

When someone dies by suicide, the mourning traditions that have always existed for the living still belong to you. The funeral, the wake, the gathering after -- these ceremonies hold grief, gather community, and say publicly that this person lived and mattered. This handout draws on peer experience and bereavement research to help survivors understand what these traditions offer and how stigma can complicate access to them.

Why These Ceremonies Exist

- Mourning customs create a structured pause where the reality of the death can begin to become real. They gather community and give mourners permission to weep, speak, and hold one another.
- These traditions exist for the living. None of them are contingent on the cause of death. For more on the role ritual plays over time, see [Ritual and Remembrance](#).
- For many survivors, the ceremonies they were most afraid of become the ones that gave them the most. The room does not collapse when the truth is spoken.

Before the Ceremonies Begin

- When someone dies by suicide, a police response and medical examiner process typically follow. The body cannot be released to a funeral home until the investigation is complete, a delay that can take one to several days.
- This waiting period is specific to suicide loss. Many survivors describe it as a fog within a fog. If you are still in it, the ceremonies do come.

How Suicide Loss Changes the Room

- Stigma does not stay outside the funeral home. It can surface in relatives' comments, in pressure to conceal the cause of death in the obituary, and in decisions about what to put on the stone.
- Research consistently identifies stigma as a factor that complicates grief. When survivors cannot speak openly about how their person died, they lose access to the acknowledgment these ceremonies are designed to provide. Telling Your Story After Suicide Loss walks through the disclosure decision.
- Your person deserves to be remembered. Their name deserves to be legible on a stone. Choosing an unmarked grave out of shame is stigma at work, not truth.

Children at the Service

- Expert guidance consistently shows that prepared children who are given the choice fare better than children who are excluded. The National Alliance for Grieving Children offers resources grounded in bereavement research.
- Children kept away absorb a lesson that death is something to be hidden. A child told beforehand what they will see is far better equipped than one brought in without context.
- Allowing children to be present, to see community gathered and hear the person spoken of with love, gives them something to hold onto. AFSP's Children, Teens and Suicide Loss is a practical companion resource.

Source

<https://sunflowersaftersuicide.com/funerals-wakes-and-the-gathering-after-honoring-someone-we-lost-to-suicide/>