

First 72 Hours After Suicide Loss

Gentle guidance for the earliest days after a suicide bereavement.

1. Shock & Numbness

It is normal to feel frozen, unreal, or as if events are happening around you but not to you. This is the mind's protective response. Try not to judge your reactions.

2. Safety & Basic Needs

Focus on the essentials: food, fluids, rest, and safe company. Small, simple meals (toast, soup, fruit) are enough. Drink water or tea. If sleep is hard, lie down in a quiet place, even for short rests.

3. Immediate Support

Tell one trusted person what has happened. You do not need to tell everyone right now. Practical and emotional support can be shared in small steps.

4. Practical Steps

If you are the next of kin, there may be urgent tasks such as identifying the person, contacting a GP, or initial funeral arrangements. It is okay to ask others to help handle phone calls or paperwork. Keep notes in a notebook to avoid overwhelm.

5. Children & Young People

Children sense when something is wrong. Use simple, clear words: "They have died. It was by suicide." Avoid vague phrases such as 'gone away'. Offer comfort and honesty. Schools can often provide immediate pastoral support.

6. Medical & Legal

In the UK, a sudden death may involve the coroner or procurator fiscal (Scotland). This can delay funeral plans. Ask the police officer in charge (often the Family Liaison Officer) to explain next steps. You are entitled to updates.

7. First Nights

Nights can feel the hardest. If panic rises, try gentle breathing (in for 4, out for 6) or a grounding exercise (name 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear). If you feel unsafe, contact Samaritans (116 123, free, 24/7).

8. Who to Contact for Help

- Samaritans – 116 123 (UK & ROI, free, 24/7)

- Breathing Space (Scotland) – 0800 83 85 87
- NHS 111 (England & Wales) or NHS 24 (Scotland, dial 111)
- Cruse Bereavement Support – 0808 808 1677
- Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SoBS) – 0300 111 5065
- Police Family Liaison Officers (for procedural updates)

9. Be Gentle With Yourself

The first 72 hours are about survival, not solutions. It is enough to breathe, eat something small, and connect with one supportive person. More detailed support and decisions can wait until later.