



When someone dies by suicide, a phone or laptop can feel like the last door that has not been opened. This handout addresses both the practical barriers to device access and the harder question underneath: what are you hoping to find, and will finding it help you or cause new pain?

The Technical Reality: What to Know Before You Try

- Guessing a passcode too many times can permanently wipe an iPhone, so if you do not know the passcode, stop and explore legal options first.
- [Apple's Digital Legacy Contact](#) and [Google's Inactive Account Manager](#) allow a designated person to request account access after a death, but only if set up in advance.
- Facebook and Instagram each have their own tools: [Facebook's legacy contact and memorialization](#) and a [memorialization request for Instagram](#) both work without unlocking the physical device.

What You Want and What You Need Are Not the Same

- What was on the device was written when their brain was betraying them, and may reflect a mind in crisis rather than the whole person you knew.
- Data is not the same as an answer: in fifteen years of hearing survivors describe what they found, the answer to why almost never comes with it.
- The [search for understanding after suicide loss](#) rarely ends at a device, and fragments of their final days rarely close the wound.

Their Privacy, Their Intent, and Your Family

- The passcode and locked accounts were choices they made when they were more themselves, and going in with awareness of that matters.
- You are not the only person this decision affects: what one family member finds and carries afterward ripples into everyone who is grieving.
- A conversation with the others who are in this grief alongside you, before anyone tries to access the device, can matter more than most people expect.

How to Approach Access and What Else to Try

- Ask someone you trust completely to preview the device first; a helper can coordinate this, and if you go through it yourself, do not do it alone or when you are already depleted.
- Friends, classmates, and coworkers often have photos and videos your person shared with them, and a direct request is often enough to open that door.
- Connection with others who understand this grief, through AFSP's Healing Conversations program or a local support group, is often more sustaining than anything a device holds.

Source

<https://sunflowersaftersuicide.com/accessing-device-after-suicide-loss/>