

Supporting Adults After Suicide Loss

Losing someone to suicide creates a profound and complex grief. For adults, whether as partners, friends, colleagues, or carers, the aftermath can involve not only sorrow but guilt, anger, stigma, and practical strain. This handout offers compassionate guidance and practical steps for adults navigating suicide bereavement.

1. The First Impact

Adults often move quickly into practical tasks after a suicide: arranging the funeral, managing paperwork, and supporting others. Yet shock, numbness, or intrusive images may dominate. Some may function automatically, appearing 'strong' while feeling hollow inside.

2. Common Emotional Reactions

- Guilt — 'What did I miss? Could I have stopped this?'
- Anger — at the person, at services, or at the unfairness of life.
- Relief — if the person had been suffering for a long time; often followed by guilt.
- Shame and stigma — worry about what others will think or say.
- Fear — of judgement, of managing alone, or of one's own safety.

3. Relationships Under Strain

Partners, siblings, and close friends may grieve differently. One person may want to talk constantly, another may shut down. Misunderstandings can arise: 'You don't care' versus 'You won't stop talking about it.' Acknowledging different coping styles is key. Couples counselling or peer groups can help rebuild communication.

4. Work and Community

Workplaces may not know how to respond. Some colleagues avoid the topic; others may ask intrusive questions. Consider what you want to share, and practise a brief response such as: 'It's been very hard; I'm taking it one day at a time.' Employers have a duty of care — you are entitled to time off.

5. Anniversaries and Triggers

Dates such as birthdays, death anniversaries, or seasonal events can trigger a resurgence of grief. Planning ahead — whether by arranging company, creating a small ritual, or booking time off — can reduce the impact. Triggers may also appear suddenly (a song, a location). Grounding strategies and safe contacts are important tools.

6. Coping Strategies

- Give yourself permission to grieve in your own way — there is no single 'right' timeline.
- Use grounding tools when overwhelmed: steady breathing, naming 5–4–3–2–1 senses.
- Write a journal or letters to the person — it helps process continuing bonds.
- Seek connection: peer groups, trusted friends, or survivor networks.
- Balance 'grief time' with small acts of normal life: cooking, walking, watching a film.

7. When to Seek Extra Help

If grief feels unrelenting after several months, or you experience suicidal thoughts yourself, reach out for professional help. Options include your GP, local talking therapy services, or bereavement charities. Specialist support exists for suicide loss and is different from general grief counselling.

8. UK & Scotland Resources

- Samaritans — 116 123 (24/7 listening support)
- Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SoBS) — groups and helpline
- Cruse Bereavement Support — counselling and resources
- NHS Inform Scotland — mental health and bereavement support
- Local Suicide Bereavement Services — ask GP or check council listings

Remember: grief after suicide is complex, but you are not alone. There are people and organisations who can walk alongside you. Take each day step by step, and allow support in.