

When someone dies by suicide, the people around them often want to help but don't know how. This handout is written for the friends, family members, and colleagues of suicide loss survivors who are trying to show up. It draws on peer experience and bereavement research to explain what survivors most need from the people around them, and what common responses unintentionally get in the way.

Why This Grief Is Different

- Suicide loss carries layers that other losses often don't. Survivors frequently live with guilt, unanswered questions, and shame alongside the grief itself.
- Many survivors are in a trauma response before they are even in a grief response. The emotions that follow can include rage, numbness, relief, and devastation, sometimes all within the same hour.
- Research shows that survivors face higher rates of prolonged grief responses than people who lose someone to other causes. Knowing this helps supporters respond to what is actually happening.

Show Up and Stay

- Support tends to peak in the first week and drop off sharply after the funeral, exactly when survivors are most raw. Checking in two or three weeks after the death, and again months later, matters more than most people realize.
- You do not need the right words. If you are frozen, say so: "I don't know what to say, but I'm here." Survivors hear the honesty in that sentence. It tells them you are not going to disappear.
- Keep inviting even when the answer is no. Many survivors decline plans for months before they are ready. When supporters stop asking, survivors notice. Keep the door open and let them decide when to walk through it.

What Helps and What Doesn't

- Say the name of the person who died. This is one of the most consistently comforting things a supporter can do. It confirms that the person is remembered and has not been erased.
- Avoid cliches like "everything happens for a reason," "at least they're not suffering," or "you need to be strong." These phrases tend to close the conversation and can feel like a dismissal of the grief.
- Do not push for explanations of why the death happened. Survivors are already searching. They need support for their own search, not someone else's answer. See [Roadblocks to Healing](#) for more on what gets in the way.

Supporting Someone Over the Long Term

- There is no standard timeline. Many survivors find the second year harder than the first. Remember the hard dates: the anniversary of the death, the birthday of the person who died, and the holidays. A short message on those days saying "I'm thinking about you and about [name]" is enough.
- Peer support groups for suicide loss survivors offer something almost no one else can: a community that understands this grief without needing it explained. The [AFSP maintains a searchable directory](#) of groups at afsp.org.
- The [Alliance of Hope for Suicide Loss Survivors](#) offers online peer forums for those who cannot reach an in-person group. If the survivor seems resistant to seeking help, gently mentioning these resources once, without pressure, is enough.

Source

<https://sunflowersaftersuicide.com/supporting-someone-after-suicide-loss-what-actually-helps/>