Help is at Hand

Support after someone may have died by suicide

Supported by:

Public Health England

National Suicide Prevention Alliance

States of Jersey

This guide is dedicated to those grieving the death of someone they love.
While producing this guide, the contributors have been remembering:
Christine, Daniel, James, Judi and Matthew.

This guide has been designed to help you to choose when and what sections are most appropriate for you. It is not intended as something you need to read through from cover to cover.

Your family, friends or colleagues may also find it helpful to look through this guide so that they can begin to try and understand a little of what you are going through and how to find the right help.

Some sections focus on how you may be feeling; others on what may be happening. Throughout – and in more detail at the back – are some suggestions for sources of further support. There are also quotes from people who have been bereaved and who have experienced some of what you may be going through.

A note about language

We have used the expressions 'died by suicide' and 'taken their own life'. We chose these terms because they seem most readily accepted, but we recognise people will have their own preferred language. We avoided the phrase 'commit suicide' since it implies people who die this way committed a crime, which is not the case.

There is no simple way to describe the differing relationships people may have had with the person who died ('loved one', 'relative or friend', 'someone close', 'someone important') so the expression 'person who died' has been used throughout. We acknowledge this may sound impersonal but it is not intended to devalue the strength of the relationship.

Contents

Introduction

When you first learn that someone has died in circumstances that may be due to suicide, you can experience a range of emotions. You could be feeling at a loss, and unsure about what you are thinking or doing.

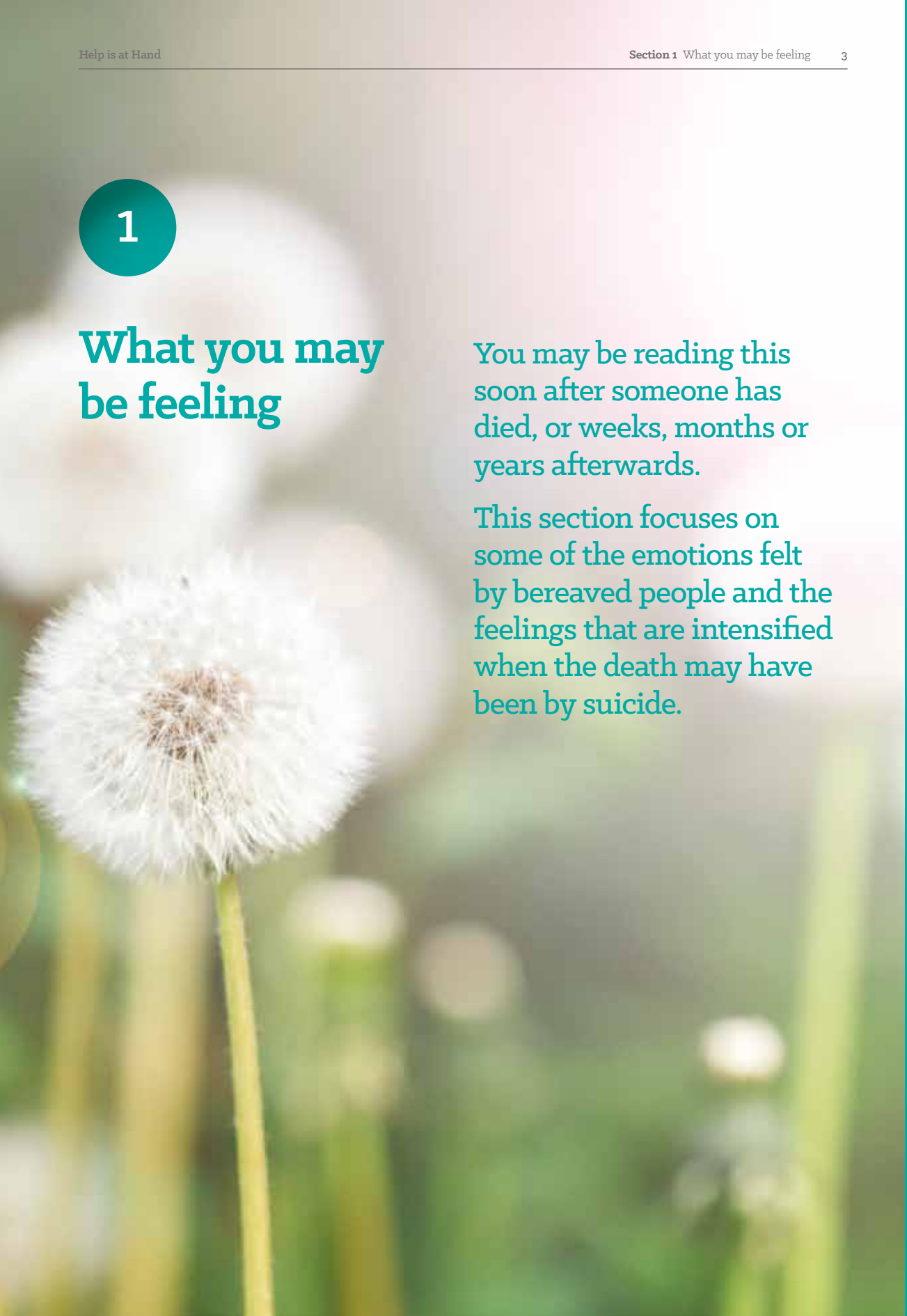
We hope you will find it helpful to have information about what you might be feeling, practical matters you are likely to have to deal with and suggestions on further help and support in the weeks and months ahead.

This guide can only attempt to describe some of what you are going through. It is no substitute for talking things over with people: either those close to you or a person from one of the support organisations listed. It has, however, been put together with the help of people who have been bereaved by suicide and who may have experienced some of what you are now going through.

We would like to express our sympathy and hope that this guide will offer you support and reassurance so that you feel you are not alone.

'In the chaos after the death, when I felt so alone, so desperate and so dazed, it helped to read something that described a bit of what I was feeling and what was happening. It felt a little as though there were others out there who were by my side and would know what I was going through.'

Mike, whose partner died



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What you may be feeling

You may be reading this soon after someone has died, or weeks, months or years afterwards.

This section focuses on some of the emotions felt by bereaved people and the feelings that are intensified when the death may have been by suicide.

How people grieve

Grief is as unique as you are, and as individual as a fingerprint. Each person will be affected in his or her own way because everyone is different – even in the same family. Each had their own relationship with the person who has died, their own experience of other losses and differing levels of support available.

People have their own ways of expressing feelings. Some find it helpful to share feelings and thoughts. Some find it very hard to cry or to put into words how they are feeling: it doesn't mean that they are not as distressed as someone who cannot stop crying.

You may find that people suggest how you are or should be feeling: ('you must be feeling very…') or tell you to grieve in a particular way ('you need to…'). It is probably best to accept that this advice is intended kindly, but remember that everyone grieves differently. So listen to yourself first and foremost and find your own way. It is important to remember that there are no set rules or stages and there is no right or wrong way to be feeling.

People may make assumptions that only close family grieve – however many people can be affected. You may be the close friend of the person, a work colleague, or maybe you have been professionally involved in helping before or after the person died. You may not have received the same recognition or understanding of your loss that family members have had yet you may still experience any combination of the feelings described.

Bereaved by suicide

Being bereaved by suicide has been described as 'grief with the volume turned up'. Much of what you may be feeling now would be the same if the person close to you had died suddenly or after a long illness. Yet people who have been bereaved say a suicide seems to intensify the normal responses to loss. For example, you may feel a sharper guilt over your own actions, a more bitter blame towards someone else who you feel could have prevented the suicide, stronger anger at the person who died or a deeper despair that someone close to you has died this way.

How are you feeling?

People often ask 'how are you feeling?' and it can be impossible to answer. When someone dies suddenly you can be left with an overwhelming jumble of feelings and thoughts. Here we explore some of the emotions that are commonly felt when someone you care about dies.

The emotions are listed alphabetically as there is no order or priority to how anyone may be feeling.

Anger
Defensiveness
Depression and anxiety
Despair
Disbelief
Fear
Guilt
Numbness
Physical reactions
Questioning – 'why?' and 'what if ?'
Rejection
Relief
Sadness
Searching
Sense of acceptance
Shame
Shock
Stigma
Suicidal thoughts

Anger

People who have been bereaved often feel angry. You may be angry with the person for dying in this way and leaving so much pain behind or because you have been left to deal with lots of practical matters and you feel ill-prepared. Or you may be angry with someone who you feel let them down, or with those who you believe should have taken better care of them. If you have a faith, you may be angry with your God. Trying to find someone to blame for the death is also a common response. Anger may occasionally feel overwhelming and can last, or go and then return, for a long time.

'My attitude changed to include feelings of anger about what she had done when I saw how her parents were suffering. I was also angry with myself for not telling her mother that I was concerned about her. At the time I felt I needed to be loyal to my friend.'

Vicky, whose friend died

'I wonder about when and how the dominoes had started to fall down and what actions might have stopped setting them into motion. I turn over in my mind what would have happened if we hadn't moved house, if I hadn't left my job, if we hadn't gone on holiday two months before she died, if I had given her more attention, or more space, said more, said less…'

Roger, whose wife died

Defensiveness

The uncertainty over how people will react can lead you to put up defences against them in case they say something upsetting or ask intrusive questions. Sometimes, it can be hard to let this guard down and talk openly about how you are feeling. Some people say it can be easier to talk with people who have also been bereaved by suicide. You'll find contact details for bereavement support organisations in section 6.

Depression and anxiety

Sometimes, people feel they are losing control of their mental health because the grief is so intense. This may be a feeling that comes and goes. Sometimes, but not always, you may feel these feelings have become deep-rooted. It is important to speak to your GP for their help or to one of the mental health support organisations listed in section 6 if you think this may be happening to you.

Despair

People bereaved by suicide may question whether they can face living without the person who has died. For some, this may be a fleeting thought; for others, it can become a deep despair that leads to thoughts of suicide. If this is how it feels for you, please seek support from those around you or one of the organisations listed on page 14.

'I spent a large amount of time trying to 'solve' why my son had decided to take his life. I internalised all these feelings which made things worse and worse for me. I just wanted to curl up in a ball and let life pass me by. I ended up reaching crisis point and was desperately trying to escape from the permanent anguish I felt. It was at this point that I decided I needed to share how I felt. That has been the game changer. Since I started talking about what I feel I have found the strength to move forward.'

Dean, whose son died

Disbelief

Some people find it hard to accept someone has died, and that the person will no longer be part of their lives. It is natural to struggle to believe what has happened, especially if the person may have died by suicide. This feeling can fade as the reality of their death sinks in, but you may still find yourself doubting what has happened for some time.

Fear

Grief can feel frightening; a shaky uncertainty because everything has changed. Sometimes people are afraid about what life will be like without the person who has died or about the impact the death will have on others. It can be difficult to imagine a different future.

Guilt

Some people may feel guilty. You could be feeling guilty for something you did or did not do, or said or did not say. It may help to remember that only the person who died knows why they could no longer bear to live. Feeling overwhelming guilt may be one of the main reasons that bereavement through suicide is so painful – and it isn't a feeling that can be diminished by someone reminding you of all the good things you did for the person who died. The guilt felt by the bereaved can sometimes feel like failure.

'His death consumed every minute of every hour of every day and on the rare occasions I became distracted from these thoughts, I felt guilty for not feeling "the pain".'

Shirley, whose son died

Numbness

Some find it hard to feel anything. People who experience this numbness can feel guilty for not expressing grief through crying or talking, especially when others around them may find it easier. For some, it can take a while for pain to break through. This can make it hard to answer well-meaning questions such as 'how are you feeling?' because the answer is sometimes nothing.

Physical reactions

After someone has died, it is quite common for those left behind to feel physically unwell with headaches, upset stomachs and sickness. Because you are feeling low, you may find yourself being less resilient against colds, for example, than usual. You may feel that you don't want to eat, or that you eat and drink more as a means of distraction. You may have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep or you may want to sleep all day.

Pining

There is a particular sadness after someone has died that can take the form of a desperate pining for that person. It can be a physical sensation: wanting to see, touch, hold or smell them and it can feel like a heart-breaking longing for them to return, even for just a moment.

Questioning – What if?

When people are bereaved by suicide, they may feel that they should or could have prevented it. Everyone who has lost someone to suicide will have asked themselves what they missed or could have done differently. Last conversations can replay in your head. You may continue to question yourself and those around you for days, weeks – even years. It is very likely that you were offering all your support, love and care. Equally, people who take their lives may not have shown despair to those around them.

'So I have made a pact with myself, which some days I can stick to, and other days not, that I will focus on remembering with joy all the good times I enjoyed and not the guilt-laden "what ifs" that can't bring me anything but pain.'

Amy, whose mother died

Questioning – Why?

People bereaved by suicide may be left with a huge unanswered question: Why? This is a question that people may go over and over, and without an answer, it may never go away entirely. The causes of suicide are usually complicated. Different experiences and incidences affect people in different ways. In truth, the person who died is the only one who knew why it felt impossible to live.

'After a while I realised I had to give him ownership of his decision, in whatever state of mind he'd been in at the time because, even if I had all the answers to the whys, the reality, the loss, the grief, were still the same.'

Angela, whose partner died

Rejection

However much you are trying to understand what happened, you may feel rejected and also that your love and care was ignored by the person who died. This can be especially true if you have been supporting the person for a long time through a period of mental ill health.

You may feel rejected by people close to you or in your community. Sometimes people seem unable to cope with what has happened and withdraw when you need them, leaving you feeling isolated. Some don't know how to react and are frightened of doing or saying the wrong thing and, as a result, they don't make contact and seemingly ignore you.

Relief

For some, a person's death feels like a relief – if they have been in deep distress or pain for a long time or if you have spent a long time worrying that they might die. This is a natural response to a long period of tension and stress and does not mean that you didn't care.

Sadness

A feeling of profound sadness may be the most frequent response to the death of someone close. This can last for years and sit alongside other reactions. You may feel you want the person back and life to return to how it once was. Sometimes it might feel like people are trying to tell you that you are angry, shocked or bewildered when what you feel is deep sadness.

Searching

People who have been bereaved sometimes search for the person who has died. For example, you may want to go to where the person used to spend time (work, school, or a favourite place) in case they will be there. Equally, some may want to avoid such places, now and in the future. It is also quite common to think you have caught a glimpse of the person who has died, for them to appear to you in a dream or to find yourself calling their name.

Sense of acceptance

There is the possibility that you accept the person's death as the choice they made given the situation that they were in. People who have been bereaved after a friend or relative has been suffering may feel some sense of acceptance that they decided to end the pain, alongside their own sadness at what has happened.

'When I got the phone call, I was not surprised. I knew my friend was in trouble and I had tried to support her as much as I could, advising her to get help and so on. Although I was devastated, I accepted the decision she had made.'

Vicky, whose friend died

Shame

It may be that you have a painful feeling of shame or distress; perhaps thinking that you have done something wrong or did not do enough to prevent the death. You may also feel ashamed because of the way that other people talk about suicide and the stigma that persists in our society.

'We had gone through so much together and I'd given him so much support. Yet it's as if I didn't give enough. Or perhaps I didn't support him in the right way? Did he think I didn't care? Did he not care about me like I thought he did?'

Faye, whose husband died

Shock

The feeling of shock can last a long time and you may experience it in many ways. It may feel as if you have lost your ability to breathe normally - as if someone has punched a hole through you or you have taken a deep breath in and then can't breathe out. Or you may feel you have lost your ability to complete daily tasks and that you are detached from what is going on around you.

Stigma

Many find bereavement by suicide marks them out and complicates the way in which people respond. Some feel it would be easier to explain the death in a different way. Others may not know what to say. People bereaved by suicide often say they feel judged in a way that would not happen if their loved one had died in a different way. There is a stigma in society over talking about suicide and this may make people avoid the subject.

'I feel sometimes that people define my mum's life by her death. She's stigmatised by the label "suicide". If someone dies from cancer or a car crash they are not blamed, nor have their death held against them like a character flaw. But with suicide I felt I had to explain how kind, lovely and giving she was. How she wasn't selfish, how she hadn't done this for attention but because depression had robbed her of her will to live.'

Lucy, whose mother died

Suicidal thoughts

Some people bereaved by suicide may start to have suicidal thoughts. If you find this happening to you, please reach out for help. Samaritans are at the end of a phone every hour of every day of the year (ring 116 123). There are many people in the organisations listed in section 6 to help and support you. Please share how you are feeling with someone and give them permission to keep a close eye on you while you are feeling vulnerable and desperate.

'I too felt suicidal. Then the pangs of guilt would smash through my head about how could I feel that way, when my other two boys and husband needed me now more than ever.'

Shirley, whose son died

What might help

People who have been bereaved say that the following things can help:

- **Expressing your feelings and thoughts:** finding ways to let out your feelings and having people around who can listen to you and accept you.
- **Making opportunities to remember:** this may mean talking about the person, looking at pictures, and videos of them, going to places that remind you of them, creating a box with physical memories (tickets, cards, pictures etc.), writing a journal or blog about them, or continuing to do activities you did together.
- **Developing 'rituals':** having a way of marking their life, for example by visiting a special place, by creating a lasting memorial or by a simple act such as lighting a candle at the same time each week.
- **Participating in activities:** continuing to do things you have previously enjoyed, such as sports, social events or music.
- **Putting your feelings on paper:** you may not feel ready to talk to anyone, but writing down your thoughts and feelings may help you.
- **Looking after yourself:** eating well and getting sufficient sleep.
- **Spending time outside:** getting out of the house for a change of scene, connecting with nature or doing exercise.
- **Meeting, speaking with or reading the words of other people who have been bereaved:** see details of the range of support organisations in section 6.
- **Developing an 'emotional first aid kit':** collecting together some things that can help when you are feeling sad or mad or bad (a music play list, your favourite chocolate, a ball to kick or pillow to punch).

What might not help

People who have been bereaved say that the following things might not help:

- **Avoiding talking about what has happened:** although it may be really difficult to start with, talking to someone you can trust can make all the difference.
- **Drinking more, taking drugs:** it can be tempting to try and blot out the pain of what has happened, but the short term oblivion doesn't take away the sadness and is likely to make you feel worse.
- **Hurrying to make big decisions:** it may be better to let some time pass before making major changes to your life.
- **Taking risks:** after someone close has died you may feel 'what's the point?' and take risks with your own health, for example by driving too fast. Try and talk to someone you trust if you think you are risking your safety or that of someone else.
- **Not seeking help:** you may feel you can't ask for help as you are worried it will make you seem weak, or that you shouldn't bother other people when they are grieving (such as members of your family), or when they are busy (such as your doctor). But how you are feeling is very important, and there are people who want to help. Section 6 includes details of support organisations.

Talk to someone now

If you need help right away, the organisations listed below can give you support. There are full listings of other helpful organisations in section 6.

Samaritans

www.samaritans.org

Samaritans provide emotional support to anyone who is struggling to cope and needs someone to listen. Local branches can be visited during the day.

Helpline: 116 123
Every day, 24 hours

SMS: 07725 909090

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)

www.uk-sobs.org.uk

SOBS offers support for those bereaved or affected by suicide through a helpline answered by trained volunteers who have been bereaved by suicide and a network of local support groups.

Helpline: 0300 111 5065
Every day 9.00 – 21.00

Email: sobs.support@hotmail.com

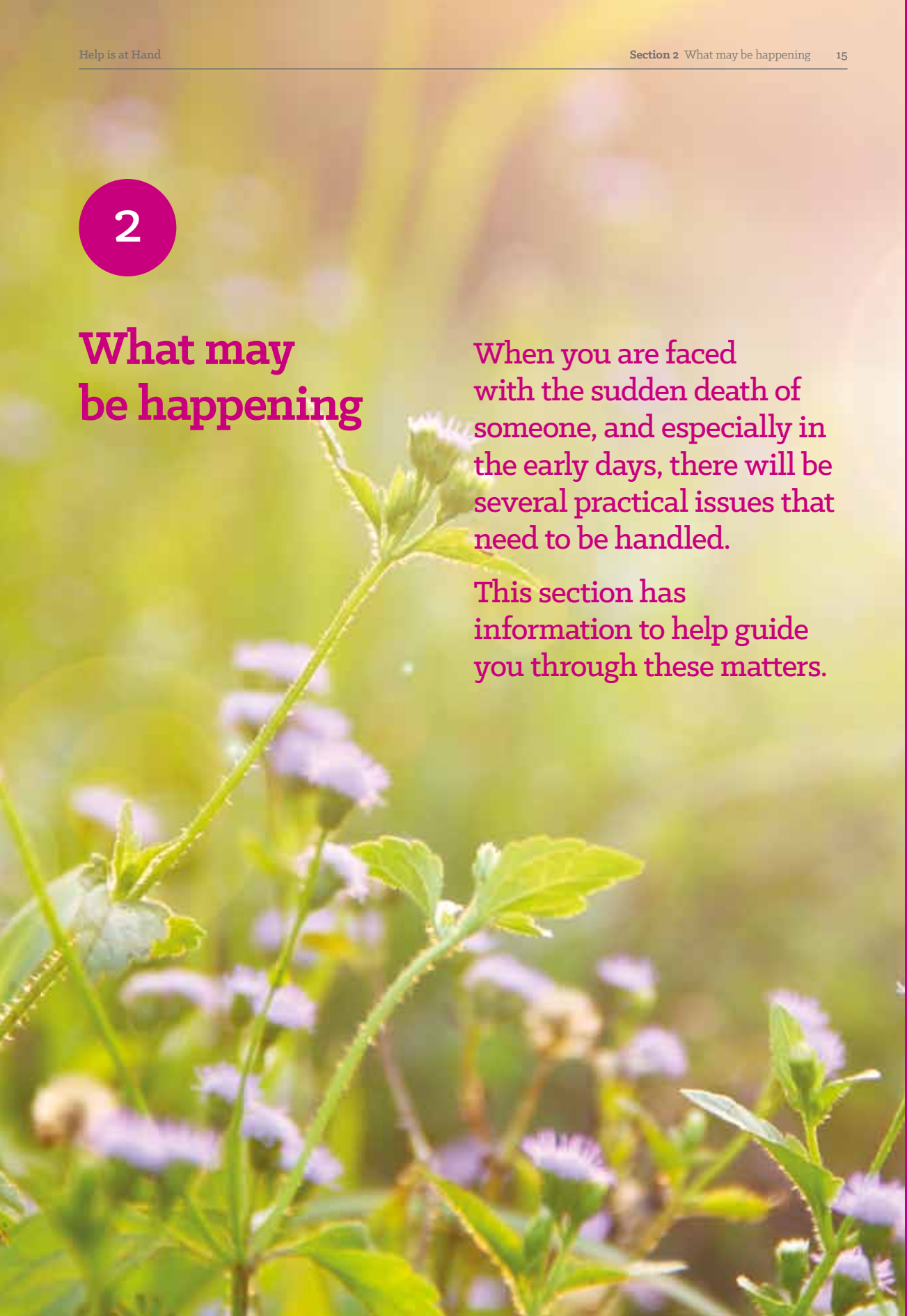
Jersey Community Bereavement Service

www.jerseyhospicecare.com/our-services/community-bereavement-service/

The service is confidential and free of charge. After an initial assessment, they offer confidential weekly support 1-1 sessions which can be continued for as long as necessary and they may suggest that you attend their Bereavement Support groups if you would find this helpful.

Helpline: 285144
(9am to 5pm weekdays) + answerphone at other times.

Email: bereavement@jerseyhospicecare.com



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What may be happening

When you are faced with the sudden death of someone, and especially in the early days, there will be several practical issues that need to be handled.

This section has information to help guide you through these matters.

Letting people know

One of the first and hardest challenges you could face is letting others know what has happened: these may be family, friends, work colleagues, or neighbours.

You are entitled to tell people when you are ready and to say whatever you want about how the person died. Some say that they found it helpful to be honest from the start as it meant they didn't have to keep any secrets, or worry about how and when the truth might one day be revealed.

You are also entitled not to answer any questions from other people if you don't yet feel able, or you feel their questions are inappropriate.

You are likely to find that the people you are telling could be at a loss about what to say to you – and they may say or do thoughtless things in their shock. It may be difficult, but try not to feel offended or let down by their first reactions.

Section 3 provides some guidance on talking to and supporting children and young people after a death by suicide.

Here are some things you could say:

[person's name] has died…

…I'll tell you more when I feel able to.

…It is too soon for us to talk about how they died.

…I don't want to say any more at the moment.

…It looks like they might have taken their own life.

…We cannot imagine what happened. The police think they may have taken their own life, but we don't know yet.

… We think it was intentional. We knew they had thought about it before and we hoped that they'd find a way through their problems.

People you may meet in the first few days

You may have already met or spoken to people from the Police or Viscount's Department. It can be really difficult to have to deal with their focus on finding out how the person died. Even if the cause seems obvious, they have to do their job thoroughly. For some people, this can feel intrusive and inappropriate but, hopefully, the professionals concerned will be kind and sensitive when carrying out their work.

Police

The police need to make sure that no-one else was involved in the person's death so they will have to ask questions to explore how the person who has died was acting in the days and weeks before their death. You may have known that the person had been struggling and unhappy; or their death may have come as a complete shock.

They may ask you to help them confirm the person's identity, either by seeing them and confirming who has died, or by providing photographs. Occasionally, the police may need to take personal items away, but these will be returned. You might want to note down the name and contact number of the officer in case you have any questions after they have gone.

Coroner and coroner's officer

In Jersey, sudden and unexplained deaths are reported to the Viscount a judicial office holder appointed by the Bailiff. On a day to day basis the Deputy Viscount acts as coroner. The Deputy Viscount may decide to investigate, in which case the death cannot be registered until this is completed.

When a death is investigated by the Deputy Viscount, a Coroners Officer, or in Jersey the Police Viscounts Liaison Officer or in his absence, a Police Officer will contact the next of kin where possible, within one working day of the death being reported, to explain why the death has been reported and what is likely to follow.

The investigation may take time, for example in cases where there is to be an inquest. You could speak to the Police Viscount's Liaison Officer or a Funeral director about how and when to make funeral arrangements as well as any other concerns or questions you may have.

'The coroner's officer came to see us within a few days and she kept in contact with us over the weeks leading up to the inquest. She was helpful and did what she could to be kind, explaining to us what the coroner needed and what the next steps were.'

Roger, whose wife died

'The day she died the police took away some of her things from beside her bed and I remember thinking, "No, I want everything of hers, I don't want you to take anything". But they were really careful and we got it all back.'

Amy, whose mother died

In the days and weeks after someone has died

The following information is designed to give you some idea of what practical things are likely to take place in the days and weeks ahead. Depending on the circumstances surrounding the death there may also need to be some specific considerations.

Post-mortem examination

Sometimes the Coroner will decide to request a post-mortem examination to be clear about how the person died. The process usually involves an internal examination of the organs carried out by a medical specialist known as a pathologist.

By law, the coroner is not required to obtain your consent to this, but will give you a reason for his or her decision.

Coroners will try to take account of your religious and cultural needs while at the same time ensuring they are acting within the law when requesting a post-mortem.

Wherever possible you will be informed when an examination will be performed. If the post-mortem examination can establish the cause of death, the Deputy Viscount may decide the investigation is complete or that further investigation is unnecessary.

Sometimes the pathologist may retain and preserve small pieces of tissue and very occasionally organs, for microscopic examination if they are relevant to the cause of death or their identity. In this case, the Police Viscount's Liaison Officer or Hospital staff will notify the next of kin and ask what they wish to happen to the organs or tissue when examination is complete. If you are the next of kin, you can request that tissue is returned to the body, retained or disposed of respectfully.

The initial investigation

As part of the initial investigation, the Police and the Deputy Viscount have to gather information about the person who has died. This might involve asking you and others who can help the investigation, such as family and friends, questions about how the person who died had been acting in the days before their death. You may also be asked questions about whether the person had any mental health problems. Your information may be written into a statement and may be read as part of the inquest. You can request a copy of what you said.

If the person who has died left a note or message, the Police or Police Viscount's Liaison Officer may need to take it away. If you ask, they may let you have a copy and you can also ask for the original to be returned after the inquest.

Sometimes the police may need to take a personal item away to help them be sure of the identity of the person who died. Occasionally, they may want to take away a mobile phone or computer. They will return anything borrowed, though this may be after the inquest.

On request you can have access to all documents and information held by the Coroner before the inquest, and the Police Viscount's Liaison Officer can help you with this. Please do be aware that you may find the contents of some of these documents detailed and distressing.

Care of the body

While the initial investigation is happening, the body of the person who has died will usually be looked after in a hospital mortuary. If you choose to do so, you will be able to see the body.

Choosing to see the person after their death

No-one can make the decision for you about whether or not to see the person who has died; what is right for one person may not be right for another. Some people, with the best and kindest intentions may suggest you don't view the body. They may say 'it's better to remember them as they were'. You may feel this is right for you or you may feel you will not be able to accept that they have died until you have seen them and said goodbye.

Funeral directors are experienced at supporting people who have been bereaved and will be able to talk to you about viewing the person who has died. This can also be done by arrangement after post-mortem at the Chapel of Rest at the Mortuary at the General Hospital.

Arranging a funeral

Even if the inquest has not yet been opened, you can talk to a funeral director to start planning what happens next.

Following the post-mortem investigation, even if the Deputy Viscount decides to continue the investigation, the body will be released for burial or cremation as soon as possible.

If the body is to be released for cremation the Deputy Viscount may open an inquest. The Deputy Viscount will then issue a certificate of the fact of death. This is an interim death certificate that will allow you to make arrangements for a funeral.

If the body is to be released for burial the Deputy Viscount will issue a burial permit and can issue a fact of death document.

A Jersey Death Grant is available and this will normally be dealt with and explained by the funeral director. Further information can be gained at the Social Security department or **www.gov.je**

Inquest

An inquest is a public court hearing to establish who has died, and how, when and where the death happened. The coroner must hold an inquest if it was not possible to find the cause of death from the post-mortem examination, if the death is found to be unnatural, occurred in prison, police custody or in hospital, or if the coroner thinks there are grounds for further investigation.

It is not a trial and its purpose is to discover the facts of the death, not to apportion blame.

The main inquest hearing should normally take place within six months or as soon as is practical after the death has been reported. Some cases are more complex and the wait is longer.

In certain circumstances the Deputy Viscount is required to start the process as soon as possible and this is known as 'opening an inquest'. This is usually a brief hearing at the Viscount's Department, allowing the Deputy Viscount to 'adjourn' (postpone) the full inquest to a later date to allow sufficient time for information to be gathered. You are entitled to attend both the initial and the full inquest and the next of kin will be informed of the date.

Most inquests are open to the public so other people, including the media, can be there. You do not have to attend – unless the Deputy Viscount wants to call you as a witness. Many people do not attend the first, brief hearing but do attend the full inquest. The Police Viscount's Liaison Officer will be able to discuss this with you.

It may be possible for you to visit the courtroom before the inquest begins so you can be familiar with its surroundings.

Reaching a conclusion

After hearing the evidence, the Deputy Viscount may summarise and then will give the 'finding' of the inquest (who the deceased was, when and where they died including the medical cause of their death).

The finding of the inquest will be delivered in a 'narrative' which sets out the circumstances and his or her understanding of the facts. In Jersey unlike in England and Wales, no 'conclusion' is given (such as 'suicide', 'open', 'accident' or 'misadventure').

The key facts are given in the narrative 'finding' of the inquest.

'Our grief was so immense that we just switched into auto-pilot to get through all the formalities. We had it explained to us what needed to happen, and we just got on with getting through the funeral and inquest. They were almost trivial compared to dealing with the way we felt. I have good family and a few fantastic friends who did any of the immediate things, and we only got involved in decisions when we needed to.'

Doug, whose son died

You can ask for a copy of the post-mortem investigation report and any other documents used during the investigation. These reports are detailed and you may find them distressing. In Jersey it is usual practice for a copy of the post-mortem investigation report to be sent to the General Practitioner of the person who has died. You may want to make an appointment with them, or your own General Practitioner, to go through the report with you. Alternatively you may want to ask a friend or someone close to go through them in the first instance.

Sometimes an inquest will show something could be done to prevent future deaths. If so, the Viscount can write a report drawing this to the attention of the organisation or person that may have the power to take action.

There is a clear guide to the inquest process on **www.gov.je/viscount.**

If the person died while under the care of mental health services

If the person died while an in-patient or whilst under the care of a community team, then mental health services are likely to offer their support.

There will be an investigation (sometimes called a Serious Incident Requiring Investigation, a Serious Untoward Incident, or similar) running alongside the coroner's inquiry. The aim will be to find out if the death could have been prevented and to learn for the future.

A member of the mental health services team should make contact with you and ask for your views to be added to the investigation. You should be kept fully informed throughout the process, unless you ask not to be, and there should be an identified person you can contact if you have questions or concerns. You may want to have your own legal representative at the inquest, so you have someone who can guide you through the process, give you advice and ask questions. Having a legal professional can also be valuable if you want to challenge any decisions made or if you are considering a compensation claim.

If the person died in prison or in detention

If the person died while being detained, there will be an investigation into what happened and whether they received appropriate care. This may mean that you speak to officials from the Prison Service as well as the Police.

When the death occurs away from home

The investigation, post-mortem investigation and inquest all take place in the area where the person died, not where the person comes from or lives. This may be difficult as it will mean that you will have to travel to the inquest.

It can also be a little more complicated and expensive to arrange for the person's body to be brought 'home' for the funeral, and even more complicated if the death happens in another country. Your funeral director will be able to give you all the information that you require.

Child Death Overview Panel

When a child under 18 years dies, for whatever reason, a process is automatically started to check every aspect of what has happened. This is the responsibility of the Child Death Overview Panel. Their inquiry runs alongside the inquest, and its aim is to protect other children and young people. The Child Death Overview Panel reports to the Local Safeguarding Partnership Board, and all work with the coroner to share information.

What else may be happening

There are other issues that you may also have to consider depending on the individual circumstances of the person who has died.

Visiting where they died

It may be that the person died at your home, which can make continuing to live there tough. It may help to ask a family member or friend to stay with you for some time. Or it could be that you move out, even for a short time. It can be especially hard if there is no alternative place for you to go. On the other hand, it can be comforting to be at home if there are also positive memories.

It may be that person died somewhere else and you may want to see where that was. This could be difficult if the police are investigating what happened, or if it is unsafe to do so or if it is in a dangerous or inaccessible place, you can ask the Police Viscount's Liaison Officer if they could help you see where the death took place.

You may feel you want to place flowers and messages at the place where the person died, if it was outside the home. This can be a way of expressing your grief.

Final messages from the person who has died

Many people die by suicide without leaving a message. This can leave you feeling hurt and increase your intensity to try and understand 'why'. If a final message has been left, the words may bring a measure of comfort; the person having taken one last opportunity to express their loving thoughts. Occasionally, the message may cause pain and other conflicting emotions if the person, in their distress and despair, is angry or accusatory.

Like the act of suicide itself, a final message allows for no reply. Some people find it helps to write a reply, either to keep or later destroy. Some decide that it feels right to destroy or erase any final message: others choose to keep it.

It is important to remember words left offer just a glimpse into what the person was feeling at that very particular time, and not what they represented throughout their relationship with you.

'I have to walk where he died ten to fifteen times a day. That brings with it mixed feelings. Most days, it means I am in and around the places where we enjoyed happy times together so it brings back positive memories. Other days I find it difficult, especially when it's coming up to an anniversary or his birthday and all I want is for him to be here with me.'

Lotte, whose brother died

Informing services

When the Deputy Viscount issues an interim death certificate/fact of death document, this will also allow you to begin to let other people know that the person has died (for example, banks, insurance companies) There is a checklist on page 32 to help you to think about this.

Many banks, building societies and utility companies (like gas and electricity) have staff trained to make arrangements easier for people who have been bereaved; you can search on the organisation's website for a number for their bereavement team or ask for this when you get through on the phone.

Registering the death

After the inquest, the coroner will notify the registrar in the Parish where the person died who will then register the death from the information the coroner provides. In Jersey it is usual for the Funeral Director to collect the death certificate for you.

Life insurance

Some life insurance policies have a clause (sometimes in the small print) that makes the policy invalid if the person whose life was insured dies by suicide within a certain time after taking out the policy. The companies that issue the policies have trained staff who handle matters after someone has died, and they will be able to talk to you about this in a sensitive way.

Bereavement benefits

You may be entitled to bereavement benefits or Death Grant after someone has died. Please contact Social Security or visit **www.gov.je**

Dealing with the media

For reasons that can sometimes be hard to understand, a death by suicide is often considered newsworthy.

You may find yourself approached by journalists and photographers for details of your loved one and the circumstances of their death. This can be particularly true when the death has taken place in a public place, or if it is a young person who has died.

Despite the pressure that a journalist can try to apply, remember that you do not have to co-operate and you do not have to say anything about the person who died. Equally, you can ask the media not to report the person's death – sometimes this is successful.

If media interest is expected, then some families prepare a written statement about the person who has died: both factual information (their name, age etc.) and also what they were like (what they enjoyed, how they will be remembered etc). In this way, it can give families the opportunity to have a little more control about what is said or written. The statement could also include whether you are prepared to comment or be interviewed now or later. Before agreeing to speak to a journalist, it is always wise to consider the possible implications of making the information public. There is no guarantee that the media will use what you provide.

They may choose to do their own research using information publicly available. This could include taking photos from social media accounts.

It is worth noting that once the media have a photograph, it can be used at any time (for example, in connection with a similar event). There may be no preparation for suddenly seeing a photograph of someone you know reappear months after they have died in connection with a different event.

Sometimes, appropriate media coverage can feel like a way of sharing the life of a person with a wider audience. Some people choose to talk publicly about what has happened as a way of remembering the person, or to help raise awareness of the issue of suicide to try and prevent other deaths. Remember, you have a right to decide what you feel comfortable with.

There are clear media guidelines issued by Samaritans about how to report appropriately on a suicide, and you should complain if you feel these have been broken: in fact, Samaritans' communication team can help you make the complaint and offer you support.

You can also complain to the Independent Press Standards Organisation if you have been subject to intrusive enquiries or if you are concerned that coverage may affect other people's safety. Occasionally, people feel the person who died was unfairly represented.

'Seeing my story laid out in black and white, his face smiling out at me from the pages of the magazine, was heartbreaking. But then, the messages started to flow in from readers who had read our story and who had suddenly realised they were not alone in this.'

Angela, whose partner died

Social media

An increasingly common aspect of experiencing loss is the role of social media. You may want to keep what has happened private, yet versions of what has happened may already be circulating on the internet. This is one reason why, although it is so hard and painful, it is usually best to be honest about how the person died.

You may want to post a message about the death on the social media pages of the person who has died. Before you do, consider if there might be a more gentle way of letting people know; it can be very shocking to learn something online when you have no support around you. Consider also who will read it both now and, potentially, in the future, and the fact that they may not react with kindness.

After a death, social media pages are also used as a place for people's memories and photographs of the person who has died. Many people talk about the comfort that sharing recollections can bring. It can be a helpful way to continue to mark birthdays and other important anniversaries.

'It's brought me great comfort to be able to share stories about her on Facebook and to have other people give me their reminiscences. There have been times I've felt really sad, but by being able to instantly tell others that is how I am feeling and to then hear back from my friends has really helped. I've also learnt about things that she did or said that I never knew about, some of which have brought a real smile to my face.'

Amy, whose mother died

If you want to, you could use the social media accounts of the person who died to inform their contacts and, maybe to establish a place for people to remember them. Different sites, e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram have different procedures for how to operate or 'memorialise' (that is, leave untouched) the account of someone who has died.

Handling these practical matters

The time after someone close has died is the time when you may be feeling most exhausted, confused and anxious. It is so hard to understand what needs to be done and even harder to do it. Accept any help you are offered by people you trust – for example, to produce and post letters, to look up relevant phone numbers or to sort through paperwork.

There are many professionals who are there to help you through this time, so talk to the Police Viscounts Liaison Officer, your funeral director, your GP or to one of the helplines listed in section 6 about any concerns you may be having, or to ask them to guide you through the things you need to do.

'The human mind has a way of protecting us in times of crisis: when things get too much we close down and blank off our feelings and emotions, allowing us some time to adjust and acclimatise. If you take the pause in the storm to make a short list of your priorities, it may help you focus on the important things while you work through the pain and problems in the months and years ahead.'

Chris, whose wife died

Contact details

After someone dies, it can feel as if there is so much to think about and do. The list on page 32 may help you consider who you might want to contact. It focuses on the professionals and organisations you may have to be in touch with in connection with this death rather than your family and friends. Maybe a friend can help find the numbers for you and make some of the calls or send the letters?

On page 33 is a sample letter which you could copy and complete for each contact.

Organisation	Name/reference	Contact details	Informed?
Police officer/Family liaison			
Police Viscount's Liaison Officer			
Funeral director			
Viscount's Department (if necessary)			
Registrar of deaths			
Workplace (yours)			
Workplace (person who died and their work colleagues)			
School/college (of person who died and/or of any bereaved children/young people)			
Social Security Department			
Voluntary work			
GP (theirs/yours)			
Hospital/health services (hospital number)			
Solicitor			
Executor of will			
Life insurance company			
Bank			
Building society			
Mortgage provider/landlord/ housing officer			
Pensions provider(s)			
Tax office			
Car insurance			
Parish, driving licence			
Phone (mobile/landline)			
TV/internet provider			
Electricity/gas			
Water			
Passport office (passport number)			
Dentist			
Library			
Hire purchase/loans			
Clubs (social/sporting etc)			
Social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram etc.)			
Other			

To whom it may concern
Name of organisation:
I wish to notify you of the death of:
Title
First name(s)
Surname
Date of birth
Address
Telephone
Email
Date of death
I understand that the person named above had dealings with your organisation. **Please amend your records.** Thank you.
Their reference number/membership number for your organisation:
If you need more information, my details are:
Name
Address
Telephone (home) (mobile)
Email
Relationship to the person who died
Signature
Date

3

People with a particular connection to the person who died

Some people will have particular responses and reactions to a death by suicide depending on their relationship to the person who died.

This section helps guide people with a particular connection.

Partners

When your partner dies by suicide, it may feel as if you and your life together have been rejected. You may ask unanswerable questions such as: 'wasn't I enough reason to stay alive?'. It may be so hard to remember the good parts of your lives together because a death by suicide seems to wipe out the positive memories, at least for a time.

'I'll never understand – how could all that love we had not have been enough? How could death seem preferable to that…to me?'

Faye, whose husband died

If the death was unexpected, you are likely to be feeling as if the ground has disappeared from under your feet. If you have been supporting your partner through mental ill health or previous attempts for a long time, there may be confused feelings of frustration, exhaustion and relief.

People whose partner has died by suicide sometimes say the manner of their death can make others treat them in a very different way, as if they were 'tainted' or to blame for what has happened. This can sometimes be the case with a partner's relatives who are, of course, also grieving.

If you and the person who died have children, you may feel extremely hurt and angry on their behalf.

The death of an ex-partner can hurt unexpectedly. You may feel you are not entitled to grieve – but that won't stop it happening. You shared parts of your lives together and you are allowed to grieve for the person you knew.

Your reasons for grief might not be easily recognised by others. Some find themselves excluded from funeral arrangements and support, either deliberately (for example, because they were in same sex relationships that their families have felt unable to accept) or unintentionally (because your connection was unknown and had perhaps been kept secret from your partner's family).

'An entire life together – friends, the flat, the cat, putting out the bins – yet I wasn't even seen as his next of kin.'

Stephen, whose partner died

Parents

For any parent to have a child die – whatever their age, whatever the cause – is devastating. It seems to break the 'normal' rules when a child dies before their parent. People talk about the fierce pain of not being able to hold their child, of not seeing them grow up and share their lives, of the loss of their dreams for their child's future.

Parents can tear themselves apart with questions such as 'why?'; 'what could I have done to stop this?'; 'why didn't I notice?'; 'if only...'. You may feel that others are judging you – and your child – in a way they would not if your child had died in other ways. Even if your child had grown up and left home many years before their death, you may endlessly wonder if there was anything you could have done that would have changed what happened.

'As his mum, I felt responsible for his death; that I should have seen his inward struggle and that I had missed the signs. The battle to deal with the intensity and complexity of his death hit our family and whole community with the ferocity and fallout of an atom bomb.'

Shirley, whose son died

Parents may grieve in different ways. Whilst one may find it impossible to talk about what has happened, seem unmoved and keep themselves busy, another may need to talk, to cry and to express feelings and pain. This may lead to a sense of being estranged from each other at a time when you most need each other's support, and may lead one parent to think that the other does not care. Single or separated parents may feel very alone and unsupported.

Parents whose adult child has died by suicide sometimes feel they have to support their child's partner and any children first, and put their own grief 'on hold'. Parents can feel responsible for their child causing pain to others.

It can be especially difficult to support any other children while you are grieving; you know they need you but you may feel you have nothing left to give. You may end up hiding your feelings and not talking about the enormity of what has happened. Parents bereaved by suicide worry that their other children will also consider suicide, which can result in becoming super vigilant and over-protective.

If you are a parent whose only child has died, you may wonder how you now define or describe yourself. One parent described it as being 'a mother without a child'. It may make answering the question 'do you have any children?' very challenging. The Compassionate Friends have an online message board for childless parents (see page 62 for details).

'When he was five, my youngest son's questions changed from "why did Daddy die?" to "how did Daddy die?". As he played with his cars on the floor, I cried into the sink of dishes I was washing and I started to tell him the truth. When he turned 18, he thanked me for telling him the truth about his father's suicide. He said he now realised how difficult it must have been, but if I hadn't told him the truth he would have lost his relationship with both parents that night.'

Angela, whose partner died

Children and young people

For children of any age, the death of a parent by suicide brings particular challenges. They are likely to feel abandoned and it can be very hard for children to avoid feeling that somehow they weren't enough of a reason for their parent to keep living.

Some who have survived an attempted suicide explain reaching a point when desperate despair removed their ability to see anything beyond an end to their mental anguish; and a feeling those they love and care about will be better off without them.

Talking to children about how the person died will depend on the child's age or level of understanding.

If there are young children who have lost a parent or sibling to suicide, a natural response is to want to protect them from knowing what has happened, and to think up an alternative explanation for the death. However, because of the likelihood of overheard conversations, media coverage, gossip and visits from the police, it is hard to keep the cause of death a secret. It is better for children to hear the truth from people who love them than from someone in the playground or on social media: this is a time when they need to feel there are people they can trust.

Talking about what has happened is a chance to answer any questions (within the limits of their age and level of understanding) and to check that they have understood what has been said. It is also a chance to reassure them they were not to blame. Ideally, a parent would be the best person to tell the child what has happened – if this is not possible, ask someone they trust to explain what has happened.

If the child has already been given a different explanation for the death, it is possible to go back and change it. For example you could say something like: 'You know I told you that your dad had an accident and that is why he died. Well, I've been thinking about this and I would like to tell you a little more about how he died. I didn't know what to say when it happened, it was such a shock. Now I'd like you to know what actually happened that day.'

You may be wondering whether children should view the person's body or whether they should attend the funeral. These decisions will depend on your knowledge of the child's level of understanding. Children and young people appreciate being given the information to make a choice.

'It was so hard to tell them that their dad had killed himself. I tried to avoid it, said he'd had an accident, but how long could I keep that up for? I thought they'd understand better when they were older, but how old? I can't understand it and I'm an adult – why do I think there is a magic age at which it'll be OK for them to know? Then I realised I was just trying to protect myself but, actually, more than ever they needed to be able to trust me. Turns out they'd guessed something wasn't right all along and they just wanted me to be honest so we could talk about it together.'

Faye, whose husband died

If children wish to see the person's body, and you feel this is appropriate, prepare them in advance for what they will see and suggest they bring something (e.g. a flower, a card) to leave with the person. If they decide to attend the funeral, consider offering them a role (e.g. choosing some music). Child bereavement services will offer guidance on these decisions: there is a list of relevant organisations on page 61.

Children and young people will have the same range and intensity of feelings as adults but may need help identifying and expressing their emotions. It may be the first time that someone they know has died and even the concept of death is new to them. Understanding suicide can be overwhelmingly difficult and confusing.

They may find it very hard to cry: it doesn't mean they aren't as distressed as someone who can't stop crying. The way children grieve is often described as 'puddle-jumping': moving rapidly from great distress to physical activity, for example. This is normal.

Some emotions can be strongly felt by children and young people depending on their age and level of understanding. It is common for a child who has been bereaved by suicide to feel that they were in some way to blame – for something they did or did not do; or something they said or did not say. Giving regular reassurance is important.

Young people may become extremely angry – with the person who died, with other members of the family, with themselves. Grief can put a great strain on relationships and young people may fall out with members of the family or with friends. It is also very natural for a child to be scared that someone else in the family may also die by suicide. If you can, reassure them. You could say something like: 'I know I have been very upset, angry and shaky since your Dad died but I am not going anywhere. I will get upset, because I am still so sad that he died, but it does not mean I will die the way he did.'

It is natural to be afraid that affected children will grow up believing that suicide is an option. Making it clear that talking about what has happened is allowed, and that it is helpful to share how you are feeling is important. It also helps to explore with them alternative ways of coping with difficulties.

Children may also appreciate being helped with how to answer questions from others: their friends may be very direct and inquisitive. Help them find something they are comfortable saying, for example: 'My sister died at the weekend. It is very sad. It was suicide. Please don't ask me for any more information. If I feel I can talk about it, sometime, I'll let you know.'

Some young people may find it easier to talk and may want to say something like: 'Please don't avoid talking about your father just because of what happened to mine. It's tough but I'd rather we talked about it.' It may be that other young people, in person or through social media, ask intrusive questions; it can help to have a sentence ready such as: 'Thanks for being interested, but I'm not going to talk about it so please don't ask me.'

If the person who died was a friend, young people may need intense support; they may have shared things together and they will wonder if there was more they could have done. Their friend may be someone they knew online and other people may not understand the intensity and importance of that connection.

It can help if young people know there are places (such as support organisations, school counsellors, helplines) where they can talk about their feelings, as sometimes they may struggle to share their thoughts with other members of the family.

It is important that children and young people get the right support at school or college. Some places can be very understanding and supportive. When you call to inform the school or college what has happened, ask if there is someone on the staff with a particular responsibility for supporting students who have been bereaved and try to speak to them. One of the organisations on page 61 could help you – and help the school– know what to say about the death and how school or college can help. Samaritans has a service called Step By Step, which supports schools after a suicide.

Several child bereavement services (both national and local) can guide you on supporting children bereaved by suicide. Some of these have particular programmes of support, such as groups, for children and young people who have been bereaved by suicide. See the list of organisations on page 61.

Siblings

If your brother or sister dies, you immediately lose someone who you have grown up with, laughed with, argued with, and with whom you share a lot of memories. You could feel you should have protected them, or you may feel really hurt that they did not turn to you for support, especially if you are the eldest. If you have had a troubled relationship, you may feel as though you are left with unresolved issues.

'He was my baby brother. I don't know why he couldn't talk to me. As many teenagers do, he'd often stay up late, playing his music and at times he'd come in and talk to me. I was there that night and I often think why didn't he come and see me and tell me about how he was feeling.'

Lotte, whose brother died

'At the time of my brother's death I was only ten years old. I had never experienced loss, and suicide was certainly not something I was aware of. Straight away I was looking for someone to blame, looking for a reason why my big brother would have made that decision. I was confused, lost and lonely. The one person I wanted to talk to had been taken away.'

Matthew, whose brother died

Not only do you have your own grief and confusion, but you can feel responsible for helping to support your parents with their grief too, and also feel that you have been given additional responsibility for looking after your parents as they age. You may also find people enquire after your parents without recognising that you are also grieving. Sometimes, it may feel as if you have lost all your family at once because your parents withdraw from you into their grief, and it can be hard not to blame the person who has died.

It can be helpful to talk through how you are feeling with your wider family and friends to get their support.

'I often think (she) would have loved this and that as things occur. She would have been an important person on my wedding day and in my children's lives. Her loss has made me more conscious of my children and their well-being… it can still make me weep when I think about it, to have lost such a kind, beautiful and funny friend to suicide.'

Vicky, whose friend died

Friends

Most people who have died will have friends with whom they have shared many experiences and with whom they feel closer than they do with some of their family. As a friend of the person who died, you may sometimes feel that your grief and needs can be overlooked and that it is difficult to get your voice heard or obtain support. It can be hard to find yourself in a secondary role after the death, and having little or no involvement in planning the funeral or other arrangements. You may also have particularly intense feelings to deal with if you are the person who knew how low your friend was feeling. Maybe they knew things about you that no-one else did – and now, no-one does.

Friends can sometimes feel that they are not 'entitled' to any support after someone dies. It is important to remember that what matters is how this loss affects you, not whether you were related to the person who died. If you are grieving, you deserve to be supported in your grief, and the organisations listed in section 6 will do their best to help.

Older people

Older people may grieve for the person who died and for the grief being felt by other family members. Or they may feel they should not express their grief, feeling it is in some way 'less important' or that they need to 'stay strong' for others in the family. This may complicate communication within the family.

Some older people may remember when suicide was a criminal offence (before 1961) and may, therefore, feel a deeper sense of the stigma that can accompany a death by suicide.

Older people may be at risk of developing depression or having their physical health suffer after a family death by suicide and yet be reluctant to seek medical help or support. It is important to remember you are experiencing something very tough and your doctor is there to help. Age UK have a useful leaflet about 'Emotional Health and Wellbeing': (see page 64 for details) and some local branches offer bereavement support.

People with learning disabilities

People often underestimate the capacity of a person with learning difficulties to feel grief and understand death. Your knowledge of the person with learning difficulties is likely to help you to know best how to support them in dealing with new experiences. It can feel particularly difficult if the person who died was one of the people who could best understand them and their needs.

Sometimes, because people may not be able to express their grief in the usual ways, those around them may assume they are not grieving when they are actually feeling distress and pain.

Any death can be a difficult concept to convey, and the idea of a death by suicide may be even harder to understand. Simple, clear, repeated explanations of what has happened will help; our language around death can be very confusing. People with learning difficulties may struggle to understand concepts such as 'lost' or 'passed away' and may prefer a more literal explanation such as 'died'.

It can help if people with learning disabilities are included in any rituals such as the funeral, with a special role, for example, choosing a song or carrying some flowers.

There is helpful guidance available from Mencap and the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities. You'll find links to their resources on page 64.

'I felt I had to stay strong to support the rest of my family, especially my heart-broken son, my grandchildren and great grandchildren. But I also had my own pain to deal with as she had been like a daughter to me for 45 years.'

Joan, whose daughter-in-law died

When you have been affected by the suicide of an acquaintance or stranger

Any individual death, especially a death by suicide, can affect many, many people, like ripples on the surface of a pond.

Many people are sad and distressed after a death by suicide, and you don't have to be a family member or friend of the person who has died to be deeply affected. For instance, you may be one of these people:

- Work colleague (including ex-work colleague, fellow volunteer)
- School, college or university student or staff
- Social media contact (e.g. Facebook friend, Twitter follower) – just because your contact was through the internet, it doesn't mean it wasn't important
- Health professional (e.g. nurse, mental health staff, doctor, counsellor) – you may have developed a very close relationship to the person, especially if you supported them through crises
- Emergency services (e.g. paramedic, ambulance, fire, police, staff) – you may have been first on the scene and tried to save them
- Police and prison staff – you may have had to break the news to a devastated family or you may have found the person who died
- Passers-by – you may have witnessed the death, or seen the immediate aftermath.

'I have been first on the scene after a number of suicides and they have affected me deeply. I recognise each time that it's the start of significant grief, pain and guilt for the deceased's loved ones. I find myself often reflecting on the words: 'They died on the battlefield of their own personal conflict but those left behind carry the burden'.'

Anna, paramedic

It may also be that the impact of this death has brought other deaths you may have experienced previously more sharply into your mind. You may wonder if there was something you could have done to have prevented this person from dying. Because, as a society, people are still learning how to respond to those who have been bereaved, you may find that your distress is not noticed. That does not mean it should be ignored.

It is important to recognise you are entitled to talk about how you are feeling and to receive support. The organisations listed to support families and friends can also offer support to you.

The role of culture and faith

Some people bereaved by suicide benefit from the help and understanding of their community. Spiritual support can make a significant difference in dealing with the emotional distress.

There are some cultures and faiths with strong views on suicide that may complicate grief and mourning for those bereaved by suicide. You may feel yourself excluded from your community. For some people bereaved by suicide, the fact that their religion does not seem to join them in loving and respecting the person who died becomes a factor in their leaving that faith. It can be particularly hard when your personal faith opposes suicide. People in this position have said that they feel certain that their God understands and loves the person who died, even if other believers find that hard to accept.

You may find spiritual support in unexpected places; for example, through support groups for those bereaved through suicide, online or through an interfaith or different faith bereavement group.

'Without the kindness and prayers of our church, I don't know how my family would have coped with the enormous pain and suffering of losing three members of our family to suicide. I'd say to other families who become bereaved to seek out people to have around you who will show you compassion.'

Esther, whose great aunt, aunt and cousin died

Talk to someone now

If you want to talk to someone about how you are feeling then these organisations can help. You'll find listings of other relevant organisations in section 6.

Samaritans

www.samaritans.org

Samaritans provide emotional support to anyone who is struggling to cope and needs someone to listen. Local branches can be visited during the day.

Helpline: 116 123
Every day, 24 hours

SMS: 07725 909090

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)

www.uk-sobs.org.uk

SOBS offers support for those bereaved or affected by suicide through a helpline answered by trained volunteers who have been bereaved by suicide, and a network of local support groups.

Helpline: 0300 111 5065
Every day 9.00 – 21.00

Email: sobs.support@hotmail.com

Jersey Community Bereavement Service

www.jerseyhospicecare.com/our-services/community-bereavement-service/

The service is confidential and free of charge. After an initial assessment, they offer confidential weekly support 1-1 sessions which can be continued for as long as necessary and they may suggest that you attend their Bereavement Support groups if you would find this helpful.

Helpline: 285144
(9am to 5pm weekdays) + answerphone at other times.

Email: bereavement@jerseyhospicecare.com

Winston's Wish

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Winston's Wish offers support and guidance to bereaved children and families.

They have produced Beyond the Rough Rock, a booklet on supporting a young person or child bereaved through suicide, and can provide information on children seeing the body and attending funerals.

Helpline: 08452 03 04 05
Monday to Friday: 09.00 – 17.00,
Wednesday also open 19.00 – 21.30

Email: chris@winstonswish.org.uk

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Helping someone who has been bereaved

Most of this guide is directed at those who have been directly affected by suicide but this section is for those who are supporting the bereaved.

My relative or friend

If a member of your family or a friend has been bereaved by suicide, they are going to need love, kindness and support. However, it can be very hard for a bereaved person to explain how they are feeling and to ask for help. They may tell you that they are fine when actually they are not. People who have been bereaved by suicide say that regular offers of help and support and making yourself available to listen or talk are invaluable. You may want to provide offers of practical help: support to do their shopping or drop by with a cooked meal. Even a simple text to let the person know they are in your thoughts can be really appreciated.

The key things – as with any loss – are to let your relative or friend talk and for you to listen without making judgments. Sometimes, people bereaved by suicide say that they find that many people find it very awkward to talk about what has happened. This can leave the bereaved person feeling even more isolated. So making sure they understand that you will be there for them will be very helpful.

'I needed people to say the same things they might have said if she had been a sister or had died in an accident: that they were sorry, that they would listen, that they were there for me. No-one did. I think they were – still are – scared to talk about suicide and thought it was best not to mention my friend. It's as if she is best forgotten – and she did die a long time ago. But I haven't forgotten her.'

Di, whose friend died

People bereaved by suicide may have many questions running through their heads and the most difficult are: 'why did this happen?' and 'could I have done something to stop it?' Your friend or relative may want you to tell them that they were not to blame – and sometimes they may need you to let them express their feelings of guilt and responsibility. Sometimes they may want to cry without being told to stop, or they may simply want you to spend time with them. People usually appreciate hearing others' memories of something the person did or what they meant to you. It may be hard, but try not to focus only on the death, but also on when they were alive and enjoying life.

If there are children or young people in the family, they will appreciate it if you acknowledge that they are grieving too. Children sometimes report being told to 'look after your mum' when they need support themselves.

You may find it too hard to hear some of the things that your friend or relative feels they need to say. You could suggest they may want also to talk to some of the organisations that offer support and for you to keep talking together about the other aspects of what has happened. It may be that you could help them to go and speak with their doctor or to attend a support group.

You could also make a note of particular dates (e.g. the birthday and the date of death of the person who died, Father's Day or Mother's Day) and remember to mark and acknowledge these in the years to come.

My work colleague or employee

Someone who has been bereaved through suicide may feel aware of the stigma associated with a suicide and find it difficult to return to work into what may seem like the spotlight of people's attention. It may help to ask them beforehand what they would like people to know about the person who died and how they died and to give colleagues hints about what would help. For example, you could tell all staff something like this: 'Xxx is coming back on Monday. Most of you will know that his daughter (name) died a month ago. Xxx wants everyone to know that (name) took her own life. As you can imagine he and his whole family are reeling with shock and grief. He has asked me to tell you that he doesn't mind people expressing their condolences but would prefer not to be asked about the details of what has happened.'

Equally, your colleague may not want to disclose this information. Either way, it is important to respect their wishes.

People bereaved by suicide often appreciate colleagues acknowledging what has happened, even very simply: 'I was so sorry to hear about your daughter', rather than having it ignored completely.

No bereavement follows a neat pattern and bereavement by suicide can be chaotic. It is possible your colleague or employee may need time off in a few months' time, or around the anniversary of the death – even in a couple of years' time.

It is likely that, for some considerable time, they will find it difficult to concentrate or function as they have in the past; they may lose confidence in their ability to perform even simple tasks. Alternatively, they may want to work themselves to exhaustion to avoid thinking about what has happened.

It would be helpful to all staff, especially if it was a member of staff who has died by suicide, to be reminded of the support available to them within or beyond the workplace (for example, if your workplace has an Human Resource department or a link to an employee assistance programme).

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), has guidelines for employers called 'Managing Bereavement in the Workplace' and Samaritans also offers information and training. Contact details are provided on page 64.

My student

The death by suicide of any member of the school or college community – student, relative of the student or member of staff – needs to be taken seriously and responded to appropriately. You may find that young people react in different ways: some may find it hard to talk, some may find it hard to stop crying. Young people appreciate staff acknowledging what has happened, even very simply: ('I was so sorry to hear about your brother') rather than having it ignored completely.

Schools vary in what they can offer, but they should try and have available a range of options for support, from one-to-one conversations to group activities. It is important to make sure there are male members of staff in the mix, and physical activity is offered, as well as talking support.

The fear and stigma around suicide can be particularly strong within a school or college, especially if a young person has died. Staff may fear some imitative reactions and because of that, avoid talking about what has happened. This may be the response that is most likely to put both the bereaved young person and others at risk.

If the person who died was a student's parent or carer, the student will need a lot of support and understanding as they try and keep going with their studies while their head is full of questions and whirling emotions. They may be feeling deeply hurt and rejected as well as desperately sad and they will bring these feelings with them to school or college.

Your school will, hopefully, have a bereavement strategy that includes supporting any students who have previously been bereaved for whom this event brings additional feelings and memories. The organisations listed on page 61 will be able to advise you on supporting the whole community. Samaritans has a service called 'Step By Step' which supports schools after a suicide.

Of course, as a member of staff, you may also be affected by the death and it may remind you of previous losses. Make sure you have sufficient support too.

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Getting through and facing the future

Rebuilding your life can seem an enormous challenge.

This section has advice from people who have been bereaved by suicide.

Taking care of yourself

After someone dies, it may be that you look after everyone except yourself. This can be especially true after a death by suicide, partly because the world has been shattered around you and partly because you feel you can't allow others to look after or support you. Some people have said, after a death by suicide, they feel that they are not 'entitled' to sympathy. Or you may be the type of person who has a reputation for 'coping' and it is important to you not to show the world how you are feeling.

It can sometimes be tempting to become very busy, and to exhaust yourself with tasks so that the tiredness can blot out some of the pain, even for a moment or two. You can become so busy trying to protect others, such as your children, that you don't protect yourself.

Taking care of yourself may mean time spent in the company of friends with whom you can be open, or it may mean choosing to be alone: and you may want different things on different days. It is important to recognise your needs and to make sure you care for them.

'It's like they say on planes – put on your own oxygen mask before you look after others. I found I had to take a few moments for me or I'd have gone under and been no help for anyone.'

Faye, whose husband died

Finding a listener

People who have been bereaved by suicide say that the most helpful thing is to find someone (or more than one person) who can listen. They may not be the most obvious people – friends may not be as easy to talk to or as available as you might hope. Look out for people who will simply listen and let you 'be you'.

If friends and family seem to struggle to know how to support you, or if you find it more helpful to talk to someone who does not know you, consider calling or emailing one of the organisations listed in section 6 where you will find people who will listen to how you are feeling.

Having a listener who is on your side does not mean you have to talk to them about how you are feeling. Sometimes their best support may be doing something alongside you in silence such as going for a walk or watching TV.

'After my son died I found it really difficult – I felt I had failed as a father and a husband. My 'practical' self was telling me I had to fix the situation for my wife and two other sons. I was scared to talk about me and thought I would be perceived as weak and not able to care for my family in the way they needed me to. I had some very dark times, but with time I realised it was the exact opposite - talking

about how I was feeling made me stronger and more able to deal with what had happened. I would say to anyone that it's essential to talk to someone, be it a friend, family, someone at work, or your GP, about how you feel – it does not make you any less of a man to do so. Losing my son will never change, but I now know that talking makes me better equipped to cope.'

Dean, whose son died

Meeting others

Some people who have been affected by suicide find it helps to connect to others who have been bereaved by suicide. It may be helpful to learn about their feelings and to feel less isolated. This could be through reading articles or books by bereaved people or by attending a support group for people who have been bereaved by suicide. You can find out what support is available near you on page 60. There are very few groups on the island but telephone support is available and there are online forums and message boards run by many of the organisations we have listed.

It may be daunting to imagine walking into a room and joining other people who have been bereaved or affected by suicide. Some people fear they will not be able to face other people's pain. However, support groups are designed to do just that, to support people, and they will do all they can to help people attending for the first time to feel accepted, less isolated and under no pressure to talk about their experiences.

Some people might prefer not to attend a group and instead find support in other ways, and some people might choose to wait a while before going along.

'As I left my first support group meeting for people bereaved by suicide I felt like a huge weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I knew that I wasn't alone'.

Angela, whose partner died

Additional support

You may feel you need or would like some professional support. Some of the mental health organisations listed in section 6 can support you. You could also ask your GP if counselling is available. It is worth asking if it is possible to see someone who has some experience supporting those bereaved by suicide.

Try and avoid saying to yourself 'I'm not ill, I'll be fine, I don't need any help'. Losing someone through suicide is unbelievably tough. It is not a sign of weakness to have to ask others to help you through this difficult time.

Helping others

Some people who have been bereaved by suicide may feel they want to get involved in helping others.

You may find you would like to add your support to one of the organisations that work to reduce suicide. Some of these are particularly aimed at supporting young people to find resilient ways of handling overwhelming feelings. Some provide support to those who are thinking of suicide. Some provide training to doctors and teachers to help them better identify those who may be at risk of suicidal thoughts.

Or, in time, you may feel that you could support others by volunteering for one of the support organisations offering support to those bereaved by any cause or particularly suicide. You may also be willing to share your story publicly to raise awareness of suicide and encourage others to get help or to get involved with suicide prevention work.

It can feel as if you have to do something in order to make some tiny bit of sense out of what has happened: action can be comforting. However, it is also very understandable if you feel that you cannot handle anything to do with suicide or other people's grief.

'I think many living with loss know of nothing more powerful, as a force for healing, than to share with others bereaved by suicide and to know that we are not alone.'

David, whose son died

Anniversaries

There may be days when it is especially difficult to deal with what has happened. These might include: the birthday of the person who died – and your own birthday; the anniversary of the day they died – and maybe of the funeral; Father's Day or Mother's Day; and occasions such as Christmas.

'Three years ago, the day after my birthday, a close friend took his life. At first, I considered cancelling my party, but then went ahead, bringing friends together in a safe, loving space. Each year, around my birthday, I know I'll always make time to remember him and celebrate his life.'

Anj, whose friend died

'If you'd have told me weeks before that this would happen, I would have been fairly certain that I would have been unable to cope, that my own death would have been the only solution to unbearable grief. But it didn't turn out that way. It is an exhausting, painful and long process, but it is possible to enjoy life again. Slowly, we have found we have survived and the sun has come back into our lives.'

Dick, whose son died

Sometimes people say the first time these come round is the worst, others find it isn't until future anniversaries that it hits home that the person won't be able to share these days again. These days will always have a special resonance and it may help to find a way of marking them. This may be something as simple as lighting a candle, or visiting a place that has a connection for you to the person who died. Or it could be bringing out the photo album and telling stories while eating their favourite food and listening to their favourite music.

'It's been six years now, and I mark the anniversary of her death by always being with my daughters, doing something together that she would have enjoyed. And on her birthday I do her favourite walk to see the view that she so loved. It helps me having these rituals.'

Roger, whose wife died

Facing the future

We're not going to tell you how you should grieve; if anyone tries to do so, you can remind them that everyone grieves differently. Grieving for someone has a definite start point but no definitive end point. The truth is, you will always carry what has happened inside you.

You may find that some days all you can think about is the loss and some days you are able to do some tasks or think a little about your next steps in life.

You may switch between these on an hourly basis: this is natural. Sometimes it can feel as if grief takes over.

But people bereaved by suicide report that one day, perhaps against expectations, you may find that there is space for something else – a plan, a hope. And one day, maybe there is a little more space. It isn't so much that your grief is growing smaller; it's that you are growing around the grief.

'Time allowed hope to enter back into our lives like a long lost friend.'

Shirley, whose son died

There will be days when on waking up you will forget what has happened – and feel guilty for having done so. Then there will be days when, for a while, you can laugh with a friend, enjoy a programme on TV or admire a view.

And one day, you will find that you remember and think more about the life of the person who died than about how they died. You won't forget that, but it will seem less vivid than who they were and what you shared with them while they were alive.

'You feel like you are in the eye of the storm. But that does pass. You can rebuild your life.'

Lotte, whose brother died

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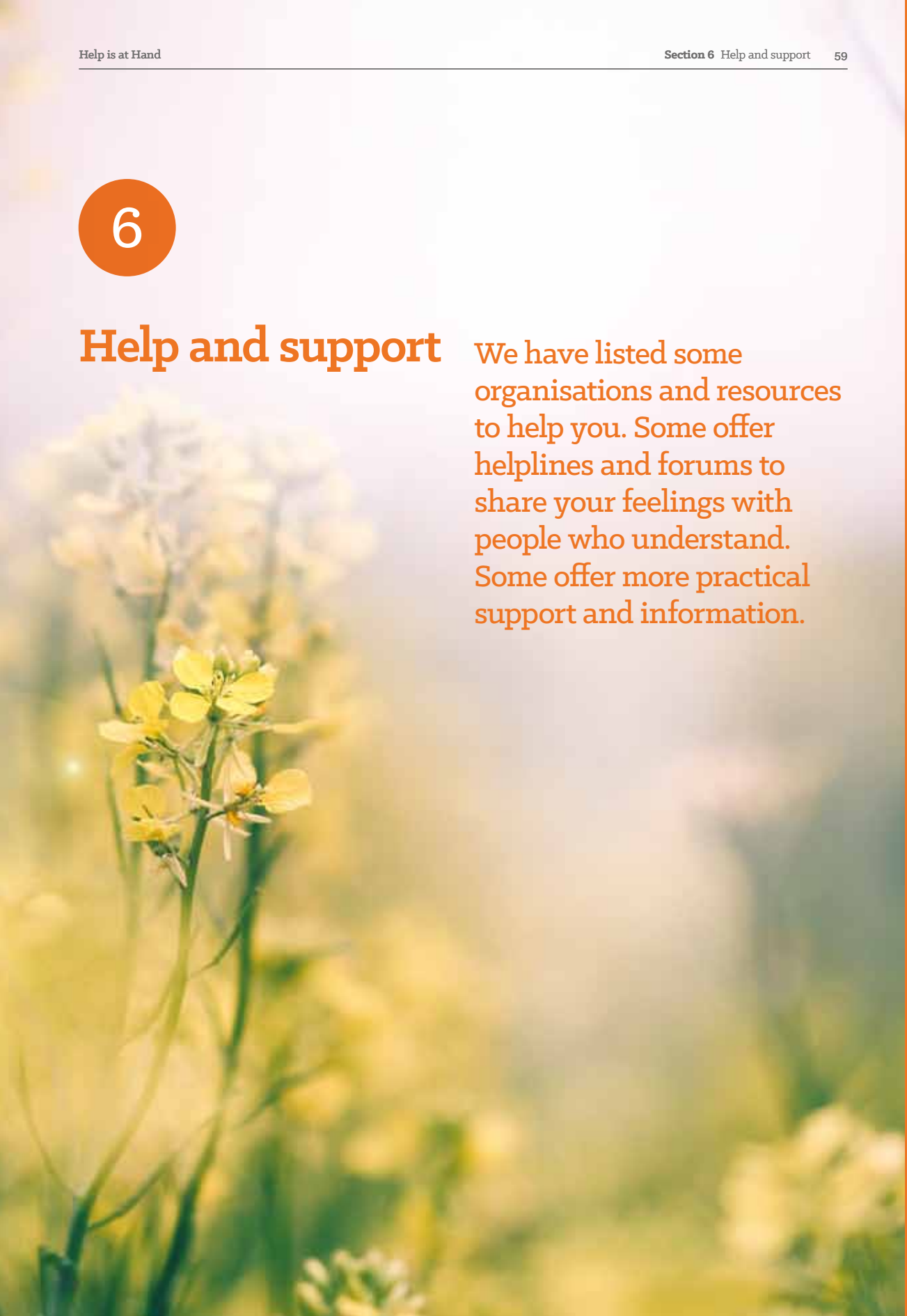
Help and support

We have listed some organisations and resources to help you. Some offer helplines and forums to share your feelings with people who understand. Some offer more practical support and information.



Sources of support

Not everyone bereaved by suicide will want to seek support outside their family and social network, but for others the death of someone close to them may mean there is less support around. Some people may prefer to seek support from people other than friends or family, as they find it easier to talk to a stranger.
At a time when relatives and friends become absorbed in their own grief, the usual sources of comfort and support may be diminished.
For some people, the stress and trauma of grief means that additional help is needed.
Some people might look for this support soon after the death, but for others the need may come weeks, months or even years later.
Various types of help are available and some of these are described below.

Local

General Practice staff

Your GP may be able to help you during bereavement either by listening and offering emotional support, by prescribing drugs for problems like sleeplessness or depression if needed, or by advising you about other sources of support and referring you to a bereavement organisation, Jersey Talking Therapies or a Psychiatrist, for example.

Community Bereavement Service

www.jerseyhospicecare.com/our-services/community-bereavement-service/

This service comes under the umbrella of Jersey Hospice Care but is available to anyone in the community who has suffered a loss regardless of the nature of the bereavement or how long ago it was. The service is confidential and free of charge. After an initial assessment, they offer confidential weekly support 1-1 sessions which can be continued for as long as necessary and they may suggest that you attend their Bereavement Support groups if you would find this helpful. The service usually do not see people until after 6 weeks following the bereavement but if the bereavement is caused by a death from suicide they will see people sooner.

A small group of their volunteer support workers have been trained by experts from Winston's Wish, the leading childhood bereavement charity which specifically helps children of all ages work through their grief.

Helpline: 285144 (9am to 5pm weekdays) + answerphone at other times.

Email: bereavement@jerseyhospicecare.com

National Bereavement Organisations

National websites may be helpful for anyone who is geographically isolated or who prefers the privacy and anonymity of internet contact. These can offer information, advice, support and counselling for the bereaved. Bereavement organisations include Cruse Bereavement Care (for bereaved children, young people and adults) and The Compassionate Friends (for bereaved parents and their families). Organisations such as Winston's Wish, the Childhood Bereavement Network and The Child Bereavement Trust also provide information and support for bereaved children, young people and their families. Although they do not have local branches, their website and telephone lines provide some very helpful information.

This information was correct at time of printing but you may need to check. Help is at Hand is not responsible for, nor endorses the information and advice of the organisations listed.

Childhood Bereavement Network

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Information and support for children, their families and caregivers.

Tel: 020 7843 6309

Email: cbn@ncb.org.uk

The Child Bereavement Trust

www.childbereavement.org.uk

Resources for children, families and the professionals who support them.

Help and support service line: 0845 357 1000

Help and support direct dial: 01494 479740

Administrative centre: 01494 446648

Email: enquiries@childbereavement.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care

www.cruse.org.uk

Helpline: 0870 167 1677

Young person's helpline: freephone 0844 477 9400

Email: helpline@cruse.org.uk

General email: info@cruse.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care also runs: RD4U (the road for you)

www.rd4u.org.uk

Support, advice and a website for bereaved young people.

Helpline: freephone 0808 808 1677
(open Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 5.00pm)

Email: info@rd4u.org.uk

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)

www.uk-sobs.org.uk

Offers support for those bereaved or affected by suicide through a helpline answered by trained volunteers who have been bereaved by suicide and a network of local support groups.

Tel: 0300 111 5065 (9am - 9pm)
Email: sobs.support@hotmail.com

The Compassionate Friends – Shadow of Suicide Group (SOS)

www.tcf.org.uk

Online message boards are available with special sections for those bereaved by suicide as well as an extensive range of leaflets and a postal lending library for books, audio and video tapes. SOS can put parents in touch with other parents who have lost children through suicide.

Helpline: 08451 232304 (open daily 10.00am to 4.00pm and 6.30pm to 10.30pm)
National office: 08451 203785
Library tel: 01634 814416
Library email: library@tcf.org.uk
Email: info@tcf.org.uk

The Compassionate Friends also runs: Support in Bereavement for Brothers and Sisters (SIBBS)

Helpline: 08451 232304 (opening times as above)

Jewish Bereavement Counselling Service (London based)

www.jvisit.org.uk/jbcs

Tel: 020 8457 9710
(open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday)
Email: jbcs@jvisit.org.uk

London Friend

www.londonfriend.org.uk

The helpline for London Friend now incorporates the Lesbian and Gay Bereavement Project and offers support to anyone who has been bereaved.

Helpline: 020 7837 3337
(Monday to Wednesday 19.30 – 21.30)

Winston's Wish

www.winstonswish.org.uk (general) or
www.foryoungpeople.winstonswish.org.uk

An information resource for bereaved children, young people aged up to 18 years and their families: the link is to an interactive section of the website for young people.

Helpline: 08452 03 04 05
General enquiries: 01242 515157
Email: info@winstonswish.org.uk

Suicide Bereavement Support Partnership

www.supportaftersuicide.org.uk

A website with details of organisations who offer support to people bereaved by suicide and information about relevant resources. The website is provided by the Suicide Bereavement Support Partnership, an alliance of organisations with a focus on providing timely and appropriate support to everyone bereaved or affected by suicide.

Positive action groups

Some people find it helpful to join a positive action group such as PAPYRUS (prevention of young suicide), which is committed to the prevention of suicide in young people and the promotion of mental health and wellbeing. PAPYRUS can offer advice and support to anyone worried about a young person who might be suicidal through its confidential telephone helpline, HOPELineUK.

PAPYRUS

www.papyrus-uk.org

HOPELineUK tel: 0800 068 4141
Admin tel: 01282 432555
Fax: 01282 432777
Email: admin@papyrus-uk.org

Ministers of religion and faith groups

Ministers of religion and faith communities can provide support and comfort, including to people not previously active in a religious community. For people who prefer a more generic or non-denominational form of support, In Truth One Spirit offers telephone spiritual counselling and designs non-denominational funeral services carried out by specially trained interfaith ministers. The Interfaith Seminary will also provide names of local ministers and spiritual counsellors for face-to-face work.

Interfaith Seminary

www.theinterfaithseminary.com

Database of ordained ministers and qualified spiritual counsellors.

Tel: 0844 445 7004
Email: admin@theinterfaithseminary.com

In Truth One Spirit

Spiritual counselling by telephone and non-denominational funeral services.

Tel: 01483 898969
Email: jackie@intruthonespirit.co.uk

Bereavement counselling

For people who would prefer more time to talk things through or have longer-term support, a counsellor may be of help. Counselling is an opportunity to talk in confidence to someone experienced in listening to people in distress. Some people find it a relief to talk to a stranger who can provide a safe environment in which to express and explore feelings. You could arrange counselling through your GP, a bereavement organisation or the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

Asian Family Counselling Service

Tel: 020 8571 3933

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

www.bacp.co.uk

Advice on choosing a therapist and list of accredited therapists

Tel: 0870 443 5220

General number: 01455 883300

Email: bacp@bacp.co.uk

Other sources of support

Age UK

www.ageuk.org.uk

Age UK provides services and support at a national and local level to older people. Useful information about bereavement can be found here:
www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/relationships-and-family/bereavement/emotional-effects-of-bereavement

Helpline: 0800 169 6565 Every day 08.00 – 19.00

Mencap

www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Bereavement.pdf

Mind Jersey

www.mindjersey.org

This is an independent charity, registered, based and operating in Jersey but it is affiliated to National Mind. They offer support if you are stressed, depressed or in crisis and have a range of information and booklets on bereavement and suicide available from the website or ordered direct.

Tel: 0800 7359404

Email: help@mindjersey.org

Samaritans

www.samaritans.org.uk

National, 24-hour confidential telephone service for anyone feeling desperate or suicidal or going through any sort of personal crisis, including bereavement.

Helpline: 08457 909090

Jersey branch: 725555

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Winston's Wish

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Help for grieving children and their families.

Helpline: 08452 03 04 05

Fax: 01242 546187

Email: info@winstonswish.org.uk

You may find websites other than those listed here and which. It is important to remember that many sites are not regulated, so you should make up your own mind about their value.

Further reading

If you want more information and facts about suicide or to read about the experiences of other people, there are a number of excellent books on the subject and a number of self-help books with guidance on how to cope. Many of the bereavement organisation websites have booklists, articles and books available to download or to buy.

'For a long time after she died all I could think about was her death and the manner in which she died. They were torturous thoughts and it pained me that I couldn't remember anything of her life beforehand. I had no memories, no dreams. But then good thoughts started to come back. Now when I think of her, we're always enjoying time we spent together.'

Amy, whose mother died

Acknowledgments

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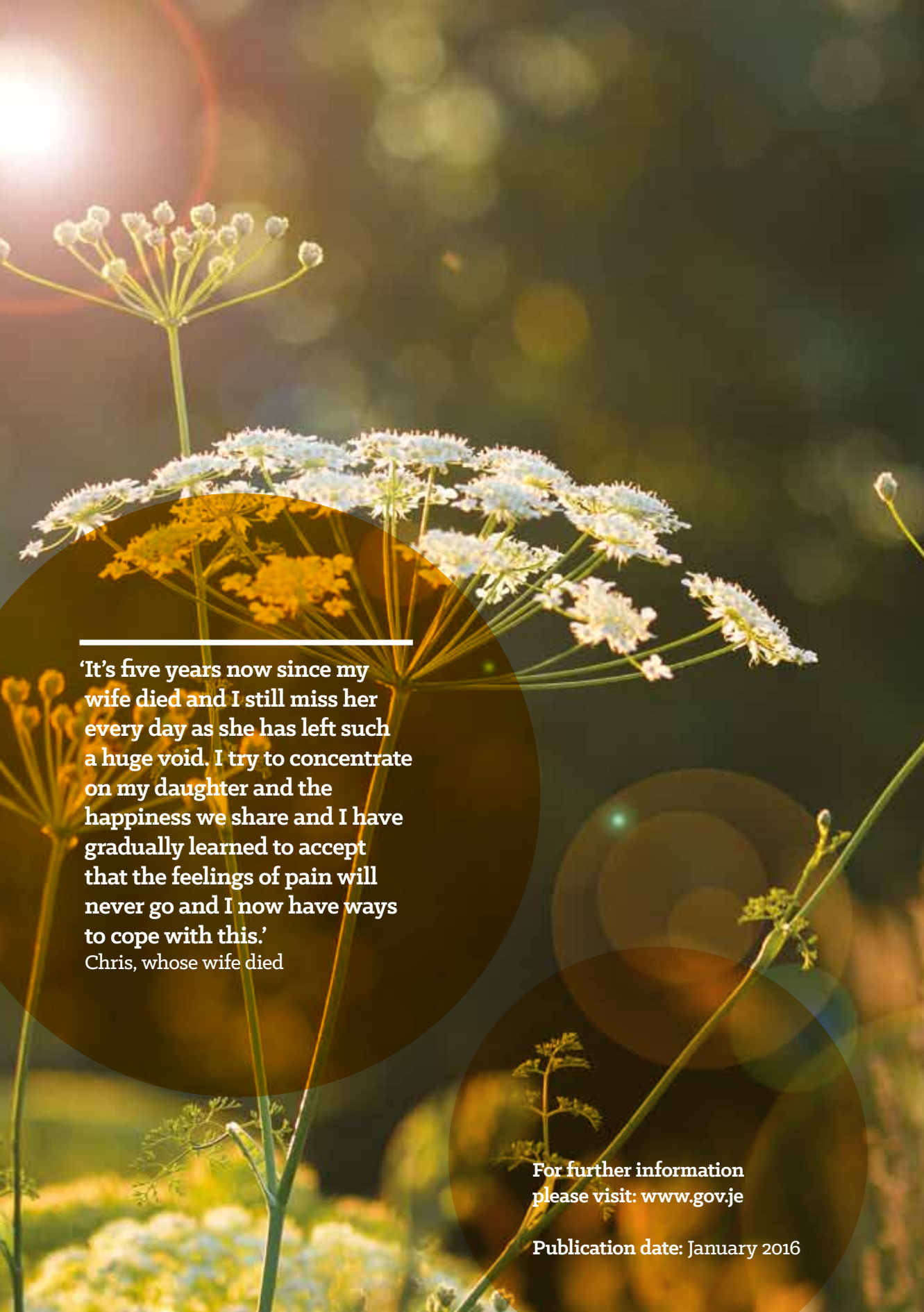
This edition has been produced by Public Health England (www.gov.uk/phe) and the National Suicide Prevention Alliance (www.nspa.org.uk) in response to the call in the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (2012) for more support for those bereaved by suicide.

It has been written with support from an Advisory Group of people with experience of bereavement by suicide: Hamish Elvidge, Joe Ferns, Karen Lascelles, Amy Meadows, Sharon McDonnell, Shirley Smith and Di Stubbs. There has also been input from members of the Suicide Bereavement Support Partnership, an alliance of organisations with a focus on providing timely and appropriate support to everyone bereaved or affected by suicide. Their website www.supportaftersuicide.org.uk includes details of organisations who provide support and a listing of relevant resources.



‘It’s five years now since my wife died and I still miss her every day as she has left such a huge void. I try to concentrate on my daughter and the happiness we share and I have gradually learned to accept that the feelings of pain will never go and I now have ways to cope with this.’
Chris, whose wife died

For further information please visit: www.gov.je

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