

Suicide&co  
OUR  
CONVERSATION  
GUIDE



# OUR CONVERSATION GUIDE



Suicide is still very stigmatised and as a result, it makes it really hard to talk about, both as someone bereaved and someone supporting. A lack of conversation can lead to feelings of isolation, awkward silences and bottling up your emotions.

This is why we want to actively encourage everyone to have more conversations about suicide-related grief so that it's easier for us as bereaved individuals and we can have better conversations that will help us process and navigate our grief.

By the nature of suicide bereavement none of us is ever prepared or know what to say, so it's important to remember that often the person bereaved is struggling too.

The power of conversation is huge, so we really do encourage you to have conversations. It's often not about the exact details of what you say, but just that you have the conversation, listen non-judgmentally and support them in their grief.

We've looked at the guidance and research out there and have worked with our network of individuals with lived experience to build this guide.



Suicide&co



# OUR CONVERSATION GUIDE

Suicide&Co launched as a registered charity in July 2020, with the mission to support those bereaved by suicide, and open up the conversation around suicide-related grief. Suicide loss can be isolating due to the stigma around suicide, and individuals are often left to navigate complicated grief alone. Suicide loss quite often adds complicated layers to the already difficult grieving process.

In 2019, 5,691 people died by suicide in England and Wales and for every person gone, there are said to be up to 135 people affected equating to potentially 768,285 annually (ONS).

We want to give those bereaved access to a safe space where they can work through this grief with trained counsellors. Navigating suicide loss alone is incredibly hard and talking about it to a professional is an incredible support to offer when counselling is so inaccessible to many!

We offer up to 12 sessions of bereavement counselling to anyone bereaved by suicide living in England and Wales, over the age of 18. We only accept applications once the person has processed the first 6 months of grief following the loss.

We will not accept anyone who is currently receiving any other therapeutic treatment as receiving more than one treatment at a time can be detrimental to the beneficiary.

We have also launched a helpline run by bereavement counsellors which is open Monday-Friday 9am-9pm on 0800 054 8400.

If you want to contact the service directly you can do so by emailing [support@suicideandco.org](mailto:support@suicideandco.org)



Suicide&co



# Contents

What Helped Others	Page 5
For Those Bereaved	Page 10
For Those Supporting The Bereaved	Page 19
Our Alphabet	Page 31





# What Helped Others?

We asked our community to help us understand their experience of having conversations, what they find useful and what they'd recommend to others - take a little read of these examples and hopefully some will resonate with you and help you on your journey.

We'd also recommend taking a look at two other guides that have sections on having conversations - [Help is at Hand](#) and [Finding the Words](#).

1. What phrase do you use most often to describe how your loved one died?

“Died by suicide”, “Took their own life.”

2. Did you struggle with that language?

“I used to say, ‘killed themselves’ or ‘committed suicide’ because that’s what I heard a lot across society and so I only adjusted to ‘died by suicide’ after researching the history of the term ‘committed’.”

“I never expected it to be something I would need to talk about and as soon as it happened, I suddenly had to learn how to talk about it. Finding language I was comfortable with made this a lot easier.”

# What Helped Others?



4. How do you find having conversations about your grief and what you're going through?

"I find this more manageable as time goes on and the more I hear about others' grief. I often have to write how I feel before I feel comfortable to say it out loud - almost have a conversation with myself before I start the dialogue with the outside world."

"I find it hard discussing my grief. Everyone deals with it so differently and it is really hard to express the emotion with people who have never experienced this type of overwhelming grief."

5. What do you think could make these conversations easier?

"Creating the right environment for conversations, i.e giving people the right questions to ask to give permission for grievers to lean into the conversation without feeling they're forcing their grief on others."

"It is important for people to understand that they don't need to find solutions for the person who is grieving. There is no solution, sadly, as their loved one has gone. Just by being present, listening and talking about their loved one is comfort enough."



# What Helped Others?

6. Do you have tips for others in this situation?

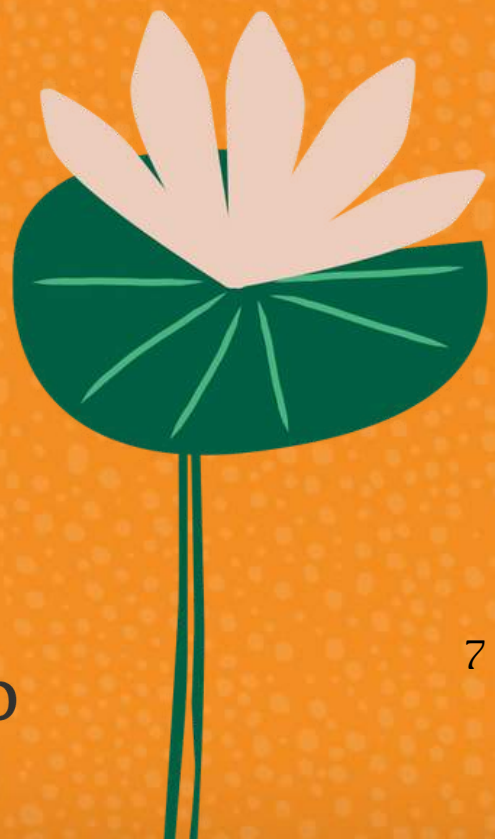
“My tip would be to have conversations with yourself, self validation and acceptance is just as important as external validation. When you’re discussing someone else's grief be cautious of their barriers and listen, judgement free listening is empowering for the person who is sharing their story.”

“Practicing saying ‘suicide’ out loud in a safe space takes the stigma away from within – sometimes you don’t even realise you have a block on the word. It’s such a scary word to most people. Being able to say it out loud helps with processing it, but only when you’re ready.”

7. Was there one thing you wish people had said or asked you after your bereavement?

“I wish people had showed up for longer. The grief didn’t disappear after a year, but friends stopped asking and started presuming it was all fine.”

“I have learnt that it is always better to say something, acknowledge someone has lost someone and is grieving rather than ignoring it and staying silent. Your words will mean a lot.”





# For Those Bereaved

Firstly, let us say that we're sorry for your loss and that you are now part of this community.

It's not a community that any of us want to join but one that we can support each other in once we're here.

## Language

To have conversations we need to have the language - obvious!  
But when you're bereaved by suicide you have to learn a new language that you have no previous knowledge of.

New words are forced into your vocabulary, you have to navigate the physical feelings that words can trigger and most importantly find a way to communicate how you're feeling.

To add to this, there can be cultural, generational and societal impacts on the language we use or feel we should use, meaning we may often feel uncomfortable with language that other people prefer in comparison to what feels right to us.

The most important language to get right for yourself is describing how you lost your loved one. It's something almost all of us struggle with at the start and there is no right or wrong answer, it's just what feels right to you.



# For Those Bereaved

## Language

From everything we've read and from speaking to our network, a couple of things were highlighted:

The word committed, and the phrase 'committed suicide' is triggering and outdated. It goes back to a time when suicide was a crime, which is no longer appropriate.

We believe that we should all actively avoid using this word and phrase so that it is slowly but surely wiped out from society. We do however want to say that it's your choice and whatever you feel comfortable with is the right decision for you.

The most common phrases that people liked using were 'took their own life' or 'died by suicide'. You may find it useful to say these phrases a few times to yourself in a safe space to practice how you feel saying them and see what you feel most comfortable with.

Even saying the word suicide a few times can be a helpful exercise.

## You're in control

The most important thing to remember in terms of conversations around your grief and the person you lost is that you are in control. You can decide what you say, when you say it and to who. Sometimes just reminding yourself of that can be helpful.

But we all know, conversations are a two-way thing, which is why we also have guidance for those supporting, which you could send over to someone if you thought they needed help supporting you.

More often than not people don't send this type of guidance as they don't want to offend the person or suggest that they don't know what they're doing.

But done in the right way, it can be so powerful - and believe us from the conversations we have with others, they want the guidance.

# For Those Bereaved

## You're in control

### Things you could try:

Send someone the link to our Supporting Others page with a message saying 'Hi, thank you for being so supportive of me in this time, as this is new for both of us I thought I'd send over some useful guidance.'

When someone asks how they can help or what they can do, have the confidence to tell them. Or if you don't know what you'd want them to do you can say something like 'Thank you so much for asking, can I have a think about that and come back to you?' Or 'I'm not sure at the moment, would you mind asking me again soon?'

Another situation to remember that you're in control of is if someone asks you something or brings it up when you don't want to talk. Firstly, our advice would always be to thank the person for asking, these conversations are difficult and their intentions were likely to help so it's always worth saying that first to encourage future conversations.

# For Those Bereaved

## You're in control

### Things you could try:

If someone asks you how you are or how you're coping and you're not in the mood to talk about it, say: 'Thank you for asking, at the moment I'm not feeling up to talking about it today, can you ask me again tomorrow/ or soon.' That way you're still asking them to ask you again so that you don't have to start the conversation.

If someone asks for details you're not comfortable giving, say 'Thank you for trying to talk about it with me, but I don't like talking about those details at the moment, I prefer to talk about them or how I'm feeling, would it be ok to talk about that instead?'

If someone starts a conversation about how you're feeling and you are feeling in a good mood but don't want to enter into a conversation about your grief (this is ok too!) You could say 'Thank you for asking me, at the moment I'm actually good so am not in the mood to chat about it, but can I come and chat to you if that changes?' That way they'll likely say 'yes of course' and reiterate that they're here for you if you need them.

Lastly, in terms of control, if you don't feel like you have people around you that you can talk to, you can actively seek new people and communities - like us whom you've already found!

# For Those Bereaved

## You're in control

Things you could try:

- Engage with a charity, support group, or local or online community where you can meet and chat with new people who have been through similar experiences.
- Find a counsellor or apply to our service to talk to a professional - this can be incredibly helpful.
- See if there is anyone in your wider network (colleagues, new friends) who might be up for having a conversation.

## Location

This may sound silly but sometimes where you have a conversation can make all the difference.

We often find that changing your physical location can really help instigate conversations and if you're struggling to talk, creating a situation where you don't have to look at the person in the eye all the time can help.

Things you could try:

- Walk and talk, not having to make eye contact can make it easier to chat.
- Talking in the car, again it can take the pressure off, and you have a finite amount of time.
- Go to a location that reminds you of the person you've lost as it can spark conversations.
- Go for a day out, or on a trip - sometimes we need the break from our day-to-day life to feel comfortable talking about things we normally wouldn't.



# For Those Bereaved

## Shared Loss

On average 6 people are directly bereaved by each suicide. We all deal with grief in our own way and there is no right or wrong way. Sometimes conversations with those people can be comforting, cathartic and healing but other times they can present new challenges.

Conversations with people from different generations around suicide can be challenging, because of the changing mental health landscape and history of the stigma. It's a weird concept because when we lose someone to suicide often there are people from every generation that are affected and sometimes if you lose a family member, the people that are feeling the most similar way to you are family members from all generations, but the way you handle the bereavement can be very different. Often younger generations want to be more open and vocal and older generations prefer to be more reserved.

Differences in shared loss can build tensions but it's important to remember that what connects you is the love you had for that person, not your grief because we all grieve in different ways!

Again, if you want to help someone understand how you're feeling about it or want to bring up a difference you may have between you, then having a conversation about it can help.

Things you could try:

- Listen non-judgmentally.
- If you can't understand a way that they're reacting or why they say a certain thing - ask them.
- If you're starting the conversation, try and have an outcome you'd like to achieve - even if it's just to understand each other more.

# For Those Supporting The Bereaved



Firstly, let us say that the fact that you've reached out to find guidance shows how much you want to support the person you know who is bereaved, and just in doing so, you're helping them!

Through upskilling and learning how best to support them you are showing support.

## Language

To have conversations we need to have the language - obvious!

But when someone is bereaved by suicide and you're supporting them you have to learn a new language that you have no previous knowledge of.

New words are forced into your vocabulary and you have to navigate the language that the person bereaved feels most comfortable with.

To add to this there can be cultural, generational and societal impacts on the language we use or feel we should use, meaning we may often feel uncomfortable with language that other people prefer in comparison to what feels right to us.



# For Those Supporting The Bereaved

## Language

From everything we've read and from speaking to our network, a couple of things were highlighted:

The word committed, and the phrase 'committed suicide' is triggering and outdated. It goes back to a time when suicide was a crime, which is no longer appropriate.

We believe that we should all actively avoid using this word and phrase so that it is slowly but surely wiped out from society. We do however want to say that if you have used it previously or it comes out don't feel guilty; it's because it's entrenched in society, just actively try to stop using it.

For example, we'll never correct someone in the middle of a conversation as it can halt them from talking and lead to them not opening up the conversation. It's important that we try to change our language but in a supportive way. The most common phrases that people liked using were 'took their own life' or 'died by suicide'.

When supporting someone bereaved you can decide what you feel comfortable saying but also be led by the person bereaved.



# For Those Supporting The Bereaved

## Language

There is some language that is best to avoid:

Don't say 'At least'.

For example; 'at least they're in a better place or can't feel the pain'. This is a minimising phrase and is not comforting to those bereaved.

Negative words like selfish or cowardly.

These are outdated assumptions that are not appropriate as we know more about the reality of mental illness and suicide.


## Questions

For someone supporting someone bereaved, we believe questions are the key! Starting a conversation can be daunting.

You want to help but are nervous you could make the person feel worse, or that you'll say the wrong thing.

If you're starting the conversation to try and support them that is all that matters. Trust that they will know that and if they're not in the mood they'll be able to say that but will always appreciate you reaching out and trying.

The difficulty with questions is that it can feel awkward as to what to ask, questions like "how are you?" seem too vague or offensive as most probably that person isn't ok or you wouldn't be asking!



We love the concept of asking if someone is ok twice like mentioned in the Roman Kemp documentary, but often with bereavement, it's obvious that the person isn't ok.





# For Those Supporting The Bereaved

## Questions

So what you want is a way to break down the questions so that they're not so overwhelming and are easier for the person to answer, the first way to do this is to contextualise the question to the moment, e.g:

How are you feeling today? Is there anything I can do to help you today? How are you coping this week? How did you feel over the weekend? Were you ok last night?

The power of a simple tweak in your questions can be huge as it allows the person to share as little or as much as they'd like but also means they don't have to download the entirety of their feelings in the first instance.

Another good way to ask questions is to focus less on feelings and emotions and more on practical subjects, e.g:

How did you sleep? Are you feeling on top of your life admin?

This way they can again share as little or as much information as they want and if they show signs of sadness or a need for the support you can continue the conversation in that manner.

Lastly, it's important to remember that people want to have conversations about the people they've lost and if they don't at the time, they can just say they don't want to.

So don't drop that person out of the conversation, ask about the person they have lost, as you might be providing the person bereaved with the opportunity they'd been wanting.

Did you go there with your mum? Was she often funny etc? What makes you feel close to them?

# For Those Supporting The Bereaved



## Key Tips

### Say Something

The most important thing to remember is just to say something; ask the question, get in touch, reach out.

Silence leads to feelings of isolation and it doesn't matter if you're not sure what to say, although hopefully as you're reading this, you'll now have some ideas!

### Persevere

If at first, the person you're supporting doesn't want to talk, keep trying!

It takes a lot of courage for someone suffering to start a conversation so help them out and be the one to keep trying.

### Listen

Both actively and non-judgmentally. Often you don't need to say much at all to help someone else, it's about listening to them and really hearing them without judgement.

# For Those Supporting The Bereaved

## Key Tips

### Ask About The Person

As we've said earlier, this is a great way to help the person on their journey of remembering and celebrating their loved ones.

It can feel awkward to bring the person up but if it's in a positive way, the person who lost their loved one is very likely to be happy.

### Encourage Self-Care

When someone is bereaved they can very often forget to take care of themselves and are less likely to treat themselves. There are lots of different ways to act on self-care from bubble baths to life-admin, the key is to encourage them to think of ways they can help themselves.

### Ask Them What They Need

Whether practical or emotional, simplifying asking can provide you with the answer to how you can support them.



# For Those Supporting The Bereaved

## Triggers to be aware of

There are moments when the person you're supporting will need extra love and care. In these times just do the same as we've been saying; start conversations, ask questions and listen.

### The Firsts

The first time they do things without their loved ones is always tough, this could be practical things, annual events, travelling – you name it, the first time is often hard.

### Key Annual Dates

This can be anything from the anniversary of the person's death to Christmas, father's day, birthdays etc. The build-up to these events in particular can be really challenging as the anticipation of how they might feel on the day can really trigger strong emotions.

### Big Life Moments

Then there are the big moments in life that this person now has to go through without that person (e.g. weddings, births, graduation etc.). Often these moments are happy and that can sometimes make the conversation harder to have, but in the lead up find a quiet moment to check in with them and ask how they're feeling about it in relation to their loss.

### News & Media

Suicides are reported in the news a lot when celebrities die by suicide and more so now it is often featured in TV and film. This can sometimes be triggering for those bereaved, so it never hurts to drop them a message and ask how they are, you can even reference the event and say that you were thinking of them and wanted to check in.



## Our Alphabet

We have used each letter of the alphabet to create a list of words that we think are important to talk about & understand in relation to this type of grief.



## Anger

Feeling anger and hostility towards the person that died by suicide, the world around you or the situation on a whole is a very natural human response to hurt, sadness or shock.

Anger can feel all-consuming when you're in a rage or heavy when it's a persistent unresolved emotion we carry for a long period of time. All emotions and reactions are valid, acknowledging difficult emotions to yourself and the people around you can help you process them.

## Abandonment

Goodbyes are hard. Permanent goodbyes in grief are even harder! When we lose someone to suicide it's very easy to feel like we've been left behind and that it's a feeling that you should sit with.

Feeling like you were abandoned by a trusted figure in your life can impact other aspects of your life if you allow it to.

Remember that this is an isolated situation, and they didn't leave you behind, they were trying to leave the pain that they were experiencing which was not your fault.



## Acceptance

Events happen which are out of our control, we can only be held accountable for our own actions, not the actions of others.

Death is final and accepting that you have lost someone to suicide is very important when finding a way forward.

Acceptance should always be on your own terms, don't feel pressure to accept the realities of your loss too soon.

## Anxiety

Anxiety is a word that is casually used a lot in modern society, recognising that there is a difference between clinically diagnosed anxiety and feeling anxious is really important.

A sudden loss or trauma can cause anxiety or feelings of anxiousness as you navigate your grief.

Listening to how you feel and openly labelling how you feel in conversations can help others understand your feelings and your behaviour. There are some amazing tools to help if you're feeling anxious that you can find on our Help Hub.



## Breathe

Life is busy and grief is exhausting. Stop and breathe, you deserve it. You are absolutely allowed to press pause and breathe. It can sometimes feel like we're all running around trying to do too much; hold down a job, be a good friend, be a good parent, be a considerate partner AND process grief on top of all of that. It's important to take time to stop and breathe.

## Bereavement

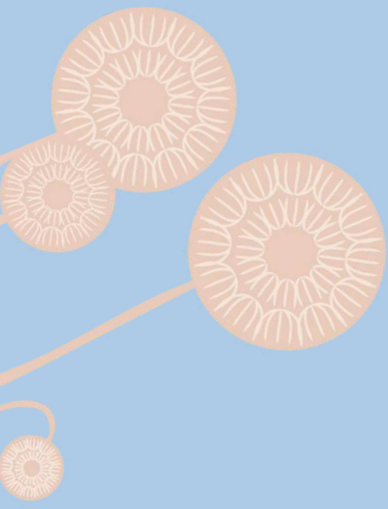
All bereavement is hard to navigate, death is a subject that we are not conditioned to talk about at length. The irony is that it is the one experience that all of us as human beings will experience at some point - it should connect us, and we should be able to celebrate the fact that no matter our background or experiences we all have the power and understanding to support one another through this.

## Bi-polar

Bi-Polar Disorder is a mental health condition that causes extreme mood swings that can sometimes be part of someone who died by suicide's story. A disorder like this can be challenging to understand but if your loved one was diagnosed with a specific mental condition or illness it can be a useful process to research and find out about that so that you can build a better understanding and then compassion towards the term and even your loved one.







## Company

Is there any truer saying than ‘a problem shared is a problem halved’, whatever life throws at us, it feels a bit easier to cope with when we’re not alone.

Find your company and keep them close, whether that's old friends, new friends, family, colleagues or an online community. Suicide loss can be isolating, finding company that understands what you’re going through is a comfort.

If you’re reading this and want your friends and family to know how to support your loss more, direct them to this conversation guide or send them links to your favourite lived experience story.

## Counselling

First things first, let's do some myth busting - counselling or therapy is not just for people with poor mental health.

Counselling is all about talking openly, in a safe space to understand ourselves more. It can be a very useful process to go through after suicide loss which is why we built our service.

Counselling can also be inaccessible because of the cost so we wanted to be able to provide people that level of support through the charity. It won't be for everyone and for those that it is, it's only part of the journey, but talking to a professional about all your thoughts and feelings can be a great way to process your grief.





## Community

The fact you're reading this blog should be proof enough that you are not alone and that there is a community that understands what you are experiencing.

34,176 people are directly bereaved by suicide in England & Wales every year and there is a growing community who are ready to share their stories. Here are some of our favourite online communities for you to explore.

## Conversation

Conversation is so important that we've made a full guide on it! The words we use, the tone we adopt and the environments in which we deliver them really matter.

Whether you've been bereaved by suicide or are supporting someone who has been bereaved, please open the conversation.

Practice makes perfect and if we keep trying to have these conversations we will get better at supporting each other.

## Compassion

Compassion literally means 'suffer with', suffering is a word that goes hand in hand with suicide and compassion must stand next to suffering.

The person who has died by suicide was likely to be suffering with their mental health, the people who are left behind are suffering their loss. Having compassion for the person you have lost and the pain that they endured can help you to find a way to move forward with your grief.

Have compassion for yourself too, your feelings of suffering are valid.





## CBT

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is a type of talking therapy that is used by counsellors and psychotherapists in certain situations.

It is a goal-orientated way of working where you work with your therapist to take action and literally change behaviours.

A key exercise within it is learning to catch and identify your own thoughts, which sounds simple but is something that most of us don't do naturally.

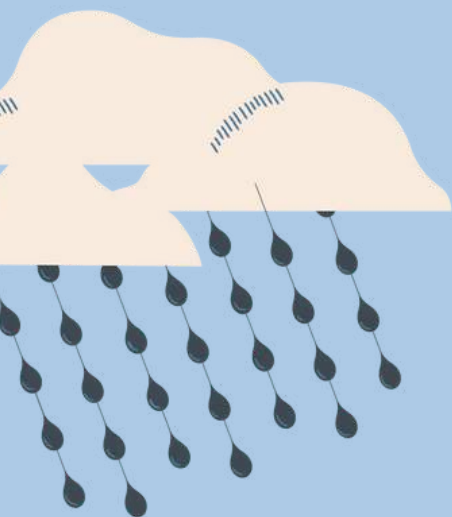
There is no specific research into the effect of CBT on suicide bereavement, but it's spoken about that CBT would not be appropriate for the first part of processing grief but could be relevant later.

But as we always say, everyone's journey is unique.

## Courage

It takes courage to share your story with the world and by doing so we promise that you will hear a similar story, you're not going through this alone.

Be brave enough to speak about your suicide loss and remember the huge courage it takes to continue after heartbreak and trauma. We are so proud of you and you should congratulate yourself every day for carrying your grief and living your story.





## Death

Death is final. Processing that you won't see someone ever again is difficult and can take a long time. It's important to remember that the end of someone else's life does not need to define the rest of your life.

## Devastation

Losing someone to suicide can feel like your entire world is turning upside down. The shock, sadness, anger and multitude of other emotions can also be described as devastation. Whatever word feels comfortable for you to use is the right word. But remember this acute feeling will pass as you put your life back together again.

## Depression

Similar to anxiety, there is a difference between diagnosed depression and then feelings of depression or being depressed. This is one of the terms that has become destigmatised and is now used a lot for when people are talking about their own mental health.

Going through the hardest parts of grief can feel very similar to depression so it's perfectly normal to use this term, but if you're worried about your mental health, it's worth going to your GP to check in and see what they suggest.





## Empathy

Having empathy for one and other is the foundation of living in an accepting and loving society, but it's something that sometimes needs to be consciously worked on.

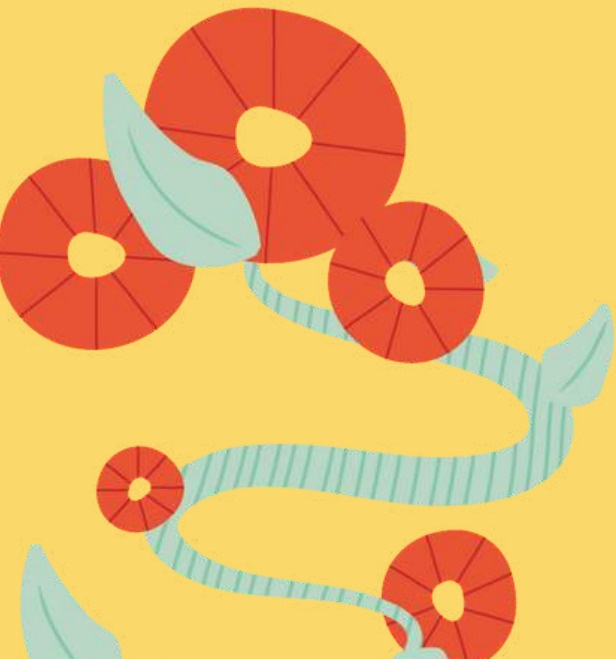
Often when someone goes through a trauma like suicide loss, they build a level of empathy for others as they can resonate when someone is going through something tough. But on the other side, it can be hard to have empathy if you can't understand that person's situation.

Ultimately empathy just means showing compassion and no judgement towards a person, which we can all do if we try.

## Embarrassment

There are lots of parts to grief that can feel embarrassing; from crying in front of others to media coverage or suicide even the concept of suicide itself.

Firstly, don't blame yourself for feeling embarrassed, again you're entitled to any of your feelings, but do know that you have nothing to be embarrassed about. Often when we feel embarrassed it's because we're worried about what others will think and often, they're not thinking what we think, so there is nothing to worry about!





## Fragile

The word fragile when it comes to human emotions can conjure up images of weakness, but we don't think that's right! Letting someone know you're feeling fragile can help them support you. Or just identifying that within yourself could mean you decide to enact more self-care or a duvet day instead of powering forward.

Think about yourself like a fragile package you're shipping through your grief journey, sometimes you need to put the red FRAGILE tape on, or put another layer of bubble wrap around, you want to come out in one piece at the end!

## Friendships

We all know the power of friendships, but times our grief can put friendships under pressure when you need them the most.

If you're supporting a friend, remember this is a marathon not a sprint and the longevity and consistency of your support will mean the most. If you're being supported by a friend, remember to show gratitude and consciously make an effort to give back when the time feels right.

If you've lost a friend to suicide it can throw up a load of questions around the meaning of friendship to you, these are all normal feelings and are the same as if it was a family member, talk with your other friends to see if they're feeling the same.

## Family

Just like friendships, your family can be such an important part of your support package through grief.

One dynamic that can be challenging if you've lost a family member is grieving with your family but balancing each other's grief and the ways you processing it.

Especially with suicide because of the stigma different generations can react in different ways which can feel isolating. Family relationships can take work at the best of times so in the toughest moments don't forget to nurture and work on these relationships.



## \* Guilt

The reality of suicide loss is hard enough without replaying “what if’s” in your mind. Trauma brings lots of complicated emotions but please know that you should not carry guilt after experiencing suicide loss.

This wasn’t your fault, “Everything that happens to us, happens because of us” - Shery Sandberg.

Read Option B to learn how resilience will help you move forward with life.



## Healing

Healing is a rewarding process; the steps that gradually make you feel better over time. It can sometimes be hard to see this when it's happening, but it is good to look back on the healing and recognise what worked and if there are any practices you can take forward to continue healing or use again in the future.

We are all stronger than we know, our bodies and minds are amazing and will heal from the trauma of suicide loss, but everyone's healing process will look different.

## Help

Asking for help is one of the hardest things to do but the more we do it the more normal it becomes. If you're early on in your grief or many years into it, it is ALWAYS okay to ask for help.

You're not weak for reaching out and asking for a friendly ear or a day off to rest, you are brave for acknowledging your needs and acting on them.



## Isolation

Suicide bereavement is isolating because we're made to believe that talking about suicide loss is uncomfortable - let's change that together! Speak about your loss, emotions and the person you lost. Normalising talking about suicide, grief and bereavement, in general, brings people into the conversation and reduces feelings of isolation.

You are not alone on this grief journey.





## Judgement

Let's talk about positive judgement, use your judgement to make good decisions around self-care and look after yourself whilst grieving. External judgement isn't worth worrying about, have conversations with people you can trust to listen without judgement.

## Journey

We use this word a lot at Suicide&Co, we're run by a full team who have lived experience of suicide loss and are all on this journey together. Every day we learn more about ourselves and the community we're in. When navigating your own grief journey make sure that you go at your own pace, grief isn't a simple journey but know that no matter how bumpy the road is - you are not alone.

## Joy

Losing someone to suicide can bring moments of deep sadness but that doesn't cancel out moments of joy. We promise you that you will find moments of joy again. Talking about mixed feelings is so important, sadness and happiness come hand in hand. One of our favourite self-care tips is to search for the tiny moments of joy in the everyday, walking in nature or calling a friend are two easy places to start.



## Kindness

We all strive to be kind to one another, so this one feels obvious. But in times of crisis people naturally, turn up the kindness dial ensuring they're actively reaching out.

It's when the initial period ends and people return to normal life that this can become less frequent.

An act of kindness can change someone's day so if you're supporting someone or being supported, do something kind for someone and you'll feel the benefits.



## Listening

We talk a lot about the power of non-judgmental and active listening and that's because it's crucial to any conversation. Often people just want space to express their feelings and navigate their situation so it's not always about the advice you give or comfort you provide through words, It can just be that you're listening and are providing that time for them to talk.

## Loneliness

Grief can come hand in hand with a feeling of loneliness, which is often magnified by a sudden bereavement such as suicide. To manage this feeling it is important to be kind to yourself and find healthy ways to express your emotions. We also recommend finding a community of people who can relate to your feelings of grief- it can be comforting to know that others are on a similar journey and you are not alone.

## Laughter

You will laugh again. In moments of huge sadness we sometimes forget the lives that we lived before our loss, forget the times we get tummy ache from laughing so hard and convince ourselves that we'll never get back there. We promise that you will, sometimes the darkest scenarios can become lighter with a dash of humour. Comedian Isabelle Farah speaks about her suicide loss - she's got a full stand up show about her experience!



## Memories

Take comfort in memories and dip into them as and when you need. Suicide bereavement can make it hard to remember the good times but allow yourself to feel it all and recognise that it's okay to sit with your memories sometimes. If you feel comfortable, talk about your memories with your friends and family, and say the person's name that you lost.

Keeping their memories alive can make you feel more connected.

## Mindfulness

Allow yourself time just for you, time to focus on your mind and body in the present moment.

Practising moments of mindfulness can bring a sense of calm to your day.

Mindfulness can sound scary but it can be as simple as sitting still and breathing in for 8 seconds, holding your breath for a moment then slowly breathing out and counting to 6. Repeat this action and feel your mind clear and body unclench.

There are lots of apps to help guide you through mindfulness, we like Headspace.

## Mental Health

Say it with us “we all have mental health” and it's important to take care of it.

Think about how much care and attention we pay to our physical health, now apply it to your mental health. Sometimes your mental health will be good or poor, or somewhere in between but it is always with us.

Open the conversation about mental health, let's celebrate and commiserate our mental health like we do our bodies.



## Numbness

Traumatic experiences can leave you in a state of numbness. Numbness is another feeling and with all feelings they come and go, and you won't feel numb forever. Try spending some time working through why you feel numb.

Journaling can be a good way to explore your feelings; our friends at Sanctus hold free daily journaling sessions.

## Nature

Exploring the outdoors is brilliant for our well-being. Walking in nature can show us the beauty in the every day - noticing the colours of flowers or smoothness of stones, whatever nature you can find in your local area get out and breathe it in.

Spending a lot of time inside our own environments at home, work and school can feel suffocating and it's easy to forget that there's a whole world outside.

## Normality

Craving normality is entirely valid. Humans like routine and normality and when the security of the norm is taken away from us we can feel really unsettled, unhappy and lost.

Creating moments of normality in your everyday life can really help these feelings; go for a 15-minute walk every day, try showering at the same time every day, adding this normality to your life can make you feel more secure and safe.

## Non-Judgmental Listening

Conversation isn't all about talking, listening is a vital part of a conversation too! The best way to be understood and to understand others' stories is to practice non-judgmental listening.

Open your ears, hearts and minds to really understand someone else's experiences, we don't need to be judged or to judge others, we're all just trying to navigate our own journeys.



## Overwhelmed

Life can be a lot sometimes and navigating life after losing someone to suicide can feel particularly overwhelming. When a big event, such as death happens it can take weeks and years to adjust to life without that person. Feeling overwhelmed is entirely normal.

Try to be open with your feelings and accept that sometimes you will feel overwhelmed and sometimes you won't. Knowing that you are not alone and talking about how you feel will make you realise that lots of people feel overwhelmed with life on a day-to-day basis - it is tough but so are you.



## Pain

Suicide bereavement causes lots of heart ache and pain, both emotionally and physically. In grief you might experience headaches, back pain, tummy problems - you are not alone in these symptoms of stress!

Our bodies can have a physical reaction to grief so it's always worth checking in with your mind and your body to make sure that you're taking care of yourself.





## Questioning

Loosing someone to suicide often leaves us with a million questions. How could you leave me? Why wasn't I enough to make you stay? Was life really that bad? Did I do enough? Was it my fault? Stop torturing yourself by asking questions that you will never receive an answer to.

Research subjects within your control, e.g learn about poor mental health and the science behind chemical imbalances but let go of questions which you can not answer, you are not responsible for other people's thoughts or actions. It was not your fault.



## Resilience

Sheryl Sandberg believes that 'Resilience is a muscle you can grow' and so do we. You might not feel very strong at first but trauma and grief will stir in you a courage that will stay with you for the rest of your life.

Repeat after us 'I am resilient. I will continue to be resilient'.



## Shock

Death by suicide is often sudden and unexpected, which means there can be more shock experienced compared to other types of bereavement. Feeling shocked is a totally normal reaction as news of a suicide can often come with no warning. Shock can also lead to disbelief and denial in the initial stages of grief.

Remember not to rush your grieving process and keep in touch with loved ones who can provide comfort and understanding.

## Suicide

Empower yourself to say the word suicide, it isn't a word you should avoid because of shame. Talking about suicide doesn't make those around you suicidal, it normalises the conversation around suicide and makes people feel less alone.

Coming to terms with suicide after losing someone can be tough because there is still so much unknown about mental health and the act of suicide. Take comfort in knowing that suicide is the result of an illness, just in the same way as other illnesses, some are fatal.

## Stigma

Suicide is still very stigmatised and can often be seen as a taboo subject - this can make it really difficult to talk about, whether you are discussing suicide bereavement, or talking about feeling suicidal. This stigma in society causes a lack of conversation which can lead to you bottling up your emotions which can have a negative effect on your mental health.

This is why we actively encourage conversations around suicide-related grief, as this is the only way to lessen the stigma, and we can all do our part by having these discussions.





## Sleep

Mental health and sleep are closely connected. Sleep, or lack of it, is common in grief and those who are bereaved are more likely to suffer from middle insomnia (waking up in the middle of the night and struggling to get back to sleep)- this is even more common for individuals with complicated grief.

Good sleep can often help you to cope with the grieving process too. Remember to practice good self-care rituals before bed and seek medical help if your grief symptoms are interfering with your sleep.

## Shame

Shame often comes with the nature of suicide-related grief due to the societal stigma associated with the word suicide. Although you may feel a sense of shame when discussing the suicide of a loved one, please know that there is nothing to be ashamed of and you are not to blame. These feelings of shame must be challenged with open conversations, as hiding through shame and avoiding these discussions can make grief more challenging.

One tip is to practice saying the word suicide in the mirror, this can help to normalise the word and make these conversations easier.



## Stress

Although everyone reacts to loss differently, almost every loss is accompanied by stress. Losing a loved one can cause chaos and disruption to your daily life and this can be a stressful experience.

It is also common to experience physical symptoms of stress triggered by grief, such as aches, pains, difficulty sleeping and breathing. Find ways to manage your stress and be aware of your triggers to try and alleviate your symptoms.

## Self-Care

Coping with the loss of a loved one is incredibly hard and it is normal to feel like your whole life has been turned upside down, but looking after your own wellbeing when dealing with grief is crucial. It is important to remember to take time for yourself and to practice self-care.

Self-care can be anything from binge-watching your favourite TV show, to more practical things like cleaning your house and going food shopping. Read this piece on our Help Hub to learn more on the benefits of 'boring self-care'.



## Talking

Talking about your grief or discussing memories of your lost loved one might help you to feel a sense of peace and it can help to confront and deal with your feelings.

At Suicide&Co, we encourage open and honest discussions of grief because suppressing these emotions can be mentally, physically and emotionally damaging.

Whilst talking is important, we recognise that we do not always have the right tools to start these conversations- this is why we developed our conversation guide!



## Unexpected

News of a suicide can often come as unexpected news.

The stigma around speaking about mental health leads to secrecy and shame, which means suicide often comes entirely out of the blue to everyone, even the closest people to the person who died by suicide.

Never make assumptions about someone's mental health or grief experience - we can never know the complexity of someone's personal experience.



## Vulnerability

Welcome vulnerability into your life, whether it's your own vulnerability or someone else's.

To be vulnerable is to be truly honest with yourself, suicide loss can expose lots of vulnerabilities that we didn't experience prior to loss; abandonment, anxiety, fear of change. This is so normal and the more we learn about our own vulnerabilities the more equipped we will be to deal with them.

Don't be afraid to say your vulnerabilities out loud, humans want to connect with each other and when we hear others talking about their vulnerabilities it allows us to share our own vulnerabilities too.

Life is hard, let's be vulnerable and brave together.



## Worry

Heightened worry after suicide loss is to be expected and normal. Worry for the future, worry for your own health, worry for the health of others around you. Grief can increase your awareness of how fragile life is but the reality is that worry doesn't have the power to change anything.

Try to only worry about things that are within your control and let go of the rest - sometimes this is easier said than done so try writing your worries down and rationalising your feelings.

Speak to others about your worries to make them feel more manageable.



## Experience

No two experiences are exactly the same but find solace that you are not alone in your experience.

Sharing your experience of suicide loss can help you understand the emotions and mixed feelings which come with a traumatic event.

Choose the right platform to share your experience, it might be with a close friend, a counsellor, at a peer-to-peer support group or you can even write about your experience and share it with our community.

The experience of losing someone to suicide is a heavy one, but it's certainly not one you have to navigate alone.



## You

YOU matter and your experience matters. Suicide loss and grief can feel consuming at times and it's easy to forget the person you were before. It is okay to change your opinions or lifestyle after something huge happens in your life, don't feel guilty for spending time working on yourself.

## Yearning

You might find yourself missing your old life and yearning for a normality without grief and that's okay! It's really hard to accept changes to our life which are entirely out of our control. Making plans for the future can help redirect your yearning for the past into hope for the future. As with all feelings, let yourself sit for them for as long as you need.

## Years

As the years go on it's totally normal that we change as individuals and with that, our grief and emotions change too. The further we get from the moment we lost someone to suicide the more conflicting it can feel; as the years go on the pain will mellow but it can also feel scary to move on with our lives because it means we're becoming more distant to what happened and the person we lost.

Read other's lived experience stories to help understand your own experience and try writing down how you feel as the years pass, it can help you process your feelings.



## Zero-Tolerance

When you have experienced a life-changing event like suicide loss you may experience bursts of zero tolerance towards other people's moans and groans - that is okay! Your empathy gauge isn't broken, you are just processing your own experience and everyone understands suffering based on their own experience.

Be patient with the people around you and know that someone else's pain or suffering doesn't invalidate your loss or experience.

## Zig-Zagging

Grief is not linear and you will find yourself zig-zagging through the motions. Life is full of twists and turns so try and go with the flow, it can be comforting knowing that your grief will change over the course of a day, month or year.

No matter where you are on your grief journey, be sure to look back on the zig-zag that got you to where you are right now and be proud of yourself.

