



Sunflowers After Suicide

Writing the Obituary: A Family Worksheet

This worksheet is for families writing an obituary after a suicide loss. It is meant to be printed and used in the first days after a death, alone or together, in whatever order is useful. You do not have to finish it in one sitting, and you do not have to finish it at all. If you can, have someone sit with you while you work through it.

Start Here: Three Things Worth Knowing

- 1. You may not need to decide anything today.** A short death notice, just the name, the date, and the service details, can run now, with the fuller obituary written later when there is more room to think. Most funeral homes will do this if you ask.
- 2. The cause of death may still be pending.** When a death is sudden, the medical examiner or coroner may take weeks or months to rule. Until then you may not be able to state a cause even if you want to. Ask your funeral director where your family's case stands. If your family has a life insurance policy, ask the funeral director or an attorney about wording before you finalize anything.
- 3. This is a first draft, not a headstone.** Almost every obituary now lives on a funeral home website, and almost every funeral home will revise it later if you ask. Whatever you write this week can be changed.

A Note Before the Wording Pages

Most of an obituary is about a life, not a death. The hardest sentence is usually one sentence in a page of otherwise ordinary details. That is why this worksheet starts with the life. If you only have the energy for one page today, make it the next one.

Full context for all of this is at [Obituary After Suicide Loss: What to Say and How to Say It](#) on Sunflowers After Suicide.

Their Life: The Part That Fills the Page

Fill in whatever you can. Skip anything that does not apply or that you do not know. A life cut short is often a list of things that were still open, and those are worth writing down too. If your mind goes blank, that is grief, not a failure of love.

Before you start, text five people and ask each for one specific memory, the smaller the better. Not condolences, one memory. Twenty minutes gives you details your own mind cannot reach today.

Full name, and the name people actually called them

Date and place of birth

Where they lived over the years

Schools, training, degrees

Work, military service, or what filled their days

Faith community, clubs, teams, volunteer work

What they loved doing (hobbies, music, sports, the outdoors)

Something they were known for, or that made people laugh

Survived by (spouse, children, parents, siblings, grandchildren, close friends)

Family members who died before them

Service details (date, time, place)

Memorial gifts to

Memories other people gave us

Three Ways to Say It: A Wording Bank

Families name suicide directly, soften the language, or let a memorial charity speak for them instead. All three are legitimate. Take whichever sentence fits and change it however you need.

Naming it directly

- *[Name] died by suicide on [date], after a courageous struggle with depression.*
- *[Name] took his/her life on [date], following a long battle with [depression / bipolar disorder].*
- *[Name] died by suicide on [date]. His/her family asks that you hold his/her whole life, and not just this one day, close.*

Softening the language

- *[Name] died suddenly on [date].*
- *[Name] passed away unexpectedly on [date].*
- *[Name] died on [date], after a long struggle with depression.*
- *[Name] died on [date], after an illness few people could see.*

Naming a cause instead of the method

- *In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (afsp.org).*
- *In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (nami.org) in [name]'s memory.*
- *Memorial gifts may be made to the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (dbsalliance.org).*

A note on "lost their battle"

This is the most common softened phrase, and many families want it. Some survivors find it implies the person did not fight hard enough, which is the opposite of what most of us believe happened. If it lands wrong, "after a long struggle with depression" carries the same meaning without the scoreboard.

If your family wants faith language

Language about peace and rest carries no judgment and works across traditions. Language about being held is where most modern pastoral teaching sits. If your own faith is shaken right now, you can write something true without claiming more certainty than you have this week.

- *Now at peace.*
- *At rest, and finally free from the pain he carried.*
- *Held now in the mercy of God.*
- *Safe with a God who understands what we cannot.*
- *We trust her to the God who made her and loved her first.*
- *We commend him to God, and trust what we cannot yet understand.*

Two notes. Citing a scripture reference rather than printing the verse keeps the obituary short; Psalm 34, verse 18, tends to land hardest in this grief. And many clergy steer families away from "God called him home" after a suicide death, since it can be read as God having caused it. Your service description often

carries your faith without a separate sentence.

Words most safe messaging guidance asks families to avoid

- *committed suicide (frames it as a crime)*
- *successful or unsuccessful attempt*
- *chose to end his/her life (suggests a free choice rather than an illness)*
- *any description of the method, which can be harmful to other readers who are struggling*

See the [AFSP guide to talking safely about suicide](#) for the full guidance.

Draft Your Own Wording

Try more than one version. Nothing here is final until you say it is.

First attempt

A second version, if the first does not feel right

Talking It Through as a Family

If people disagree, that is common and it is not a permanent rupture. The short death notice buys you time to keep talking.

- Do we want to name suicide directly, soften it, or let a memorial gift speak for us?
-
- Has anyone told the children in our family, and what words did we use with them?
-
- Is there a charity or cause that felt meaningful to [name]?
-
- Do we want a faith leader to read this before it goes out, or suggest wording?
-
- Who else needs to see this before it is finalized?
-
- If we do not agree, can we run a short notice now and decide the rest later?
-

Other things we want to remember or discuss

One question worth saving for later, not today: are we comfortable with this wording still being findable online years from now? It can be revised when you are ready.

After It Publishes

Most obituaries go live with a guest book or comment field, and get shared to social media within the hour. Most of what arrives is kindness. Some of it is harder, including a comment that names suicide when your family chose not to, or a public question about how it happened.

Funeral home guest books are almost always moderated. You can ask to have a comment removed, or to turn comments off entirely, at any point and without explaining why. It also helps to ask one person outside the household to watch the guest book and social posts for a few days and tell you only what you need to know.

Who is watching the guest book and social media for us

Comments we want removed, or a note to ask the funeral home about

People who should be told before the obituary goes live

If There Are Children in the Family

Grief organizations that work specifically with children have found that honesty, in words that fit a child's age, protects them better than silence does. When adults leave gaps, children often fill them with guesses that are harder to carry than the truth.

This is about what you tell a child directly, not about what a public document says. You can soften the obituary and still tell your child the truth at home. Children bereaved by suicide also carry higher risk themselves, which is worth knowing and worth watching for.

For age-specific toolkits and local referrals, contact [Doug Center](#), [Eluna Network](#), or, for military families, [TAPS](#). None of them require you to have your words figured out first.

For Your Funeral Director

This page can be handed directly to a funeral director or newspaper contact.

Most funeral homes default to gentle, general language when a death is by suicide unless a family says otherwise. This family may want something different, whether that means naming suicide directly, using specific softened language they have chosen, or naming a particular memorial charity. Please ask rather than assume.

Four specific requests that help families most. First, please tell them where the medical examiner's ruling stands, since that may determine what can be printed. Second, if a short death notice now and a fuller obituary later would serve them better, please offer that option. Third, please provide the final text as an editable document, not only a printed proof, since many families revise the wording months or years later. Fourth, please explain how the online guest book works, including whether comments are moderated, how the family can have one removed, and whether comments can be turned off entirely.

Funeral home contact and phone

What we agreed on, and the date

Family's draft wording (or attach separately)

If You Cannot Face Writing It

The [Society of Professional Obituary Writers](#) keeps a directory of writers who will interview your family and draft this for you, usually within a day or two. Many funeral homes can also recommend someone local.

Full post: <https://sunflowersaftersuicide.com/obituary-after-suicide-loss-what-to-say-and-how-to-say-it/>