

Do's and don'ts after a suicide

A Communities Matter factsheet

Supporting someone who has lost a family member, friend or loved one to suicide.

Don't...

- **Keep asking for details** of the suicide
- **Blame or give reasons** for the suicide
- **Avoid talking about the person** who has died. It may seem that you are denying they ever existed, which can be very hurtful to those left behind
- **Use clichés** that make judgments or assumptions about the person who has died, such as 'they've gone to a better place' or 'it was the best thing for them'
- **Use clichés** such as 'you must be strong' and 'life goes on'.

Do...

- **Listen to the story.** You may need to do this over and over again. Or sit with them in their pain in silence if that's what they need.
- **Listen without judging.** People will have intense feelings that are likely to include anger, sadness, fear and guilt. You can't change this or take their pain away but you can help them by being there, caring and listening.
- **Be prepared for any and all reactions.** Be particularly aware of the needs of children.
- **Remember that there are some very important things that people want to know.** Offer to find out about resources and information that may help them in their grieving. Support them to get specialist care if they need more help or have no 'good' days.
- **Keep in regular touch.** Don't abandon those mourning the loss of someone.
- **There may be times when your offers of help are refused.** Try again later. If you feel awkward because you don't know what to do or say, be honest: 'I don't know what to say ... is there anything I can do?'
- **Offer to do something practical** such as making a meal, paying bills or doing the shopping or washing.
- **Send a note.** If you don't know what to say, you can just write 'thinking of you'.
- **Share good memories** of the person who died and what they meant to you.
- **Give people who are grieving time** to begin their healing. Don't expect they'll be 'over it' in a few weeks or even months. It can take months or years to find a way to live with the loss. Try to remember birthdays and other special days. Be aware that these may be particularly difficult times.
- **Be kind to yourself.** It can be draining to share another's loss. You may also be affected by this loss and have your own grief to deal with. Take time to do some special things for yourself or get help if you feel the need.

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Suicide prevention for small towns and local communities