

Hope^{and} Healing

When Someone You Love
Dies by Suicide


Newfoundland
&
Labrador

Land Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge the island of Ktaqmkuk (Newfoundland) is the ancestral homeland of the Mi'kmaq and Beothuk. We also recognize the Inuit of Nunatsiavut and NunatuKavut, and the Innu of Nitassinan, as the original peoples of Labrador. We recognize all First Peoples who were here before us, those who live with us now, and the seven generations to come. We strive for respectful relationships with all the peoples of this province as we search for collective healing and true reconciliation.

The Department of Health and Community Services extends its sincere gratitude to NL Health Services, Richard's Legacy Foundation, and Community Mental Health Initiative Inc. for their invaluable partnerships and collaborative efforts in developing this resource.



**NL Health
Services**



**RICHARD'S LEGACY
FOUNDATION**



Community Mental Health Initiative Inc.
REACHING OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY

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Hope and Healing

About the Guide

You are not alone. Support is available now.

This guide is for survivors of suicide loss and those who support survivors. It was compiled by people with lived and living experience and health professionals to help you during this difficult time. Please share it with others who may benefit from this information. We hope it will bring comfort and help you navigate the practical matters that survivors face after a suicide.

We encourage you to keep this guide to help you through:

The first few moments;

The first few hours;

The first few days;

The first few weeks;

The first few months; and

The first few years after the suicide of someone you love.

Use the guide at your own pace to find the information to help you through life after loss. It provides information on what to expect, practical matters, grief, and available support.

This guide was developed to provide updated, provincially relevant information for the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador as an initiative of **Our Path of Resilience: An Action Plan to Promote Life and Prevent Suicide in Newfoundland and Labrador**. A special acknowledgment to Richards Legacy Foundation, Community Mental Health Initiative Inc. and Mental Health and Addictions, NL Health Services, for the time, research and care that went into creating this guide.



Having suicidal thoughts after experiencing a suicide loss is more common than people realize. It doesn't mean you will act on them. Remember to breathe. If thoughts of suicide continue, please seek support from a mental health professional, 811, or a trusted loved one.

Early Days After Loss

Coping with the loss of a loved one by suicide is not an easy, clear-cut process. There will be a lot to deal with in the coming days and months. Knowing what to expect can help you or a loved one cope and begin healing from this loss.

There is no timeline for grief or one way to grieve. Heal at your own pace and in your own way.

You may also be dealing with questions from children, family members, police, health providers, media requests, and stigma surrounding suicide. You may feel alone and isolated due to stigma and people's uncertainty of how to respond, but help is available. You are not alone.

Reactions to Suicide

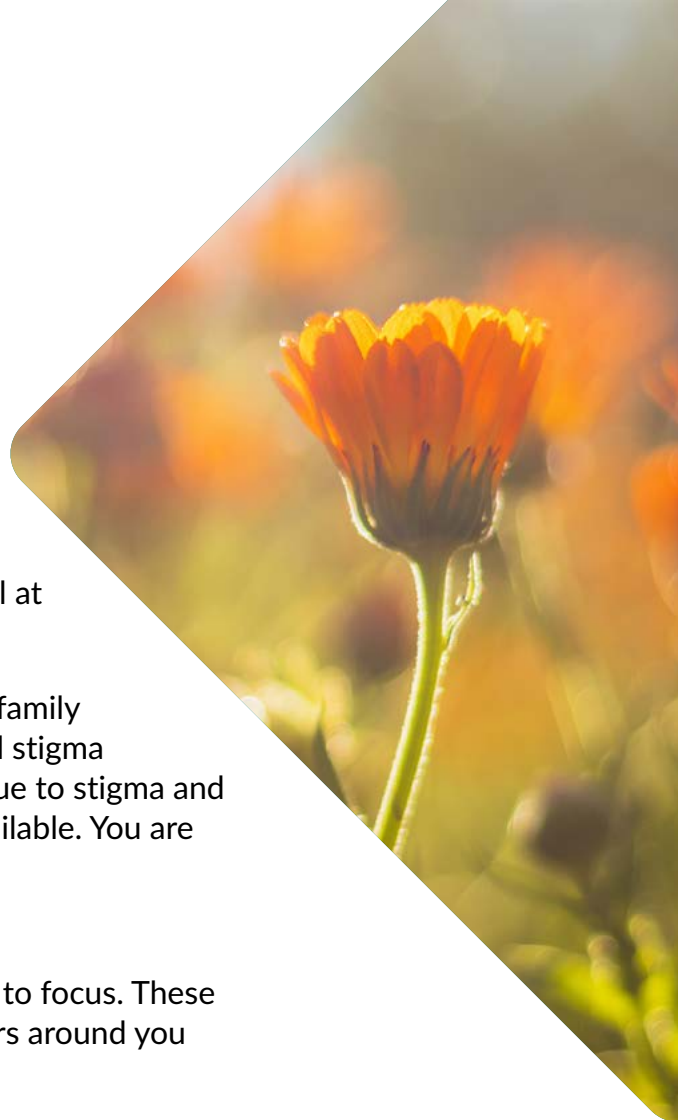
Survivors may feel overwhelmed, numb, or find it hard to focus. These reactions are to be expected after a sudden loss. Others around you will be trying to work through their feelings as well.

Your emotions may feel unbearable at times, and you may have trouble coping with the nature of the death. Grief due to suicide is often complicated in ways other grief may not be, as it is often traumatic. Trying to deal with both trauma and grief can feel debilitating.

You may also have lots of questions about what happened and the suicide. Some answers may never be known or understood.

The grief may come in waves. These emotions and reactions are to be expected after a loss.

- You may experience feelings of guilt about what you did or did not do, and this is a normal response. Self-blame or blaming others is common. Refuse to accept blame from yourself or anyone else. Feeling responsible is not the same as being responsible. Remember, this was not your choice. It was not your fault.
- You may feel overwhelmed by the intensity of your emotions. Know that every feeling you have is valid and part of the grieving process.



- You may feel angry - at the person, the world, yourself, or a higher power. This is a common experience following suicide loss.
- You may feel confused and forgetful; this is expected when mourning. Be gentle with yourself.
- It's okay to cry. Tears are a natural and healing release.

Acknowledge the pain of family and friends, even as you tend to your own. Everyone has their own personal experiences on their healing journey. We can support others while balancing our own needs.

Telling Others

One challenge you may face is what to say when telling others about the suicide. Although it may be difficult to speak openly about suicide, it is important to tell family and friends the truth. This allows them to help each other cope with their grief, and helps you work through yours.

Creating a brief statement that you repeat can be helpful so that you are not trying to think of what to say each time you need to tell someone. You do not have to disclose details to anyone. You might choose to say something as brief as:


- "They died by suicide, and I just can't talk about it yet."
- "They lived with a deep depression and died by suicide."

In addition to telling family and close friends, you will need to notify others whom the loved one had regular contact with. Because telling people can be difficult, you may want to ask someone to help you make these phone calls.

The list of people to inform might include:

- School personnel;
- An employer and work colleagues;
- Health care workers;
- Financial and insurance companies;
- Religious or spiritual organizations; and/or
- The owner of the property where your loved one was living.





Remember!
This was not your
choice, it was not
your fault.

When talking to others about how your loved one died, consider having a “sideways conversation” – that is, situating yourself “hip to hip” so you’re both facing forward. You might, for example, start the conversation while driving, walking, or cooking. Talking and listening without eye contact is a promising strategy for building trust and putting less pressure on everyone, allowing all to speak more openly.

For guidance on talking to children and youth, please see page 21.

Let Others Help You

Your sense of confusion, shock or sorrow may make it hard to know how to respond or get things done. Let others help you. Look to your family, friends, elders, place of worship, community and others for support. They can:

- Support you in seeking information;
- Help you make arrangements following the death of your loved one;
- Assist you making decisions or prioritizing tasks; and
- Be there to listen and share memories of your loved one.

Practical Matters

The death of someone close to you is always difficult. But when the person dies by suicide, you face legal and emergency situations not typical of other deaths. The events and procedures that take place after a suicide can cause great anxiety for survivors. It may help to know why various procedures are necessary.

Understanding Emergency Response and Investigation

Response Personnel

When a sudden death is discovered, Emergency Medical Services, the fire department and the police respond to the emergency call. When the police arrive, they notify the chief medical examiner office of the death.

Emergency Medical Services

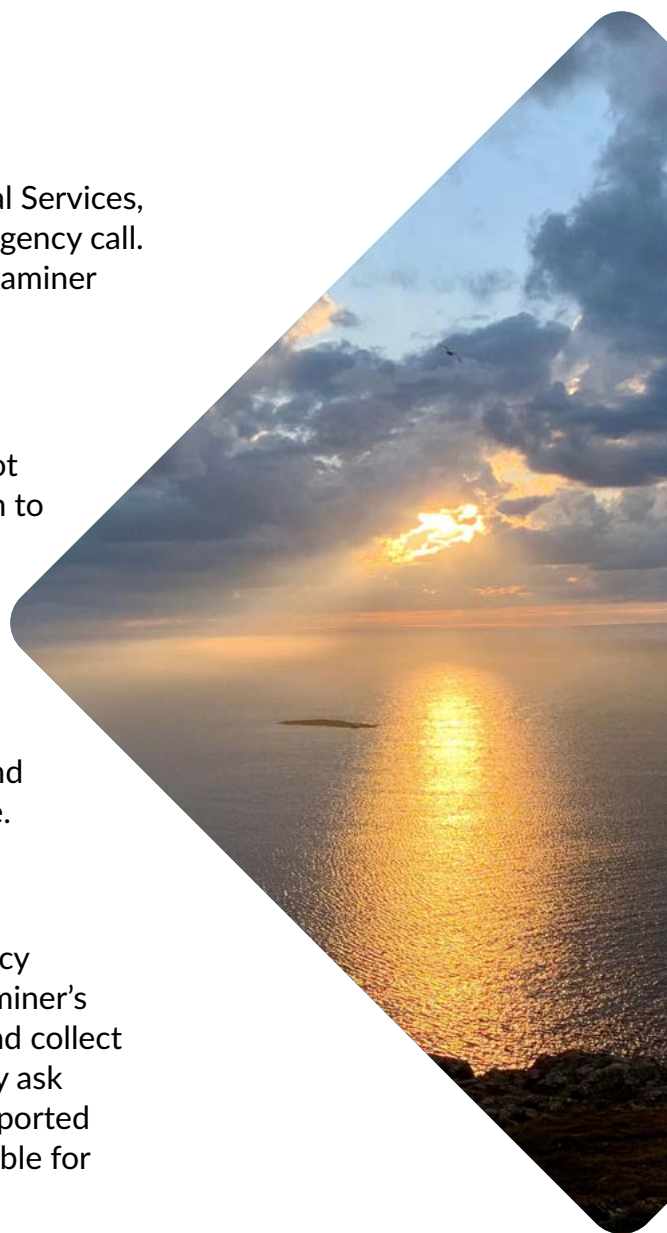
Emergency Medical Services (EMS) provides on-the-spot medical assistance. If the person is alive, they take them to a hospital, where hospital staff take over their care. Or EMS may determine that the person has died.

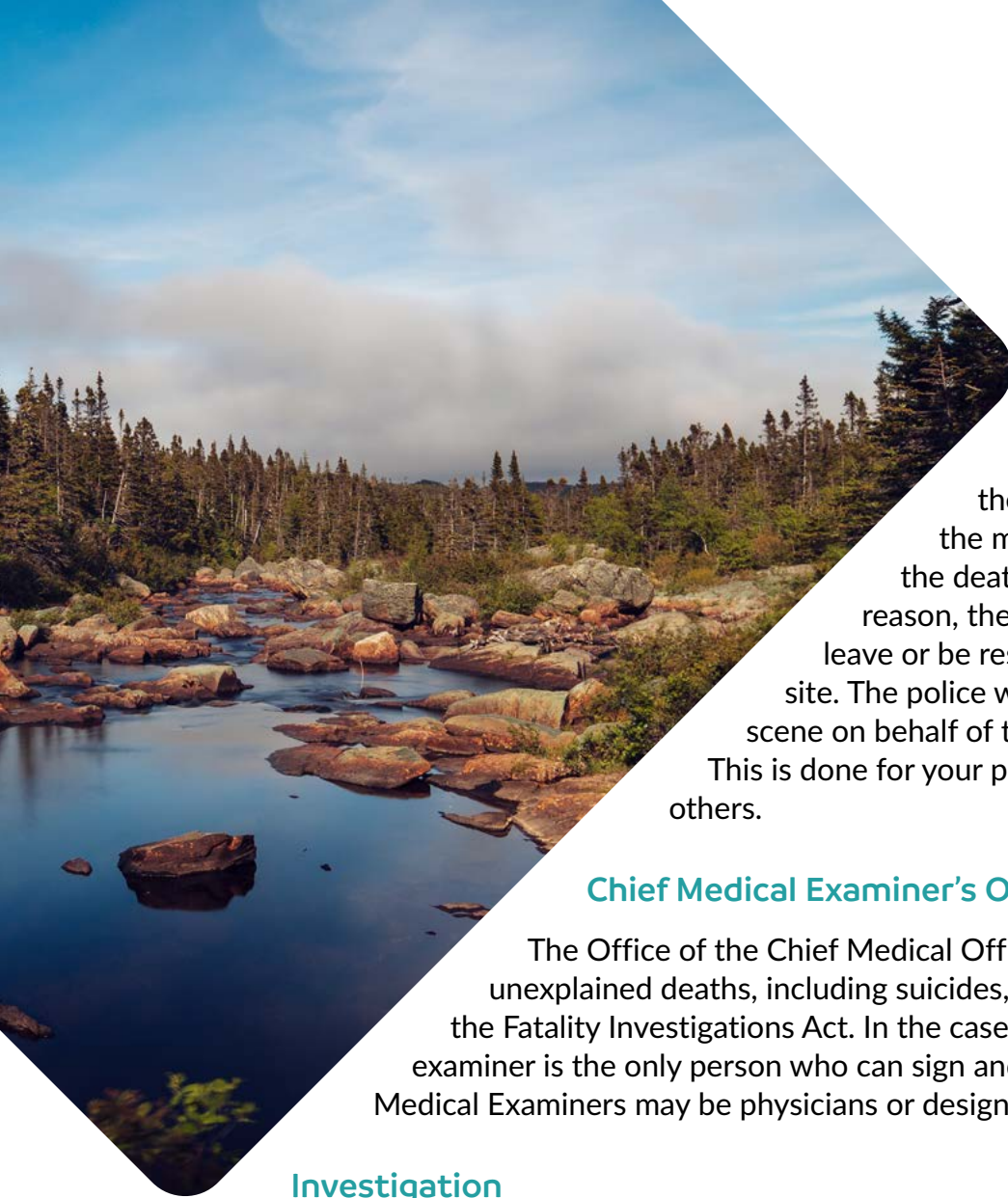
Fire Department

The fire department assists EMS. In rural parts of the province, the fire department may be the first to respond and will provide medical assistance until EMS can arrive.

Police

Police secure the scene and provide safety for emergency personnel and others and notify the Chief Medical Examiner's office. They investigate the death; take photographs; and collect identification, valuables and other items. The police may ask the person who found or identified the loved one, or reported the death, to make a statement. The police are responsible for notifying the next of kin.





It is important to understand that until this investigation is complete, police must consider the scene to be the site of a homicide until the medical examiner determines the death to be a suicide. For this reason, the family may be asked to leave or be restricted from areas of the site. The police will maintain control of the scene on behalf of the Chief Medical Examiner. This is done for your protection and the safety of others.

Chief Medical Examiner's Office

The Office of the Chief Medical Officer investigates all unexplained deaths, including suicides, by the authority of the Fatality Investigations Act. In the case of a suicide, a medical examiner is the only person who can sign and issue a death certificate. Medical Examiners may be physicians or designated police officers.

Investigation

An investigation is done to find out the circumstances of the death. This includes the person's identity, when and where they died, as well as the cause and manner of death. The investigation often includes a review of medical history, and an examination of the body and the scene of the death.

Items Collected at the Scene

The police retain related items collected at the scene of the death (including suicide notes). These items can be returned to the next of kin after the investigation but must be requested and a signature is required.

Autopsy

If the cause of death is obvious, an autopsy may not be done. If there is some doubt about the cause or manner of death, an autopsy may be ordered by the Chief Medical Examiner. An autopsy may include laboratory tests and results may not be known for months after the death.

Consent from next of kin is not required for an autopsy to be done. It is performed at the request of the investigating Chief Medical Examiner. The next of kin should inform the Chief Medical Examiner if there are cultural sensitivities or religious concerns around the autopsy. The next of kin can request a summary of the Chief Medical Examiner's findings and autopsy report.

The Scene After the Investigation

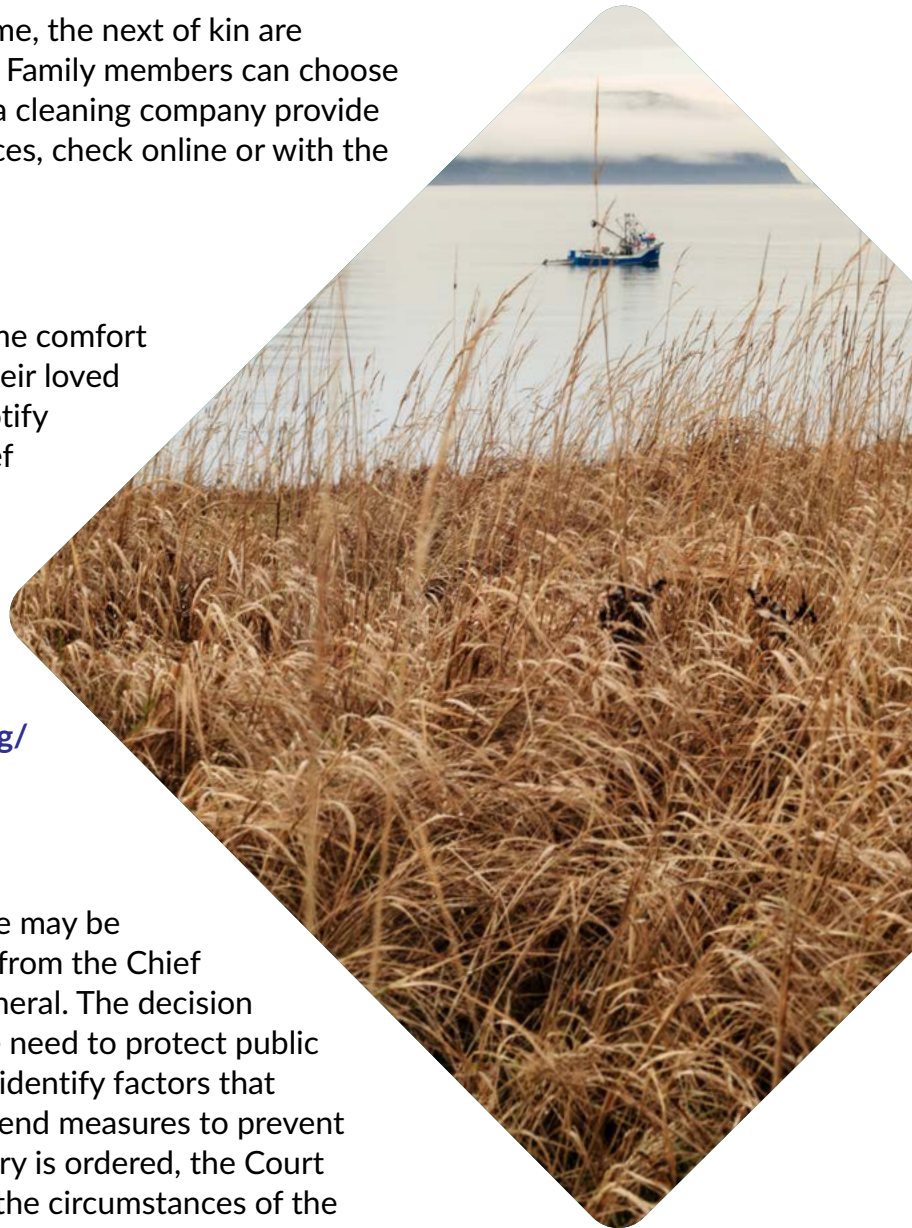
If the death has taken place in the home, the next of kin are responsible for cleaning up the scene. Family members can choose to clean the area themselves or have a cleaning company provide this service. To identify cleaning services, check online or with the funeral home.

Tissue and Organ Donation

After a suicide, survivors may find some comfort in donating the tissues or organs of their loved one. If the family wishes to do this, notify the police. The police will tell the Chief Medical Examiner if a donor card was found on the person. Most people can be considered for tissue donation while organ donation is only possible if death occurs in hospital. For more information, visit: nlhealthservices.ca/service/organ-donation/.

Public Inquiry

A public inquiry into a death by suicide may be ordered following a recommendation from the Chief Medical Examiner to the Attorney General. The decision to conduct the inquiry is based on the need to protect public interest or safety. The inquiry aims to identify factors that contributed to the death and recommend measures to prevent similar events in the future. If an inquiry is ordered, the Court appoints a judge who will investigate the circumstances of the death, determine facts, and make recommendations to prevent similar occurrences.



Funerals and Grieving

Arranging a Funeral

It may be helpful to appoint a family representative or someone you trust. This person could be a distant relative or a close family friend. It is not this person's role to make decisions; rather, they would accompany loved ones to the funeral home and help the family process information to support them in their decision making.

Friends, family, clergy, or the funeral director can help loved ones decide what type of funeral arrangements to make. Honour the wishes of the loved one as much as possible, if they communicated these to you or others. The loved one may have made burial arrangements, left written instructions about organ and tissue donation, or talked about what they wanted to happen upon death.

Guidelines and customs for funeral services vary. Different cultures, religions, and spiritual groups have special rituals to recognize a death.

- A committal service is a brief service where final words of farewell are spoken. It happens at the end of the traditional service and may be done at the graveside, crematorium, or religious institution.
- In military service, the loved one is given military honours. This is available to any veteran or serving member of Canada's Armed Forces.
- A memorial service is similar to a funeral service, except the body of your loved one is not present.
- A celebration of life is a gathering to honour and remember your loved one, focusing on the positive aspects of their life rather than solely mourning their death. It may involve sharing stories, music, and activities that were meaningful to your loved one.
- If you choose not to have a service, you can ask a funeral home to care for the body by arranging for burial or cremation.





Often, the family sets aside time for visitation (for example, at the funeral home in the days prior to the funeral service or in the home in the days following the service). The visitation period can be an important part of the healing journey, as family and friends visit and offer comfort. However, it is a personal decision if you choose to have visitation.

Notification of Death

Writing an obituary may be a difficult task but it may be healing for others. Some families feel comfortable with being open and others do not. Funeral home staff can help you prepare the obituary. Spiritual and religious leaders may help you find the appropriate words. Choose wording that does not perpetuate the stigma of suicide.

Talking about Suicide at the Funeral

It is okay to talk about the suicide at the funeral service. Make sure any mention of suicide in the service is done without judgment. It may be appropriate to acknowledge the pain your loved one was feeling.

Although it is difficult to talk about the suicide, it is generally more difficult to spend energy covering up or hiding the cause of death. In general, you will find people deeply respectful of your hurt.

Celebrate the life of your loved one and talk about memories. Some survivors find it helpful to place an open notebook on a table at the funeral and encourage others to write down their memories of the loved one.

Allow yourself to grieve the relationship you shared. Funerals acknowledge that a valuable life has been lived and the end of that life has a deep impact on the people left behind.

Taking Children to the Funeral

Encourage children to take part in the funeral or ceremony. It may help them as their grief unfolds. It is wise to talk with children ahead of time—in a way they can understand—about what will happen at the funeral and what behaviour is expected of them.

If children do not want to attend the funeral, assure them it is okay not to be there and help them grieve in their own way.

Offer children a role in planning the funeral and allow them at least minor choices (for example, what to wear to the service or whether to bring a flower to place on the casket). Children must be allowed to change their mind about choices they have made (such as attending the ceremony), even at the last moment.

Funeral Costs

Funeral homes are required to provide a full listing of funeral services and associated costs to allow you to assess the total cost prior to making any funeral agreements.

Many families rely on the loved one's life insurance to help cover costs; although death by suicide can have an impact on a life insurance claim. An insurance broker should be able to help you with the policy claim.

Other sources of financial help include:

- The Canada Pension Plan Death Benefit;
- Veterans Affairs (for war veterans or members of the Canadian Armed Forces);
- Band Councils or Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (for status Indians);
- Work-related benefits programs; and/or
- Income Support (if you already receive assistance).

Funeral homes often have resources available to assist you in completing the necessary forms when seeking financial help.



Dealing with Personal, Legal and Financial Matters

You will need to address legal and financial matters following the death of your loved one. You may want to ask other family members or close friends to help you with some of these matters during this difficult time.

First Steps: Gather Documents

The first step in dealing with financial matters is to gather your loved one's documents. This must be done before you (or your financial advisor or the Executor/Executrix of the Will, where one exists) can take care of matters related to the estate. Set up a folder to keep all the personal documents and records of legal and financial matters together.

Estate and Will

The Last Will and Testament names the beneficiaries and outlines how their estate is to be divided after creditors are paid. The Executor/Executrix is responsible for administering the estate. If there is a Will, it is recommended the Executor/Executrix consult a lawyer to probate the Will. Banks and other entities, such as mortgage or insurance companies, typically require Letters of Probate to communicate with the Executor/Executrix.

If there is no Will, the estate is administered in accordance with the Intestate Succession Act, which outlines who is entitled to be a beneficiary of the estate. A direct family member is entitled to petition the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador for a grant of Letters of Administration, seeking their appointment as Executor/Executrix of the estate. If there is no direct family member or other person to administer the estate, the Office of the Public Trustee may, by Court Order, be appointed as Executor/Executrix of the estate. It is recommended to consult with a lawyer for the appointment of the Office of the Public Trustee as Executor/Executrix and the estate administration process. For more information, contact the Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland and Labrador at <https://publiclegalinfo.com/legal-info/wills-and-estates/>.



Next Steps: Take Appropriate Action

Once all documents have been gathered, you or an authorized representative will need to cancel, transfer and apply for various financial benefits or accounts. There are fees associated with some of these matters.

Some funeral homes will do some of the work for you by notifying government offices of the death. This could include handling documents related to:

- Social Insurance numbers;
- Health cards;
- Passports; and
- The Canada Pension Plan.

It is recommended to seek the advice of professionals before making any major decisions that may affect your legal, financial or personal situation.

A checklist is provided to help you navigate practical matters.

Practical Matters Checklist

Personal Documents

- ☐ **Death Certificate**
Contact the Vital Statistics Division to obtain the Death Certificate. It will be needed to cancel, transfer, or apply for benefits. There is no fee when issued within the first year of death.
- ☐ **Social Insurance Number (SIN)**
When death occurs in a Canadian province, the provincial statistics agency automatically notifies the SIN Program. If the death occurs in a territory or outside Canada, provide proof of death at a Service Canada Centre.
- ☐ **Indian Status Cards**
Contact Indigenous Services Canada or Band Office to cancel registration.
- ☐ **Passport**
Mail valid passport to Passport Canada. Include a copy of the death certificate and letter indicating whether to destroy or return passport. Expired passports do not need to be return.
- ☐ **Birth Certificate**
Contact the Vital Statistics Division to obtain a copy.
- ☐ **Driver's License**
Contact the Motor Registration Division to cancel driver's license and apply for any unused portion of the license fee.

Benefits and Employment

- ☐ **Canada Revenue Agency (CRA)**
Contact the CRA as soon as possible to:
 - ☐ File an Income Tax Return
 - ☐ Cancel or transfer GST/HST Credit
- ☐ **Canada Pension Plan**
Contact Service Canada to apply for survivor benefits.
- ☐ **Old Age Security Benefits**
Contact Service Canada to cancel and inquire about entitlements.
- ☐ **Employer**
Contact Employer for Record of Employment, T4, unpaid earnings, benefits, and pension plan.
- ☐ **Income Support**
Contact local Income Support Office
- ☐ **Spousal/Child Support Agreements**
Contact Support Enforcement Program.
- ☐ **Veterans Affairs Benefits**
Contact Veterans Affairs Canada for available support and cancellation.

Legal Matters

- ☐ **Estate and Will**
Consult a lawyer to probate the will and address any outstanding legal matters.
- ☐ **Estate Account**
Open a temporary estate account for estate-related transactions such as funeral costs and transfer of funds.

Practical Matters Checklist

Property

- ☐ **Land Titles**
Update property ownership with a lawyer and check for liens.
- ☐ **Homeowner and Vehicle Agreements**
Provide notice to update, transfer, or cancel mortgage, rental, and lease agreements.
- ☐ **Vehicle Registration**
Transfer ownership or check for liens.
- ☐ **Utility Accounts**
Cancel or transfer account (electricity, phone, internet, heating).
- ☐ **Mail Redirection**
Apply at Canada Post with Death Certificate.

Insurance

- ☐ **Life/Mortgage Life Policies**
Contact providers to cancel or make claims.
- ☐ **Homeowner & Vehicle Policies**
Contact providers to cancel or update policies.
- ☐ **Private Health Coverage**
Contact providers to make a claim, update, or cancel policy.
- ☐ **Funeral Expense Coverage**
Contact providers to make a claim.

Banking

- ☐ **Bank Accounts**
Cancel bank card and transfer joint accounts.
- ☐ **Safety Deposit Box**
Make an appointment to review contents.
- ☐ **Credit Cards, Loans, and Debts**
Contact each Creditor to resolve the balance and close accounts.
- ☐ **Investments**
Contact a financial advisor to discuss assets.

Health Care

- ☐ **Medical Care Plan (MCP)**
Contact MCP to cancel coverage.
- ☐ **Prescription Drugs**
Contact pharmacy to close file. Return unused medication to pharmacy.
- ☐ **Health Care Providers**
Contact doctors, dentists, and other providers to cancel scheduled appointments.

Memberships

- ☐ **Gym and Others**
Cancel any gym, or extracurricular memberships.
- ☐ **Rewards Programs**
Cancel all service subscriptions.
- ☐ **Subscriptions**
Inquire about point transfers.

Healing Forward

Some survivors feel even more pain and emptiness several months after the death. Once the most immediate concerns have been addressed, there are fewer distractions, and others have returned to their daily lives, it can be very lonely and difficult to cope. Be prepared, expect setbacks and reach out for help. Intense emotions may return like waves—this is a normal part of the grieving process.

Healing is about moving forward, not forgetting. You will carry your loved one with you, and even after loss, you can still live a full and meaningful life.

Your Grief is Unique

Grief is deeply personal and does not follow a set timeline or pattern. It tends to ebb and flow, be unpredictable in nature, and may even include feeling many emotions at one time. Among other factors, reactions to death vary according to one's age, culture, coping skills, circumstances of the death, and relationship with the loved one.

Living After Loss

"Life goes on."

"Time heals."

"Tomorrow is another day."

Hearing these statements may offer little comfort. This may come from a reluctance to see our lives move past this tragedy. We may feel that continuing to live diminishes the memory of our loved one, trying to ignore feelings of grief and pain will only prolong them.

"At first it is one second at a time, then one minute at a time, then one hour at a time, one day at a time, one month at a time, one year at a time..."

- MHCC Toolkit

Know that
you can survive.
You may not believe
it now, but survival
and healing
are possible.



Define your relationship with your loved one by celebrating their life rather than focusing on the way they died.

Finding Answers

It's okay to question what happened and keep asking until you no longer need answers, or until partial answers bring some peace. You may never know the answer to "Why?" Survivors often identify a triggering event, like a breakup, as the "cause" of the suicide. However, in most cases, the person had been in deep emotional or physical pain for a long time. Many people hide their feelings or intentions from loved ones.

When should you start getting on with life?

There is no right way to grieve and it's important to be patient and kind to yourself and with those who may not understand your grief.

It is important to acknowledge the confusing emotions that suicide may leave. Some might come to an understanding of their loss quickly where others may take a year to get through the toughest parts, and even longer to truly feel ready to live again. Life has a way of moving us forward whether we are ready or not.

Life experiences remind us our loved ones are not here to share in them. It might even feel like you are "leaving" them behind, but their memory will stay with you always. With time and healing, you will be able to cherish fond memories and celebrate their life as you continue to live yours.

Healing Strategies

Find a Trusted Listener and Keep Talking

As you heal, talk about your memories of the person who died by suicide. Confide in someone you trust, whether a friend, family member, colleague, spiritual leader, or counsellor. It is also helpful to share with someone who has experienced suicide loss. You may find that more people than you realize have been touched by suicide.

People may feel uncomfortable talking about suicide and fear upsetting you more. Let people know it is okay to talk about it and they can help by simply listening. When you talk openly, you give others permission to talk about it too. Keeping silent about suicide adds to feelings of shame.

Set Healthy Boundaries

Choose to do what feels right for you—not what pleases others. Give yourself permission to say “NO.” Avoid people who try to tell you what you should think or feel. Lean on your personal faith, spirituality, or values, whatever brings you comfort.

Connect with Others

Reach out when you need connection. Spending time with others reduces isolation and loneliness.

Feeling is Healing


Allow yourself to fully feel your sadness, anger, guilt, and confusion. Feeling your emotions is a necessary part of healing. Healing forward does not mean forgetting.

Delay Decision-Making

Intense emotions in the early stages of grief impact judgment. If possible, delay major life decisions in the first year.

Accept Help

Sometimes friends and family want to help but do not know how. Tell people what you need. You could suggest tasks like mowing the lawn, grocery shopping, or going for a walk together.



“Grief looks very different for everyone: allow yourself to feel whatever emotions that may arise.” – MHCC Toolkit

Plan for Difficult Days

There will be many times throughout the years when coping with the loss becomes more difficult: anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, and the days or weeks leading up to them. It can help to plan with others about how to acknowledge the day. This gives everyone a chance to support each other and talk about their grief.

There will be other difficult situations that arise. These include receiving mail or a phone call for the person or running into someone who does not know about the death. It can help to have a prepared response or message.

Hold on to Memories

Many survivors find comfort in holding on to items that remind them of the person—furniture, clothing, jewelry, or favourite objects. Create space for remembering your loved one – keep or start new traditions, make a photo album or memory box, or write in a journal. Ask others to share their stories and record them.

Laughter is Medicine

Those who have experienced suicide loss often feel guilty when they find themselves laughing or finding joy in a moment. It's okay to laugh, as it is a valuable part of the healing journey.

“It is also okay
to take a break from
grieving and allow yourself
to enjoy what brings you
happiness without
feeling guilty.”
- MHCC Toolkit





“The message I’d like to share is that there are supports available and we are not alone. There are people who understand you and together we can help offer hope for better days to come.”

- Survivors of
Suicide Loss,
Support Group
Participant

Healing Supports

Consider Seeking Professional Help

It is a courageous and caring choice.

Know that Support Groups can be Powerful Resources.

Connecting with others who have shared lived and living experience can be very empowering. To find support groups in your area call the Mental Health Crisis Line at 811, call or visit Doorways or visit nl.Bridgethegapp.ca

Having Suicidal Thoughts after Experiencing a Suicide Loss is more Common than People Realize.

It doesn’t mean you will act on them. Remember to breathe. If thoughts of suicide continue, please seek support from a mental health professional, 811, or a trusted loved one.

Comfort and Self-Care

Self-soothing refers to actions to reduce distress and find comfort in the moment. It includes things like scrolling on social media, binge watching shows, taking a nap, or other activities with the purpose of distraction. Self-soothing can help us get through a tough moment. Find what works for you and allow yourself to use these activities to help in the short term.

As time passes, you will find the courage and resources to keep going and the energy to be more purposeful about taking care of yourself.

Self-care involves intentional practices that support our physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual health. It often requires more effort and planning but provides longer-lasting benefits. Self-care helps us build resilience over time.

It is important to balance self-soothing with self-care. The key is noticing when self-soothing too much and choosing self-care when possible. Here are some self-care suggestions to support healing:

- Eat a variety of healthy foods each day.
- Be physically active.
- Drink plenty of water and limit caffeine.
- Get enough sleep.
- Try relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, yoga, mindfulness, meditation, and visualization.
- Write down your thoughts, feelings, hopes, and dreams.
- Explore music, art, hobbies, or other forms of expression to work through your feelings.
- Learn about grief, suicide, and how others have learned to cope.
- Create a list of people and organizations that can support you and your family.
- Try to establish routines such as returning to work or creating daily structure.
- Allow moments of joy.
- Take small steps and celebrate each step forward.
- Consider volunteering or helping others in your community.

Be kind to yourself and find what feels right.

Avoid harmful coping. Although alcohol, cannabis, or other drugs may help you relax or cope with stress in the moment, it is important to limit or avoid use to reduce long-term impacts.

Supporting Children and Youth through Suicide Grief

Just like adults, grief for children and youth can range from a minor reaction, to feeling their world has shattered. This depends on factors such as their age and their relationship with the person who has died. In many other ways, however, their grief looks very different from that of adults. As a result, it's often overlooked or misunderstood.

How to Talk About Suicide

One of the hardest decisions that adults face is what to tell children when someone dies by suicide. There is no need to go into the details of the death but speaking in broad terms in age-appropriate language is important.

It is okay for young people to see your sadness, anger, helplessness, and confusion. Reassure them these feelings are not about them. Observing your reactions helps them understand that their own feelings are normal and okay.

Honesty, although difficult, is the best approach when talking with children. Children thrive when they are raised in an environment where they can trust the adults they interact with; and when children are not told the truth of the nature of the death it can have long lasting impacts.

Understanding Grief in Children

There are four common concerns that children and youth have when someone they care about has died. Children and youth who are grieving the death of a loved one from suicide experience the same kinds of worries:

1. **Can I catch it?** Reassure them that they cannot catch suicide or mental illness.
2. **Did I cause it?** Even if they are not outwardly expressing worry or guilt, children and youth need reassurance they are not responsible for the suicide death.
3. **Could I have cured it?** Reassure them mental illness and suicide are complex, and the circumstances are beyond their control.
4. **Who will take care of me?** Reassure children and youth they are not alone, even if it may feel that way. Let them know plans will be made to ensure their safety and care. Talk to them about who may be a part of the plan (parents, family members, other trusted adults, etc.).





Understanding Grief for Youth

Similar to children, youth grieve differently than adults. Like adults, they will ask why and try to comprehend how someone can end their life. However, many youth are more social than adults and they may rely on peers and other groups (such as clubs, teams, and cultural and religious groups) for support. Expressing themselves through social media is common with youth and can also be useful in the grieving process (for example, posting pictures or videos to remember and celebrate the person).

Signs of Grief in Youth

As with adults and younger children, the ways in which youth express their grief will vary. Some common signs include:

- Appearing confused, depressed, angry or guilty.
- Experiencing physical complaints, such as having difficulty eating or sleeping.
- Masking their hurt and pain to fit in with their peers.
- Changes in school-work patterns: either too much or not completing work.
- Feeling different or that they no longer fit in with their peer group.
- Relying on friends or joining groups who feel they understand them more.
- Becoming more helpful to their parents or the surviving parent and taking on the responsibilities of the loved one (especially if it was their parent).
- Becoming overly concerned with the safety of family members and friends.
- Feeling like they have lost their family because the dynamics have shifted.

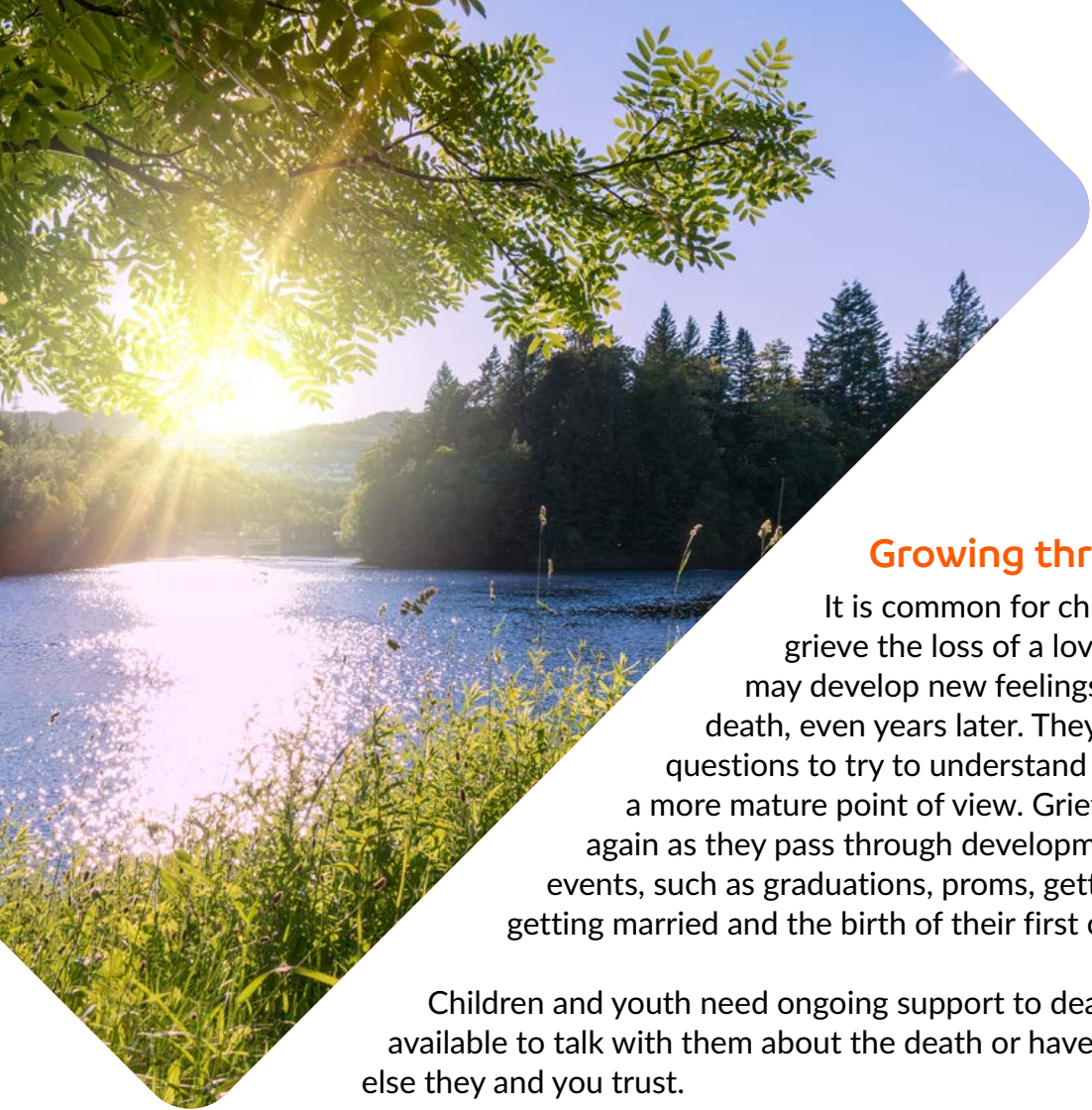
Ways to Help Children and Youth Cope with Grief

For young people, the seriousness of the loss is beyond the innocence of childhood. Their once-predictable life has become uncertain and frightening. Yet grieving children and youth are amazingly resilient and, with support from loved ones, can grieve and begin healing. They need love and ongoing support, regardless of how they seem to be coping. If you are also grieving, make sure you have your own support, while supporting the children and youth.

Here are some ways you can help children and youth cope with their grief:

- Be present and focused. Listen to what they are saying - and what they are not saying.
- Do not force them to talk about the death. Wait until they are ready.
- Create a loving and safe environment where they can ask questions.
- Answer their questions. If they do not get their questions answered, they will fill in the blanks and use their imaginations to come up with scenarios that are often worse.
- Respond only to what they are asking. Do not provide more information than asked.
- Reassure them nothing they said or did could prevent their loved one from dying.
- Accurately describe what has occurred with concepts and words they can understand. For example, do not say "Auntie is sleeping". Instead, you could say "Auntie has died."
- Encourage them to identify and express their thoughts, feelings, and fears.
- Make sure they know it is okay to feel happy as well as sad. Feeling happy (or feeling better) does not mean that they are not sad about the death or that they have forgotten their loved one.
- Provide consistency and routines for children and youth.
- Engage in activities that can take their minds off what has happened or can help them celebrate the person's life. This could include:
 - Drawing, clay, writing, playing with toys;
 - Making a memory picture book or a memory box with favourite mementos;
 - Framing a picture of the person;
 - Planting a tree or garden in the person's honour; and/or
 - Lighting a memorial candle or visiting the cemetery.





Growing through Grief

It is common for children and youth to grieve the loss of a loved one over time. They may develop new feelings and responses to the death, even years later. They often ask different questions to try to understand what happened from a more mature point of view. Grief may be experienced again as they pass through developmental stages and life events, such as graduations, proms, getting their first job, getting married and the birth of their first child.

Children and youth need ongoing support to deal with their grief. Be available to talk with them about the death or have them talk to someone else they and you trust.

Resources available to support children and youth:

- Supporting Children and Youth to Grieve After Suicide Loss Toolkit Parent/Caregiver Booklet and printable Workbooks for Children and Youth
<https://pei.cmha.ca/suicide-prevention/supporting-children-and-youth-to-grieve-after-suicide-loss/>
- Talking to Children About a Suicide, MHCC
https://suicideprevention.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Talking_to_children_about_a_suicide_eng-MHCC.pdf
- Suicide Grief in Children and Adolescents
<https://suicideprevention.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Suicide-Grief-in-Children-and-Adolescents.pdf>

Beyond Surviving

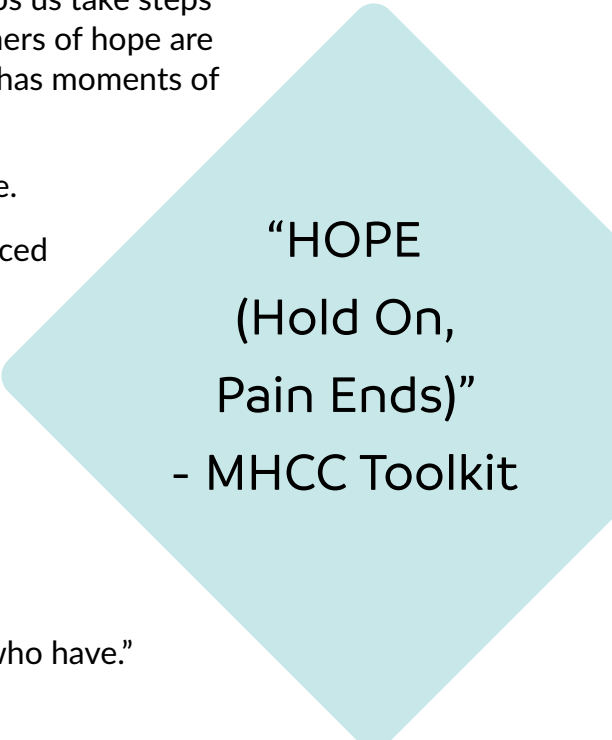
Finding Hope, Purpose, Meaning, and Belonging After Suicide Loss

Losing someone to suicide is a life-altering experience. Over time and with support, it is possible to find glimmers of hope, re-establish a personal sense of purpose, rediscover meaning in your daily activities, and regain a sense of belonging.

Hope

Hope allows us to believe things can be okay again and helps us take steps forward even when we cannot see the path forward. Glimmers of hope are small, positive reminders that life, even with its difficulties, has moments of joy, connection, and potential for better things.

- Look for those glimmers or positive moments in daily life.
- Find hope in connecting with others who have experienced a similar loss.
- Collect warm memories to bring you a sense of calm in difficult moments.
- Allow yourself to feel joy without guilt.
- Use words such as 'when', 'I believe,' and 'yet' as the language of hope.
"When I am feeling stronger..."
"I believe I will get through this because I know others who have."
"I do not know how to handle this yet."



"HOPE
(Hold On,
Pain Ends)"
- MHCC Toolkit

Purpose

Following a suicide loss, your old routines and activities may feel less important as your priorities have shifted. A new purpose may emerge from your experience of loss or the need to move away from that experience – both are okay.

- How has this experience changed you?
- What is important to you now?
- What do you need now?
- Is there something you wish others knew?

Meaning

You may never fully understand why your loved one died but you can still find meaning in how you choose to live each day. Memory projects, old traditions, or creating new ones may help bring strength.

- How do you want to remember and honour your loved one?
- What would you like others to know and remember about your loved one?

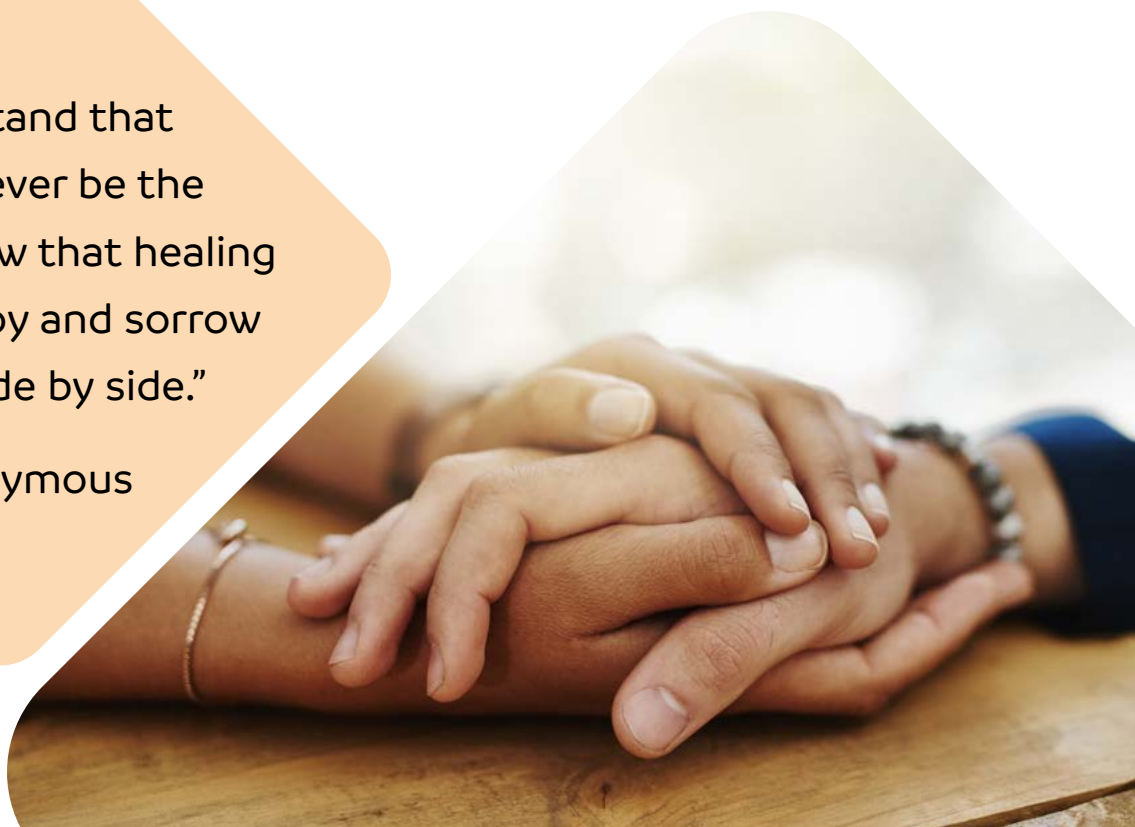
Belonging

Belonging comes through connection to others – your family, friends, and community. You are not alone.

- Look for people who share your experience or activities.
- Strengthen relationships with those who have supported you during this difficult time.
- Connect with a local suicide loss support group or find an online forum.
- Attend community events that provide education or support people who have experienced suicide loss.

“Understand that
you will never be the
same but know that healing
is possible. Joy and sorrow
can live side by side.”

- Anonymous



Suicide is not a desire to end life. It is a need to end pain.

Misconceptions to Meaning: Shifting Thoughts Toward Healing

This section aims to help identify and change unhelpful patterns of thinking that you may experience or comments you may encounter that contribute to shame and stigma.

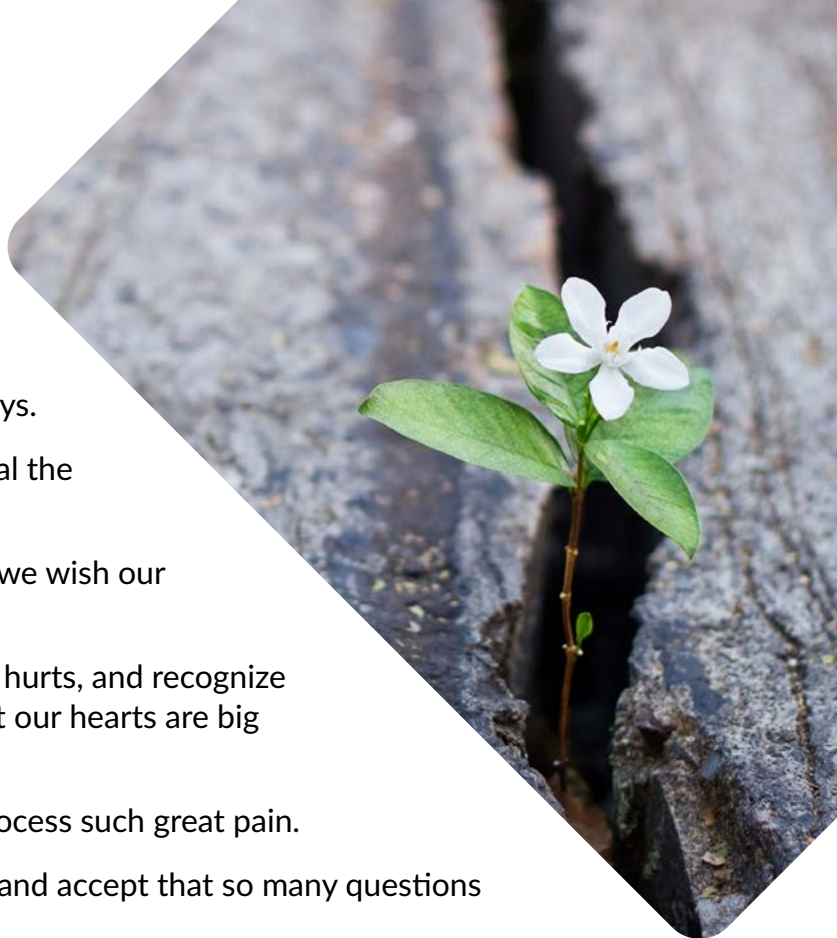
Myth	Fact
Suicide can be predicted.	Even trained professionals cannot always predict who will end their life. It is never anyone's fault for 'missing' the signs or failing to predict and prevent suicide.
Suicide is caused by mental illness.	There is no single cause of suicide. Having a mental illness can increase your risk of suicide, but there are many factors. Things like loss, addictions, trauma, depression, serious physical illness, and major life changes can make some people feel overwhelmed and unable to cope. It is not necessarily the nature of the loss or stress that makes someone want to end their life — it is the feeling that these things are unbearable.
People who consider suicide only want to end their life.	Most people who attempt suicide do not necessarily want to die, but they do want to end their emotional pain. They may be overcome with hopelessness and unable to see another way out of their situation.
Suicide is a sign of weakness.	Suicide is not a sign of weakness or a character flaw. It is not selfish or a cry for attention. These ideas are all part of the stigma that surrounds suicide and can stop people from seeking help.

Unhelpful Thoughts	Helpful Thoughts
It was someone's fault that this happened.	It is never anyone's fault for 'missing' the signs or failing to predict and prevent suicide. There is no single cause of suicide.
What if... I was able to stop them. They would have been okay.	I have no way of knowing what would have happened if events had played out differently. Some people go on to take their lives despite intervention.
The person I lost is selfish for having done this.	The person I lost was very likely struggling with emotional pain and felt like they were a burden.
The person I lost seemed to 'have it all'.	The person I lost was an individual who was struggling in silence.
I should have seen this coming.	I cannot predict the future and did the best I could with the knowledge I had.
I should have been able to save them.	I am only human and cannot control all of the events around me.
I can never be happy again.	My life will forever be changed, but my life will go on.

Messages of Hope

- May we be free to grieve in our own ways.
- May we take all the time we need to heal the wounds nobody can see.
- May we give ourselves the compassion we wish our loved ones could have felt.
- May we open our hearts even though it hurts, and recognize that it hurts because it matters, and that our hearts are big enough to hold it all.
- May we allow ourselves the space to process such great pain.
- May we learn patience and forgiveness and accept that so many questions will not have answers.
- May we never close our own lives to the support we know we need.
- May the support systems we build teach us courage and faith, and to honour our loved ones' lives and everything they were to us.
- May the pain we carry grow lighter as we grow stronger.
- May we find purpose in the darkness we've crawled through and be brave enough to make meaning out of what we can't change.
- May we choose expression over silence, and solidarity over solitude.
- May we create something beautiful out of what happened, whatever kind of beauty we're drawn to, and may everything we do in love be done for them.
- In their name, may we learn to love all over again, and again, and again.
- "May the radiance and beauty of their lives never be defined by their death."
(unknown)
- As we remember their light, may we feel that same light flowing through our veins.
- No matter how long it's been, may we feel their presence so completely, it's almost as if they've never left.

Source: [A Prayer for Those Who Have Lost Loved Ones to Suicide– Healing Brave](#)





Supports and Services

Help is available now!

Call the Mental Health Crisis Line at 811. 811 offers 24/7 mental health, substance use, and gambling crisis support and can connect individuals to emergency and crisis response services, including 911 and mobile crisis response teams, as needed.

Call or visit Doorways or your local Mental Health and Addictions Office. NL Health Services offers quick access to mental health and addictions counselling services.

Visit nl.bridgethegapp.ca, Newfoundland and Labrador's website for mental health, substance use, and gambling information. Browse the service directory to find local services and supports. Check out the selection of free **E-Mental Health Programs** available to people of all ages.

Local Emergency Departments provide care during urgent, life-threatening situations that need immediate help, 24 hours a day. To access emergency services, go to your local emergency department or call 911.

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