

# Considerations for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Young People



**Australia is fortunate to have a diverse population representing many different cultures.**

Approximately 28 per cent of Australia's population were born overseas from more than 250 countries<sup>1</sup> and some schools are likely to have students representing many different parts of the world.

Different cultures and religions may give different meaning to suicide. It is important to be aware of the impact of a death by suicide on students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds to ensure a safe response to a death by suicide.

Awareness of cultural and religious diversity may influence a schools' response to managing students following a suicide. Observing cultural appropriateness and sensitivity is likely to reduce further distress for the students, family, friends and community of the deceased young person.

**Awareness of cultural and religious diversity may influence a schools' response to managing students following a suicide.**

## Seek further information

- Seek culturally appropriate information from the relevant cultural community concerning religious or spiritual beliefs pertaining to suicide. Be open to letting the students or deceased young person's family educate you about their culture and customs.
- Utilise the skills and knowledge of any English as a Second Language (ESL) staff or Multicultural Education Aids if available.
- Be mindful of the grieving practices and beliefs about suicide informed by different cultures. Be aware that there may be a variety of beliefs and practices within the same cultural group.

## Consider how cultural or religious beliefs may impact on open communication about suicide

- Discuss with the family affected by the suicide whether the school can refer to the death as a suicide. If they do not wish for the death to be referred to as a suicide this needs to be respected. Be aware that the family's thinking may be culturally informed, which may create complexities in communicating about suicide. It may be appropriate though to talk about the damaging impact of misinformation and the importance of being able to talk to students about suicide and its causes in order to help keep students safe.

# Considerations for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Young People



- Respect the cultural practices of the students and families at your school, but in doing so, communicate to them that Australia has seen a considerable cultural shift in speaking about suicide. Though historically suicide was associated with stigma and shame, research has shown that talking about suicide helps to reduce stigma, provides opportunities for education about mental health and help-seeking and does not increase someone's risk of suicide.

## Consider the impact of migration

Research suggests that depression and suicidality can increase with the stress associated with migration and the readjustment into new cultures.

There are a number of events that have been identified which contribute to this stress including: bereavement due to loss of social supports and cultural identity and ongoing settlement issues such as inadequate housing, unemployment and family dysfunction<sup>2</sup>.

These factors may increase vulnerability of CALD students following a death by suicide.

## Other helpful steps to support CALD young people

- Advise students about relevant CALD community organisations and the support they may offer. Be mindful when making referrals, the young person/family may need assistance accessing services. This may include orienting the family to a new service or receiving the service via an outreach method.
- Make appropriate concessions in the school for young people to engage in culturally appropriate grieving practices or self-care during this time, for example providing a safe space for students to engage in prayer or worship.
- Some families may want to hold the funeral overseas and send the body of the deceased young person back to their home country. If appropriate, discuss options for a local memorial or ceremony to help young people from the school mourn. Be mindful that certain religious groups only permit others of the same religion to attend the funeral.

- Access an interpreter if the family have limited comprehension and/or fluency in English, preferably not a friend or family member. Some mental health services have interpreter services available and some schools have allocated funding for use of a specific interpreter service. An alternative service is the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS), a telephone interpreter service available 24 hours, 7 days per week (phone 131 450). Consider the family's openness to using an interpreter – they may fear that the interpreter will be known to them. This may lead to fear of further shame.
- Wellbeing staff at the school may be able to provide some practical advice about assistance with financing the funeral and other associated costs.

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Please refer to the **headspace School Support Suicide Postvention Toolkit – A Guide for Secondary Schools** for further guidance.

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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)

### Acknowledgements

Centre for Multicultural Youth [www.cmy.net.au](http://www.cmy.net.au) | Hall, K. (2002) Suicide prevention topic 7: Does asking about suicidal ideation increase the likelihood of suicide attempt? A critical appraisal of the literature. NZHTA Report | Life [www.livingisforeveryone.com.au](http://www.livingisforeveryone.com.au) | [www.suicideprevention.salvos.org.au](http://www.suicideprevention.salvos.org.au)

### References

<sup>1</sup> "Estimated Resident Population by Country of Birth – 1992 to 2014". Australian Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved 12 May 2015 <http://stat.abs.gov.au/Index.aspx?QueryId=743>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.livingisforeveryone.com.au/LIFE-News-Issue-10.html>