often misplaced intentions, thinking that avoidance of the person or not saying the wrong thing is the safer option. Unfortunately this can lead to feelings of isolation. You are NOT alone.

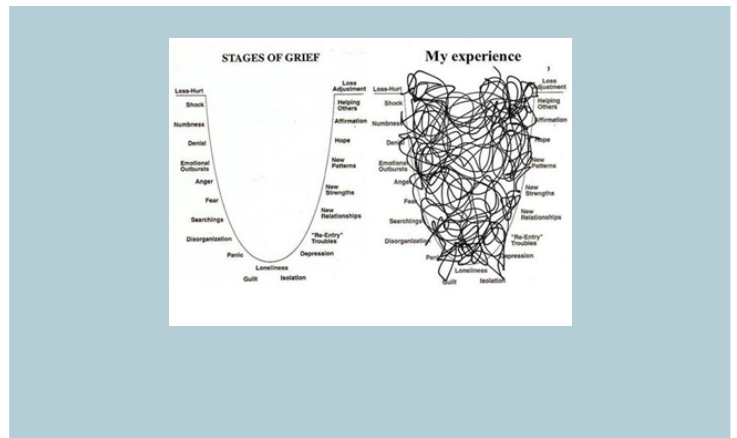
<https://mentalhealth-uk.org/suicide/>

Cognitive Approaches to Combatting Suicidality | Ending stigma: Let's talk about effects of stigma surrounding suicide (manchester.ac.uk)

GRIEF

There is no right or wrong way to feel. But there are often three main feelings that we work around when losing a loved one to suicide.

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-a-loved-ones-suicide.htm>



Guilt

Guilt is a common response to losing a loved one – Why didn't you help? Why didn't you see it coming? It is NOT your fault. People often go to great lengths to hide their thoughts and intentions from their loved ones.

Anger

The fact that someone 'chose' to take their own life may make you angry. How could they do that to me/us? It is not uncommon to direct your feelings towards someone, blaming them for the situation.

This may be the person you have lost or someone else close to them. Dealing with your anger is important but can be difficult. This is one of the reasons the peer groups play such an important role, allowing you a safe space where you can express that anger without judgment.

Why?

Suicide causes a traumatic form of grief as there is no external force to blame except your loved one. The biggest question, and probably the hardest to answer, is simply 'Why?'

The truth is you may never know. Even if a note was left, it may not answer all the questions you have and that is something you may have to learn to live with. They are often written at a time of great distress and may not properly reflect how they were truly feeling. It can be very hard to accept, but you may never know for sure.

PEER SUPPORT

Peer support creates a safe space with a non-judgemental atmosphere. Sharing a willingness to give and receive support and learn, listening to the struggles and achievements of others suffering grief through the commonality of suicide can be very helpful.

Attended only by those bereaved by suicide, it can be the perfect space to speak openly and honestly, about feelings that you may not be able to express in any other environment in your day-to-day life for fear of upsetting loved ones. Peer support can be done one-one or in a group environment depending what suits you.

Seeing similar experiences and normalising parts of grief that may have taken you by surprise can really help you to feel less alone. Many find hope, empowerment and advocacy by being in a peer led surrounding .

“When I lost my son to suicide I felt very alone and isolated in, what felt like, a unique type of grief. So finding the SSBSS Peer group and buddy service really helped me. In group I felt safe to share my feelings and experiences in a kind of comradeship. Surrounded in the company of people who understood and all shared my journey, made the grief that bit more manageable.”

-Martin

Peer groups local to you:

- **Taunton** – 1st Thursday of each month
Taunton Mind Office -Peer Support Time
6:30-8PM
- **Bridgwater** – 2nd Monday of each month
St Mary’s Church. - Support session 1:1s 11-3PM : Peer support Time: 1-2:30PM
- **Street** – 3rd Thursday of the month
Crispin Community Centre. Peer support Time: 6:30-8PM
- **Yeovil** – Last Monday of the month
Yeovil Foyer. Support session 1:1s 11-3PM : Peer support Time: 1-2:30PM
- **Online** – Every other Wednesday 6:30-8PM
Every other Friday 10-11:30AM

If you would like to attend these groups please contact:

Bereaved@mindinsomerset.org.uk

Mind in Somerset:

Suicide Bereavement Support Service -

<https://www.mindinsomerset.org.uk/our-services/somerset-suicide-bereavement-support-service/>

- 24/7 Helpline.
- Specialist support worker sessions – For up to 12 sessions,.
- Specialist counselling provision sessions – Up to 6 sessions.
- Bereavement Buddies – Trained volunteers who have lived experienced of suicide loss offering listening support.
- Practical information and support around issues such as the Inquest and funeral.
- Professionals – confidential guidance and support following the suicide of a client.
- Training in suicide prevention and postvention for organisations & businesses.
- Specialist organisational and leadership/management guidance about how to navigate suicide in the workplace.

HELPFUL RESOURCES TO GUIDE YOU:

Local support:

Pete's Dragon: https://www.petesdragons.org.uk/Support_in_North_Somerset_42438.aspx

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

Survivors of bereavement by suicide: <https://uksobs.org>.

National support:

Support for Bereaved Parents and siblings: <https://slowgroup.co.uk/>

Talk Club: <https://talkclub.org/>

The Listening place: <https://listeningplace.org.uk/>

PAPYRUS prevention of young suicide(under 35): <https://www.papyrus-uk.org/>

Men's support

Campaign against living miserably: <https://www.thecalmzone.net/>

Rusty Road 2 Recovery: <https://www.rustyroad2recovery.co.uk/about-us>

Children's support

Winston's wish: <https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/supporting-a-bereaved-child/suicide-bereavement-support/>

Child bereavement: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/supporting-your-child-when-someone-has-died-by-suicide>

Pete's Dragon: https://www.petesdragons.org.uk/Bereavement_Support_3927.aspx

Survivors of bereavement by suicide under 18s: <https://uksobs.org/we-can-help/services-for-under-18s/>

Barnardo's: <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/child-bereavement-service-suicide-work>

Young People Living after loss: <https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/Wist>

READING RESOURCES:

Adult reading:

A Special Scar:
The Experiences
of People
Bereaved by
Suicide.
by Alison
Wertheimer

Aftershock:
Help, Hope and
Healing in the
Wake of Suicide.
by Candy Neely
Arrington

But I Didn't Say
Goodbye:
Helping Families
After a Suicide.
by Barbara
Rubel

Wintering: The
Power of Rest
and Retreat in
Difficult Times
by Katherine
May

The Strength
In Our
Scars by
Bianca
Sparacino

Children's reading:

Muddles,
Puddles and
Sunshine:
Activity Book to
Help When
Someone Has
Died by Diana
Crossley

When Dinosaurs
Die: A Guide To
Understanding
Death by Laurie
Krasny Brown

The Invisible
String:
by Patrice
Karst

What
Happened to
Daddy's Body?:
what happens
after death
by Elke Barber
and Alex Barber

I Miss You : A
First Look at
Death: by
Thomas, Pat

"HOW LUCKY I AM TO
HAVE SOMETHING THAT
MAKES SAYING
GOODBYE SO HARD."

 mind
in Somerset

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Registered in England 5148414
Charity No. 1109626

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