



Support for people bereaved by suicide

Updated July 2010

Bereavement and coping with a death by suicide

People who have been bereaved by suicide often ask Cruse about the support available to them. If someone close to you has taken their own life, we hope the information in this factsheet will help you work out what kind of support would suit you and how to go about finding it. We outline some of the situations which people bereaved by suicide often experience, suggest people you could talk to and give details of some helpful books and booklets. We also offer some suggestions on choosing a suitable support group and list some of the specialist groups available for people bereaved by suicide.

You may be finding your situation difficult and complicated. As well as having to adjust to changed circumstances and cope with the intense, often lengthy periods of grieving which are common after the death of someone close, the aftermath of a suicide can present you with tough challenges. For example there may be unwelcome publicity, prejudice or hostility against the act of suicide, which could leave you feeling isolated and unsupported. You may feel angry with the person who died for causing so much pain, for not dealing with their problems in a different way or seeking more help. You may feel they have robbed you of a future you wanted them to share with you. You may also feel guilty that you couldn't prevent them from wanting to take their own life.

If the death followed long periods of distress, and perhaps previous suicide attempts, you may have a sense of relief that the person's suffering is over and they are now at peace, but you may still find it hard to cope with.

Grieving and dealing with the changes which follow any loss is never easy. People often experience unpredictable extremes of emotion, feel insecure, and at times feel out of control. When someone has taken their own life you may feel so low that you even have suicidal thoughts yourself. You may want to talk through any such upsetting thoughts and feelings with someone you trust – a friend, someone in your family, perhaps with your GP or a trained volunteer from Cruse or from another organisation offering bereavement support. Different people can help at different times, and so can different activities or simply taking time out to be alone with your thoughts and feelings. You may also be thinking about joining a support group so you can talk with other people who have been bereaved.

Books and leaflets for people bereaved by suicide

A useful starting point is to read about different aspects of bereavement, and how other people have coped. Many people have been helped by Cruse's short, wise and practical booklet *Bereaved by Suicide*, by Patrick Shannon, and have found that reading Alison Wertheimer's book, *A Special Scar: the experiences of people bereaved by suicide*, or Sarah McCarthy's *A Voice for Those Bereaved by Suicide*, was a turning point for them.

Beyond the Rough Rock: supporting a child who has been bereaved by suicide offers practical, sensitive advice on helping a child to cope following a death by suicide.

There are publications on bereavement through suicide available from Cruse, along with many other books, leaflets and cassettes for bereaved people of all ages. They can be seen in the online bookstore or a book list can be mailed to you on request.

Support Groups

Broadly speaking, support groups are effective if they allow each person to support, and be supported by, the other people in the group. In a group you should be able to express your feelings, share your experiences, and learn from each other in a setting which is safe and confidential. This can lead to increased understanding and compassion for yourself and for others, and help you to work out how to make the next steps in your life. You are likely to hear about different ways of coping, work through some of the thoughts and feelings which you may have felt were overwhelming you, and hopefully find that you can manage it all better than you thought you would!

You might find it helpful to join a general bereavement support group, such as one run by your local Cruse Branch. There is a list of Cruse branches on the website www.cruse.org.uk. Such a group would include people bereaved in various circumstances, for example as a result of cancer, a heart attack or an accident. Or you may feel it would be more useful to join a group in which everyone is bereaved by suicide, although there are fewer of these groups available.

Whatever type of group you choose, it can be rewarding to be in the company of others and know you are not alone in what you are going through. However, you may have some difficult moments. For example, some people in the group, including yourself, may release emotional pain and anger. This is likely to be helpful in the long run and often leads to positive changes in people's lives, but it may feel disturbing at the time. Those running a group usually try to ensure that each session ends in a relaxed atmosphere and that people feel calm when they leave.

Support groups vary in how they are run. For example, most groups meet regularly for a set number of weekly sessions. Some are known as closed groups, in which case the group is closed to newcomers after the first session. Others are known as open groups, and people can join later on. Whatever the arrangements, it is important that the people running the groups have relevant training, experience and back-up. Before joining a group it is advisable to talk to the organisation which arranges it, and perhaps also with the people running the group itself, to see if you think it would suit you. They are also likely to want to talk to you, and will usually advise you on whether they think their group can help you, or suggest that you might perhaps get more benefit from a different kind of support.

You may feel ready to join a group straight away, wait until later, or decide not to join one at all. You may want to look into using other kinds of support too, either before or instead of joining a group (see pages 3 and 4 for other Cruse's services).

Other support groups for people bereaved by suicide

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS) support groups

Helpline: 0844 561 6855 | Website: www.uk-sobs.org.uk

This charity is a self-help organisation which offers information, publications and a number of support groups around the UK for people bereaved by suicide.

Survivors of Bereavement by suicide told us that each group is supported by three people: one with appropriate training and counselling skills, one who has been bereaved by suicide and has received training to work with groups, and an administrator. Phone their helpline or look at their website for information about the support groups nearest you.

You may come across other organisations, or individuals, running support groups for people bereaved by suicide. Again, we suggest you check out any group before you join, to see if you think it would meet your needs.

How Cruse helps bereaved people

By providing:

- Someone to talk to – some of Cruse's trained volunteers work on our telephone and email helplines, others meet individually with bereaved people to provide them with the opportunity to talk, in confidence, once or many times.
- Groups – which offer bereaved people the chance to talk with others in similar circumstances.
- Books, leaflets and cassettes for bereaved adults, children and young people, and those working with them.
- Information on many aspects of bereavement, including practical and financial matters.
- Training, support, information and publications for Cruse volunteers and people in other organisations working to care for bereaved people.

Cruse websites and helplines:

Telephone helpline 0844 477 9400 (working hours)

Email helpline@cruse.org.uk

Website: www.cruse.org.uk

RD4U

A special website for bereaved young people where they can express and share feelings and experiences.

Young Person's freephone helpline

0808 808 1677

info@rd4u.org.uk

www.rd4u.org.uk