



# LOSING A LOVED ONE TO SUICIDE DURING COVID-19

## AROHA FROM AFAR – HE AROHA MAU ROA

UPDATED JUNE 2020

This resource was developed by people with lived experience of suicide loss. Everyone's loss is unique, we hope this resource is helpful for you. We'd also like to acknowledge cultural differences in grieving. Please feel free to adapt the information in this resource for your own situation.

The death of a loved one is one of life's most difficult experiences. If you're here because you've lost someone you care about to suicide, we'd like to acknowledge your loss and the emotions you may be feeling.

Suicide loss is a traumatic event. The grief that comes with it may differ from other forms of grief in its intensity and duration. Feelings of guilt may occur along with 'why' questions. It's normal to wish we could have done more to prevent a suicide.

It's important to know, a suicide death is no-one's fault. Suicide is never the result of one thing only. Suicide is complex, an outcome influenced by many factors coming together at one time.

### GRIEF AND LOSS – CHALLENGES DURING COVID-19

Grief is our natural response to losing a loved one. This can present in many ways. In addition to experiencing grief you may also be concerned about preventing the spread of COVID-19.

- A death by suicide is particularly difficult to comprehend. You may be experiencing intense shock, confusion and grief, this is normal.
- There will be practical things to deal with, on top of trauma, shock and grief. Ask for the support you need.
- With so much happening in the world right now, you may feel overwhelmed or numb. It's actually ok to be numb for a time, to focus on surviving in the immediate now. Your grief is still there, underneath it all.
- Suicide loss can feel isolating. You may feel disconnected from the rest of the world. Know it's not just you, and you are not alone.



**REMEMBER: IN GRIEF YOU CAN ONLY DO  
THE BEST YOU CAN, BE KIND TO YOURSELF**



## FUNERAL, TANGIHANGA AND HONOURING A PERSON'S LIFE

New Zealand is at alert level one. Funeral and tangihanga are now back to normal with no restrictions.

There are no physical distancing requirements at level one. You can still play it safe by keeping a distance between yourself and people you don't know. Use your judgement.

Funeral Directors and those holding tangihanga are no longer required to keep records of those attending. However for contract tracing purposes, you may want to keep a record of where you've been, when you were there and who you've met.

People who are sick with cold or flu-like symptoms are advised not to attend.

Some restrictions still apply: people in managed isolation or quarantine cannot attend funerals or tangihanga. International travel restrictions are still in place.

This may affect you if the person you lost lived in another country and you can't travel there, or if people living overseas would like to attend a funeral or tangihanga in New Zealand.

For more information please see the Ministry of Health/Manatū Hauora website page for [COVID-19 Deaths, funerals and tangihanga](#).

If for any reason you cannot attend a funeral or tangihanga due to COVID-19 restrictions, the venue where the funeral or tangihanga is being held may be able to supply a video link to watch proceedings online. Or you may like to create your own farewell. You can put up a photo of your loved one, say a karakia/prayer, light a candle, or share memories of that person.

## PRACTICAL TIPS

- You might like to keep a notebook handy. Lots can be going on and it may be hard to focus and remember things. Write all important and helpful information down, anything you might need to remember.
- You may have many 'why' questions around suicide and what was going on for the person who died. You may feel like you're on a detective trail, searching for answers. This is normal after a suicide. Just take your time and look after yourself. It's important to

remember, suicide is a 'multi-factorial' issue, meaning many factors are involved. Suicide is never the result of one thing only. Some factors may be known, while others are unknown.

- Give yourself time to grieve. Be kind to yourself, something big has happened and it may take some time for you to find a way forward.

## GETTING THROUGH TOGETHER – WHĀIA E TĀTOU TE PAE TAWHITI

Communicate with key people in the life of the person who has died. Phones and social media platforms offer us ways to keep in touch, to share memories, photos and stories. Even if we can't be together in person, we can reach out online to feel less alone.

Talking about how you are feeling is important. Perhaps ask a friend to check in with you every few days via phone, text, FaceTime or other video apps. It's the gentle support and connection with others that counts.

If you're supporting someone who's bereaved by suicide and find it hard to know what to say, it's ok to say that. You can ask them how they are and let them talk more than you do. It's ok to say the name of the person who died. Or if they don't want to talk about it now, let them know you're there to listen whenever they'd like to. You can also offer practical support and take over a prepared meal, help with the laundry, babysitting or grocery shopping.

Sympathy cards can be used to share remembrance stories. Find a card with lots of blank space inside and write a personal story or memory of the person you'd like to share. It's healing to write a precious memory down and the bereaved family may appreciate receiving these.

If there are tamariki/children in your family, check-in with them often. Answer their questions honestly. Tamariki may appear sad and happy in the space of minutes. Let them set their own pace.

Try to limit how much news and social media you consume – when we are experiencing sadness and trauma, regular news can be distressing.

It's ok to alternate grieving with other activities. Doing this can help us adjust to loss while managing everyday life.



**GENTLY REMIND PEOPLE GRIEF IS  
DIFFERENT FOR EVERYONE, TRY NOT TO  
JUDGE YOURSELF OR OTHERS.  
LET GO OF EXPECTATIONS RIGHT NOW.**

## FINDING SUPPORT

Counsellors and grief counselling are available for face to face meetings, online and by phone. For more information and to find a counsellor please see:

[The New Zealand Association of Counsellors](#)

[Talkingworks](#)

[New Zealand Psychological Society](#)

[New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists](#)

[Skylight Trust](#)

[The Grief Centre \(Auckland\)](#)

[Grief Support Services \(Tauranga\)](#)

[Loss and Grief Centre \(Invercargill\)](#)

## FREE 24/7 PHONE HELPLINES

Free call or text 1737 anytime to talk to a trained counsellor.

**Lifeline** – 0800 543 354 or free text 4357 (HELP)

**Youthline** – 0800 376 633 or free text 234

**Samaritans** – 0800 726 666

See the Mental Health Foundation website for more [helplines](#)

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

[After a Suicide NZ](#), website developed by Mental Health Foundation for the Ministry of Health

[COVID-19, Deaths, funerals and tangihanga](#), New Zealand Ministry of Health

[Funeral Directors Association of New Zealand website](#)

[#Manaaki20, Resources](#)

[Te Puni Kōiri, COVID-19 information for Māori](#)

[Le Va - When you're grieving](#)

[Mental Health Foundation - Looking after mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19](#)

[Mental Health Foundation - Suicide bereavement information](#)

## FOR THE LATEST INFORMATION, UPDATES AND ADVICE ON COVID-19

Please see the New Zealand Ministry of Health, [Manatū Hauora website](#)

**GETTING  
THROUGH  
TOGETHER**

WHĀIA E TĀTOU TE PAE TAWHITI

**ALL RIGHT?**

 **Mental Health Foundation**  
mauri tū, mauri ora OF NEW ZEALAND