

Suicide loss bereavement packet

Purpose

This guide is intended to provide support and resources to community organizations and groups that are interested in customizing a bereavement packet to support suicide loss survivors.

Who can use

Individuals and organizations that might find the guide helpful include funeral home directors, faith leaders, county public health, law enforcement, military staff and organizations, suicide prevention coalitions, primary health care, behavioral health care, and family or friends.

How to use

The resources listed in this guide can be used by individuals and organizations to create and customize a packet that includes local or regional resources within communities. Examples include:

- Local resources specific to suicide loss supports such as local suicide loss support groups.
- Resources on what to expect after a loss, where and how to access supports, and coping.
- Resources and information specific to the type of loss, for example a spouse, child, parent, sibling, client, or employee.

When and where to share

Bereavement packets can be shared with suicide loss survivors at any point after the loss, there is no specific timeline.

- People bereaved by a suicide loss might not be immediately ready to read a packet right after the loss but having the resource present when they are ready is helpful.
- Having packets present at moments when those bereaved are seeking help is suggested and in locations where they may not need to ask.
- Suggested locations may include clinician office, primary care clinic waiting room, funeral home, conference tabling events, faith community resource locations, and local county or governmental service locations.

Minnesota Department of Health Suicide Prevention Unit
85 East 7th Pl, PO Box 64882
St. Paul, MN 55164-0882
health.suicideprev.mdh@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us
5/22/24

To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5400.

Suicide loss condolence letter template

This content can be used as a template to create condolence letters and customized as needed.

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. ,

We extend our deepest condolences for your loss. The death of someone we care about to suicide is a unique experience for everyone, and it is important to know that there are resources available to help navigate the difficult emotions that may arise. We want to ensure that you have the enclosed information on hand should you need it, now or in the future. There is no time limit on grief; you can access this information at whatever pace feels right to you.

Losing someone to suicide might be one of the most painful experiences a person can face. Coping with that loss can bring up complex and intense emotions. It can be immensely helpful to talk with a mental health professional about the grief that follows an unexpected death. We have included information in this packet on how to connect with a mental health professional who specializes in grief and loss, and can provide you with support.

Know that you are not alone. Many find it helpful to talk to others who have experienced a similar loss. There are suicide loss support groups available, and this packet provides information on how to find a support group that works for you.

We can also provide you with help in navigating the resources in this packet if you should need it. Please do not hesitate to reach out to or any of the agencies listed in the enclosed materials. We want to help you in any way we can during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

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After a death by suicide brochures, booklets, handouts

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) resources

Contact the Minnesota chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) to request printed copies of brochures and handouts. [Minnesota AFSP \(https://afsp.org/chapter/minnesota\)](https://afsp.org/chapter/minnesota)

- **After a Suicide brochure:** AFSP's After a Suicide brochure provides comfort and the essential, practical guidance suicide loss survivors so desperately need in the first few days after their loss. The brochure describes common emotional responses to this particular type of grief, information on what research tells us about suicide in a section entitled, "Understanding the Why," and available resources to help them heal. [After a Suicide \(https://block-image-uploader-prod.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/78468da5-14f8-460b-a5e9-ae96924b878b/13754_AFSP_After_Suicide_Brochure_m1_v2.pdf\)](https://block-image-uploader-prod.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/78468da5-14f8-460b-a5e9-ae96924b878b/13754_AFSP_After_Suicide_Brochure_m1_v2.pdf)
- **Surviving a Suicide Loss Resource and Healing Guide:** AFSP's Surviving a Suicide Loss: Resource and Healing Guide is a guide for suicide loss survivors providing support, resources, and tools to foster hope and healing. It contains practical information as well as stories from experts and fellow loss survivors. Surviving a Suicide Loss Resource and Healing Guide (<https://aws-fetch.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/flipbooks/survivingASuicideLoss/index.html?page=1>)
- **#RealConvo Guide - How to Talk to a Suicide Loss Survivor:** Ten tips to help you navigate conversations with suicide loss survivors in a kind, thoughtful and responsible way. [#RealConvo Guide - How to Talk to a Suicide Loss Survivor \(13754_AFSP_After_Suicide_Brochure_m1_v2.pdf \(block-image-uploader-prod.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com\)\)](https://aws-fetch.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/flipbooks/realconvo/13754_AFSP_After_Suicide_Brochure_m1_v2.pdf)
- **Self-Care Strategies for Resilience:** A one-pager with self-care strategies and a worksheet to add your own personal strategies. [Self Care Strategies for Resilience \(14257_AFSP_Surviving_Suicide_Loss_Resource_Healing_Guide_m1_v10_flipbook \(aws-fetch.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com\)\)](https://aws-fetch.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/flipbooks/self-care/14257_AFSP_Surviving_Suicide_Loss_Resource_Healing_Guide_m1_v10_flipbook)
- **Book and Film Recommendations for Loss Survivors:** A booklet with a list of book and film recommendations or loss survivors. [Book and Film Recommendations for Loss Survivors \(https://block-image-uploader-prod.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/aa53b8a4-4bca-46b6-a419-d076d9ce8702/Book-and-Film-Resources-Booklet.pdf\)](https://block-image-uploader-prod.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/aa53b8a4-4bca-46b6-a419-d076d9ce8702/Book-and-Film-Resources-Booklet.pdf)

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) resources

- **Suicide Grief: Making Meaning Out of Loss:** This handout provides coping strategies for people who have been touched by suicide. [Suicide Grief: Making Meaning Out of Loss \(https://www.save.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Suicide-Grief-Making-Meaning-Out-of-Loss.pdf\)](https://www.save.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Suicide-Grief-Making-Meaning-Out-of-Loss.pdf)
- **Providing Support to Someone Experiencing Suicide Loss:** This handout discusses appropriate ways to comfort suicide survivors. [Providing Support to Someone Experiencing Suicide Loss \(https://www.save.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Providing-Support-to-Someone-Experiencing-Suicide-Loss.pdf\)](https://www.save.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Providing-Support-to-Someone-Experiencing-Suicide-Loss.pdf)
- **Common Misconceptions of Suicide:** This handout common misconceptions regarding suicide. [Common Misconceptions of Suicide \(https://www.save.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Common-Misconceptions-of-Suicide.pdf\)](https://www.save.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Common-Misconceptions-of-Suicide.pdf)
- **Why Do People Die by Suicide?:** This handout discusses the complexities of why someone may die by suicide. [Why Do People Die by Suicide? \(https://www.save.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Why-Do-People-Die-by-Suicide.pdf\)](https://www.save.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Why-Do-People-Die-by-Suicide.pdf)

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Minnesota Handouts

- **Understanding Suicide:** This handout shares contributing factors to suicide, emotions commonly experienced by suicide loss survivors, things you can do to help with the grieving process. [Understanding Suicide \(https://namimn.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/48/2024/05/02-Understanding-Suicide-Updated-2024_05.pdf\)](https://namimn.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/48/2024/05/02-Understanding-Suicide-Updated-2024_05.pdf)
- **Talking About Suicide Safely:** This handout provides guidance on safe messaging, and how to talk about suicide safely and share stories in a way that supports healing and help-seeking behavior among people vulnerable to suicidal thoughts and behavior. [Talking About Suicide Safely \(https://namimn.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/48/2024/05/06-Safe-Suicide-Messages-Updated-2024_05.pdf\)](https://namimn.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/48/2024/05/06-Safe-Suicide-Messages-Updated-2024_05.pdf)
- **Suicide and Life Insurance:** This fact sheet provides important information about Minnesota's law governing life insurance policies after a suicide death. [Suicide and Life Insurance \(https://namimn.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/48/2024/05/07-Life-Insurance-and-Suicide-Updated-2024_05.pdf\)](https://namimn.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/48/2024/05/07-Life-Insurance-and-Suicide-Updated-2024_05.pdf)

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Suicide loss survivors support resources

Losing a loved one to suicide is difficult and can come with complicated emotions. This journey can be challenging, but you don't have to face it alone. There are a variety of different supports available to help cope with the loss of a loved one to suicide, included below are a variety of different resources that may be helpful for you on your path to healing.

988

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988lifeline.org) provides free and confidential support 24/7 to individuals in emotional distress or experiencing suicidal thoughts. By connecting with 988, you can connect with trained counselors who can provide support, guidance, and resources to help you through difficult times.

Healing Conversations

Healing Conversations is a program through the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention that offers a one-time visit (phone, virtual, in-person) that connects those who have lost a loved one to suicide with trained volunteers who are also survivors of suicide loss. The goal of this connection is to help recent survivors navigate this challenging journey by offering support, connection, and resources. Healing Conversations (<https://afsp.org/healing-conversations/>)

Bereavement support groups

When you have lost someone to suicide, it is not unusual to withdraw from others. Bereavement groups, ideally a group focused on suicide loss, can be helpful. These groups can offer a community that has gone through a similar loss and provide a space for hope and healing.

Tips in choosing a support group:

- **Do research:** Check the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (<https://afsp.org/find-a-support-group/>) to locate a support group near you.
- **Choose one that is right for you:** there are options for in person or virtual online support groups and may have different focuses. Support groups are through organizations like faith communities, hospitals, or non-profit agencies and are often facilitated by those with lived experience. A support group is centered more on coping strategies and finding comfort from shared experiences where a therapy group focuses on bringing about change and personal growth through structured guidance and facilitated by a trained mental health professional. Consider what might feel the most beneficial to you.
- **Communicate with the facilitator:** if possible before attending group to better understand group dynamics and group rules/expectations.
- **See if it is a good fit:** try out the support group for a while and if it doesn't seem to feel right it is ok to try a different format or group.
- **Trust your instincts:** watch out for groups that promise a cure, charge high fees or pressure the purchase of products or services.

Mental health professional

Survivors commonly experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), intense emotions, conflicted feelings about the death, guilt, blame, social stigma, financial issues, and other unexpected challenges in relationships. A mental health professional can provide guidance and support that is tailored to your specific needs. There are many different types of mental health professionals such as therapists and counselors. Having someone to talk with who is trained in traumatic loss can be very helpful. Look for a grief / trauma counselor who has experience helping people bereaved by suicide.

Tips in choosing a mental health professional:

- **Determine what type of mental health professional you need:** There are a variety of different types of mental health professionals. It is a good idea to determine what type of mental health professional you may want to engage with. Visit here for information about the different types: Mental Health America: Finding the Right Clinical Mental Health Care For You (<https://www.mhanational.org/finding-right-mental-health-care-you>)
- **Don't be afraid to ask questions:** Having someone to talk to who is trained in traumatic loss can be helpful. Don't be afraid to ask about their training and experience specific to suicide grief and loss.
- **Do research:**
 - Review the list of clinicians that have been trained in suicide bereavement through the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Bereavement Trained Clinicians (<https://afsp.org/suicide-bereavement-trained-clinicians/>)
 - Confidential and anonymous resource for locating treatment facilities for mental and substance use disorder: FindTreatment.gov (<https://findtreatment.gov/>)
 - The decision to use herbs or medication is a personal one. There is no one "right way." You alone will know what feels right. If you are considering medication, consider seeking the help of a psychiatrist (rather than a general practitioner) and informing yourself about possible side effects.
- **Determine if it is a good fit:** As you are meeting with your mental health professional, reflect to ensure that it is the right fit for the support you are looking for.

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Resources for after a suicide

General

- [The Compassionate Friends: Supporting Family After a Child Dies](https://www.compassionatefriends.org/friend-support/) (<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/friend-support/>)
- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: I've lost someone](https://afsp.org/ive-lost-someone) (<https://afsp.org/ive-lost-someone>)
- [American Association of Suicidology: Helping Survivors of Suicide](https://suicidology.org/resources/suicide-attempt-survivors/) (<https://suicidology.org/resources/suicide-attempt-survivors/>)
- [How to Talk to a Suicide Loss Survivor: A #RealConvo Guide from AFSP](https://afsp.org/story/how-to-talk-to-a-suicide-loss-survivor-a-realconvo-guide-from-afsp) (<https://afsp.org/story/how-to-talk-to-a-suicide-loss-survivor-a-realconvo-guide-from-afsp>)
- [After a Suicide Resource Directory](http://www.personalgriefcoach.net/) (<http://www.personalgriefcoach.net/>)
- [The Dougy Center for Grieving Children & Families](http://www.dougy.org/) (<http://www.dougy.org/>)
- [Suicide Awareness Voices of Education: Coping with Suicide Loss](https://www.save.org/programs/suicide-loss-support/) (<https://www.save.org/programs/suicide-loss-support/>)

Youth and young people

- [Tips for Talking with and Helping Children and Youth Cope After a Disaster or other Traumatic Event: A Guide for Parents, Caregivers and Teachers](https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/tips-talking-to-children-after-traumatic-event.pdf) (<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/tips-talking-to-children-after-traumatic-event.pdf>)
- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: Children, Teens, and Suicide Loss](https://aws-fetch.s3.amazonaws.com/flipbooks/childrenteenssuicideloss/index.html?page=1) (<https://aws-fetch.s3.amazonaws.com/flipbooks/childrenteenssuicideloss/index.html?page=1>)
- [Postvention: A Guide for Response to Suicide on College Campuses](http://hemha.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/jed-hemha-postvention-guide.pdf) (<http://hemha.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/jed-hemha-postvention-guide.pdf>)

Workplace

- [A Manager's Guide to Suicide Postvention in the Workplace: 10 Action Steps for Dealing with the Aftermath of Suicide](https://theactionalliance.org/resource/managers-guide-suicide-postvention-workplace-10-action-steps-dealing-aftermath-suicide) (<https://theactionalliance.org/resource/managers-guide-suicide-postvention-workplace-10-action-steps-dealing-aftermath-suicide>)

School settings K-12

- [After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools](https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/after-suicide-toolkit-schools) (<https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/after-suicide-toolkit-schools>)

- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center: Provide for Immediate and Long-term Postvention \(https://sprc.org/effective-prevention/a-comprehensive-approach-to-suicide-prevention/provide-for-immediate-and-long-term-postvention/\)](https://sprc.org/effective-prevention/a-comprehensive-approach-to-suicide-prevention/provide-for-immediate-and-long-term-postvention/)

Military

- [Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors-Military Suicide Loss \(https://www.taps.org/suicide\)](https://www.taps.org/suicide)
- [Postvention Toolkit for a Military Suicide Loss \(PDF\) \(https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/documents/postventiontoolkit.pdf\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/documents/postventiontoolkit.pdf)

Rural

- [After Rural Suicide: A Guide for Coordinated Community Postvention Response \(PDF\) \(https://sprc.org/online-library/after-rural-suicide-a-guide-for-coordinated-community-postvention-response/\)](https://sprc.org/online-library/after-rural-suicide-a-guide-for-coordinated-community-postvention-response/)

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