

Coping in the First Year After Suicide Loss

The first year after losing someone to suicide is often the hardest. It brings many 'firsts' — the first birthday, first holiday season, first anniversary — without your loved one. These milestones can reopen grief in powerful ways, even if you felt a little steadier for a while. This guide offers gentle strategies to help you through.

Milestones and Anniversaries

- Mark significant dates on a calendar so they don't catch you by surprise.
- Plan in advance how you might want to spend the day: alone, with family, or doing something symbolic.
- Create remembrance rituals — lighting a candle, cooking their favourite meal, or visiting a place they loved.
- Give yourself permission to say no to invitations if you need quiet time.

Ongoing Grief Waves

- Grief does not follow a straight line. It often returns in waves — intense for a time, then easing.
- Emotions may shift quickly: sadness, anger, guilt, or numbness. All are normal parts of loss.
- Keep a small grounding toolkit with you (breathing exercises, soothing music, or a comfort object).
- Seek safe people you can talk to when the waves feel overwhelming.

Family and Relationship Dynamics

- Each person grieves differently. Some need to talk often, others withdraw.
- Try to respect differences and avoid comparing grief styles.
- Children may process grief in bursts — seemingly fine one moment, upset the next.
- Family conflict can increase after loss; consider family counselling if needed.

Returning to Work or School

- A phased return may help if full-time feels overwhelming.
- Ask a trusted manager, tutor, or HR contact for flexibility around key dates.

- Let colleagues or classmates know if you are comfortable sharing — it can reduce misunderstandings.
- Use workplace or student wellbeing services if available.

Building Hope and Remembrance

- Start new rituals of remembrance that feel right for you.
- Some find comfort in creative expression — writing, art, gardening, photography.
- Support groups (in-person or online) help normalise your experience and reduce isolation.
- Professional support (counselling, GP, suicide bereavement services) can be sought at any time — you do not have to wait until crisis.

Remember: coping in the first year is about survival, not perfection. Some days you may simply get through the basics — and that is enough. You are not alone, and support is available.