

# Suicide in schools: Information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families



## You might have heard a suicide has occurred at your young one's school.

The suicide of a young one is a very sad and difficult time. It affects students, the school staff, parents and the community. Here is some useful information that can help you and your young one through this difficult time.

## How young ones may respond

Young people respond to the suicide of a young person in lots of different ways. You may notice that they experience times when they are:

- Confused
- Cranky or angry
- Fearful of death or dying
- Feeling guilt
- In denial about the death
- Feeling betrayed or abandoned
- Hurt
- Sad and weak in spirit
- Avoiding the things they usually enjoy
- Spending less time with family and friends
- Longing for country or home

Your young one's response may be influenced by their personality, their relationship with the deceased person, what is happening in their life, past experiences and their ability to adjust to change. It is different for everyone, some reactions can happen weeks, months or a year after an event. Young ones need opportunities to express how they feel in safe and helpful ways.

They may need extra support during this time and could benefit from having a yarn about dreamtime and spiritual visions. Family yarning about cultural ways and sorry business is an important part of their grieving.

Be guided by the young one's need to yarn and make sure that they understand that the family is there to support them.

Young ones who have experienced difficult times in their lives may find it harder to cope. They may stay away from everyone and want space, or they may be cranky one minute then really happy the next. This could be confusing for them and the family, but it's part of them expressing how they feel. It is important that the people who support the young one are aware of the death so that they can offer their support and care.

## Practical ways you can support a young one who is grieving following a suicide

While many young ones will deal with their sorry business in their own time, there are a range of things you can do to help and support them:

- Let your young one have some time out if they need it, they don't need to be with you all the time
- Do not yarn about the method and other distressing details about the passing of the loved one
- Encourage them to keep participating in enjoyable activities (such as footy, fishing or camping) and yarn with them about how they can express their grief through dance, storytelling, artwork and connecting with Elders

- Encourage contact with supportive family and friends
- Encourage them to get back to their regular routine of sleeping, healthy eating, doing things with family and friends as well as staying connected with Elders
- Help your young one to find other ways of dealing with problems by supporting them to reflect on connection with culture and how this can help with healing their spirit.

## What else can you do?

Your young one may have a lot of questions.

Yarning about the details of how the loved one passed on may not be helpful and could weaken their spirit. Where possible when your young one brings it up yarn about all the ways they can stay positive and strong in spirit. This could include yarning with parents, Elders, relatives, friends, teachers or a counsellor. It can also help to yarn with someone at the school about the difficulties your young one may be experiencing.

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## Encourage young ones to support each other

Traditionally during these sad times all the family and friends come together. Often the young ones will go off and yarn about the suicide. Young ones sometimes share their feelings about death with each other. Make sure they know to tell a trusted adult right away if they are worried about a friend or family member.

## How you can help your community to heal

After a suicide death there is lots of yarning about it in the community. Community discussion of suicide can help everyone to start their healing journey. It can help community members feel connected to culture and the community, while this collective strength can help others to heal. Too much talk about the detail of the suicide however could further weaken a young one's spirit, so it is important to find a balance in these yarns. Some people may decide not to get involved in these yarns to protect their family.

By encouraging positive actions through yarning and community support you can support young ones to heal and strengthen their spirit.

## Where can parents and young ones get more information and help?

- **Local services include:** Aboriginal Medical Services, Community clinics as well as local Elders.
- **eheadspace** provides online counselling and telephone support to young people aged 12 to 25. Go to [eheadspace.org.au](http://eheadspace.org.au) or contact on **1800 650 890**.
- **headspace** Centres provide support, information and advice to young people aged 12 to 25. For locations and other information, go to [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au).
- **headspace School Support** is a service which supports schools following a suicide. More information is available on the **headspace School Support** website [headspace.org.au/schoolsupport](http://headspace.org.au/schoolsupport).
- **Lifeline (13 11 14)** can provide support 24 hours a day.
- **Suicide Callback Service** can provide support to people who are suicidal, have lost someone to suicide or are supporting someone who is suicidal: **1300 659 467**.

### Other fact sheets that may be of interest:

*Grief: How Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people might respond to suicide, Remembering a young person: Memorials and important events in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.*

For more information on suicide or support and assistance visit [headspace.org.au/schoolsupport](http://headspace.org.au/schoolsupport) or [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)



headspace acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future.

### Acknowledgements

Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet. (2001). *Grief, Loss and Trauma*. Accessed at [www.healthinonet.edu.edu.au](http://www.healthinonet.edu.edu.au).  
Lifeline Information Services. (2010) *Coping with sorrow, loss and grief*. Accessed at [www.lifeline.com.au](http://www.lifeline.com.au).

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