



Supporting children and young people bereaved by suicide



About this leaflet

This leaflet offers advice and guidance on how best to support children and young people bereaved by suicide. At this time they are probably experiencing a range of emotions and have many unanswered questions.

It has four parts:

1. Talking to your child about suicide

2. Answering difficult questions

3. How children and young people may respond to a death by suicide

4. How to support children and young people depending on their age

1. Talking to your child about suicide

Talking to a child about the death of a parent, sibling, close relative, or friend can be very difficult. You want to protect a child from distress. However, children need to be told about death. It helps the child understand what has happened and what it means for them.

It is best to be open and honest about what has happened as this helps avoid misunderstandings about suicide which can affect children later.

Children will have a different understanding of death depending on their age, so it can be helpful to check with them about what their understanding of death is.

The following steps will help when talking to a child or young person about the person who has died.



- Tell the child clearly what has happened; it is best if the child is told by a parent, a relative, or a person the child knows and trusts
- Use clear language, which the child understands
- Give simple details about how the person died
- Acknowledge the child's feelings, and ask questions
- Reassure the child that they are loved and nothing they did caused the person's death
- Maintain the child's routine as much as possible

2. Answering difficult questions

A death through suicide can leave people with many unanswered questions. For some questions, such as *'why did the person die?'*, there may be no easy or quick answers.

For other questions, such as regarding the facts of what happened, there may be answers that can be given.

It is important to encourage children to ask questions. This can help you to find out what they are thinking and how they are coping with the death. Try and be open and honest in responding to them.

The child may be angry and frustrated and have questions you can't answer. You may have to explain that you don't have all the answers. Very often, children imagine that they caused the person to die.

With a death by suicide, they may worry that they could have done something to prevent it. Reassure them that this is not the case.

3. How children and young people may respond to a death by suicide

Children and young people may exhibit many, some or none of the responses outlined below. All bereaved children and young people need to be heard and have their need for information, simple explanations and reassurance met after a death by suicide.

Emotional responses may include fear, anxiety, confusion, anger, sadness, relief, loneliness, guilt or isolation.

Physical responses may include low energy, interrupted sleep or eating patterns, unexplained aches and pains.

Behavioural responses may include lack of concentration, memory loss, aggression, irritability or regression to behaviour more commonly associated with a younger age, such as bed wetting.

Social responses may include loss of self-esteem and confidence, withdrawal from friends and activities, or a fall-off in school attendance.

Source: www.childhoodbereavement.ie

Self-care

It is important to remember that supporting others affected by suicide takes energy and can be demanding at times.

Practicing self-care not only allows us to help ourselves, but to help others as well.

Self-care is any activity that we do deliberately in order to take care of our mental, emotional, and physical health.

4. How to support children and young people depending on their age

How children and young people understand and react to grief depends on their age and stage of development. Experiences of grief change as children get older.

As they grow and mature, a child's understanding of death increases, and they may need to revisit their grief again in later years.

These tips point to how you can support a child or young person at different ages and stages.



0-5 years

Maintain routine, encouraging them to ask questions, and answering them openly and simply

5-8 years

Encourage them to talk about and express their feelings, no matter what those feelings are

8-12 years

Reassure them about changes in lifestyle, such as household income and the family home

Adolescents

Involve teenagers in rituals (memory books/videos) and be willing and able to listen to them, accept their feelings as real and important, and model openness in discussing issues of death and grief

Source: www.childhoodbereavement.ie

Who to contact if you need urgent help

Contact your GP, or an 'out-of-hours' GP
see www.hse.ie

Contact Samaritans 24/7 on freephone
116 123 or email: jo@samaritans.ie

Contact Pieta House 24/7 on freephone
1800 247 247 or text HELP to 51444
(standard message rates apply)

Contact Text50808, a free 24/7 crisis
text service, by texting HELLO to 50808
see www.text50808.ie

Go to, or contact, the Emergency
Department of your nearest hospital
see www.hse.ie

Call the emergency services on 112
or 999

*If you are being supported by a mental
health team, or have been in the past,
contact the service for support in
a crisis.*

To download **You are not alone**, the National Suicide Bereavement Support Guide visit

www.connectingforlifeireland.ie

The **Suicide Bereavement Liaison Service** is a free, confidential service that provides assistance and support to families and individuals after the loss of a loved one to suicide

www.pieta.ie

www.vitahouse.org

www.thefamilycentre.com

For information, resources and tools to help and support bereaved children, young people and their families, contact **The Irish Childhood Bereavement Network**

www.childhoodbereavement.ie

Childline is Ireland's 24-hour national listening service for young people up to the age of 18 - freephone **1800 666 666** or Free Text **50101**

www.childline.ie

Jigsaw provide free, confidential, mental health supports for young people aged 12-25 around the country

www.jigsaw.ie

your mental health.ie

Information | Support | Services

1800 111 888

Visit **www.yourmentalhealth.ie** for information and support services for your mental health and wellbeing.

This leaflet is available to order on **www.healthpromotion.ie** and has been produced by;

**The HSE National Office for
Suicide Prevention (NOSP)**

Stewarts Hospital, Palmerstown, Dublin 20

Tel: 01 778 5112 / E: info@nosp.ie

Version 4, December 2021 / HSP01303



Seirbhís Sláinte
Níos Fearr
á Forbairt

Building a
Better Health
Service