



Safety and Public Memorials following Suicide

Perth Metropolitan Suicide Prevention Coordinators
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Acknowledgments

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Content Warning: Suicide Prevention

This document discusses suicide and related topics that may be upsetting for some readers, in particular those who are recently bereaved. If you feel overwhelmed or distressed, please seek out a trusted friend for support or call one of the phone lines below.

In an emergency, do not hesitate to call emergency services; 000

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Safety and Public Memorials following Suicide

A well-considered memorial or funeral for a person lost to suicide can help people affected to grieve in a healthy way and commence their recovery from the loss. It can also have a positive impact on the way we understand and respond to suicide, by increasing awareness, reducing stigma and encouraging people to access support services if required. A community that is more informed is also better equipped to recognise and respond to the signs of suicide, allowing people to assist those at risk of taking their own life to seek pathways for recovery.

A safe memorial is one that is:

- respectful,
- assists those affected by a suicide grieve to their loss while using safe language; and
- shares safe activities and information about available supports.

Whilst incredibly healing, memorials can also have the potential to increase distress among those who have experienced the recent loss or who may be vulnerable to suicidal thoughts. This document aims to assist people organising a memorial presentation, event or activity in a way that supports healing and prevents further harm.

Practical tips for a safe memorial activity

- Promote self-care for those planning and attending the memorial activity by encouraging people to 'check in' with one another in the days and weeks leading up to and following the event and to access support services if required.
- Consult with the bereaved to gain consent for the memorial activity and to confirm the spoken, written or other material can be shared.
- Consult with the community or hosts of the memorial to ensure any potential harm to people or property are managed.
- Ensure the memorial respectfully acknowledges and reflects the cultural and/or religious context of the bereaved and the person who has died.
- Use appropriate, safe and non-stigmatising language and ensure no information about the location or means of death is shared.
- Ensure all those wishing to take a formal role in the activity are prepared with safety information prior to the event.
- Provide information to attendees about relevant help and support services making sure to address the needs of diverse communities.
- Focus on the positive experiences and attributes of the deceased, while acknowledging the difficult times in their life.
- Acknowledge the complex feelings of loss and grief people are sharing and the different impacts for different groups present.





Things to consider when planning a memorial

Safe language around suicide

Using appropriate language when talking about suicide reduces stigma and decreases the chance of offending or further upsetting those present. The below table from MindFrame provide some guidance.

Table 1.

Consider the language you use when referring to suicide

Choosing language that reflects and empowers individual experiences, is not sensationalised, is understandable and is adapted to individual preferences or audience is recommended.

Preferred	Problematic
✓ Died by suicide; took their own life	✗ Successful suicide; completed suicide; committed suicide
✓ Suicide attempt; attempted to end their life	✗ Unsuccessful suicide; failed suicide bid
✓ Increased rates of suicide; higher rates of suicide	✗ Skyrocketing rates of suicide; suicide epidemic
✓ A person who attempted or died by suicide; he died by suicide	✗ Labelling terms associated with suicide methods
✓ Tragic death; a tragedy	✗ Set free; finally at peace; can rest at last
✓ Refraining from using suicide out of context	✗ Political suicide; suicide pass/ball (in sports); suicide mission
✓ Content advice; the content includes discussion of suicide	✗ Trigger warning; triggered

For further information and guidance safe language see:

- <https://mindframe.org.au/our-words-matter-guidelines-for-language-use>
- <https://rosesintheocean.com.au/talking-about-suicide/>

Safe presentation of a suicide loss

The timing and content of a memorial activity requires careful consideration. The primary questions are: is it going to be safe for those attending? Is it going to be safe for those presenting?

- Select the content of messages and tributes carefully and use recommended language in **Table 1**.
- Agree with friends and family on roles and gestures that reflect the suggestions outlined in **Table 2** and are relevant to those present and honour the person who has passed away.
- Avoid providing an open platform where anyone present is invited to speak, as speakers experiencing great emotion may inadvertently say something that increases the distress of attendees. As an alternative, memorial attendees can be invited to submit written tributes in advance and a selection of these can be read out.
- Ensure the message of self-care is promoted throughout planning and delivery and that people know it is ok not to attend and/or safe to leave if the activity is upsetting or triggering in any way.
- Provide information about helplines and other support services and/or place relevant material (e.g. service brochures) for attendees/visitors to take, making sure to address the needs of diverse communities.
- Avoid any reference to, or speculation about, the suspected method, place or specific reasons for this loss. Evidence has shown that this is likely to increase distress and may lead others to experience thoughts of suicide.
- If holding a public memorial service which is large or particularly high profile, arrange for counsellors or trained peer support workers to be on hand for distressed people requiring immediate support.

Table 2: Suggestions for safety

Things to Avoid	Things to Try Instead
Avoid disclosing details of the suicide, such as the location or means of death, as this can increase distress and may inadvertently lead others to experience their own thoughts of suicide.	Discuss with family and friends what to share and how best to represent the person and their relationships. Focus on the whole life of the deceased sharing positive accomplishments and qualities.
Avoid language that glamourizes or romanticises the suicide, or describes it as a desirable outcome, e.g. calling the suicide a “noble” or “brave” act. Avoid language that stigmatises the causes of suicide. Avoid suggesting the person who has died is ‘at peace’ or ‘no longer in pain’ as this may suggest suicide as a desirable outcome.	Acknowledge that the reasons for suicide are complex and highly personal. If appropriate, make it known that efforts had been made to seek/provide support and that support is available to those present (see p 8 - 10).

Things to Avoid	Things to Try Instead
Do not 'catastrophize' the pain being felt by the loved ones of the deceased.	Encourage those present to support one another or to volunteer their time to services providing help for others. Consider including messages, information, music, stories or poetry that promote hope and recovery.

Based on CASA, 2011, 1-2; Hughson, 2016, 2-3; Lowe et al. 2019, 7; SPRC, 2004, 9.

Safe memorial activities

There are various activities that can safely be undertaken as a memorial for the deceased, including:

- Personal expressions created and given to the family and friends of the deceased person to keep privately. These may include letters, poems, recollections captured on video, commemorative scrapbooks, art works or photographs.
- Permanent memorials are contentious as they can inadvertently create a focus for the distress of other people with thoughts of suicide or become a location for self-harming or suicidal behaviours and for this reason are best avoided.
- Making a donation or volunteering time to a local charity or peer support service.
- Collecting funds to support the family and cover funeral and other costs.
- Sharing information about programs or events that promote resilience, mental health and suicide prevention.
- Donating to or participating in local services and events with a mental health and wellbeing focus.
- Purchasing books for the local library addressing topics around coping with loss or dealing with depression and other mental health problems.

Note: Balloon releases - where attendees each release a helium-filled balloon - are discouraged, as the balloons eventually fall and create litter that is harmful to wildlife and the environment.

If planning on dedicating a community memorial to lives lost by suicide, consider the various and diverse people who may visit the memorial including children and young people, and ensure there are clear messages about help seeking. A memorial which includes information about support services can prevent harm and raise community awareness.

Social media memorials

People are increasingly using social media websites to memorialise loved ones. Social media includes Facebook, TikTok, X (Formally Twitter), YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat and more.

Online memorial pages and tributes can provide a helpful way of remembering that person, sharing feelings of hope, raising awareness and the accessibility of such posts allows no time limits or interruptions to the person bereaved and grieving. However, inappropriate language or images used in posts can cause distress to people viewing them and may lead others to experience their own thoughts of suicide. For support navigating this we suggest using the MindFrame Image Matter Guidelines: <https://mindframe.org.au/images-matter-mindframe-guidelines-for-image-use>

Table 3: Suggestions for social media memorials

Things to Avoid	Things to Try Instead
Avoid disclosing details of the manner or location of the death, or posting images, photos, videos or animations depicting a method of suicide or self-harm. These increase distress to people viewing them and may lead others to experience their own thoughts of suicide.	Follow the suggestions for appropriate language and presentation provided above, including avoiding giving the impression that the suicide was a positive outcome.
Avoid posting or sharing images of the person who has died by suicide looking dishevelled, threatening or using body language indicating distress (such as clutching their head). Such images can upset others and reinforce negative stereotypes around suicide.	Share information about support services available and encourage people feeling upset to seek help.
Avoid suggesting the person who has died is 'at peace' or 'no longer in pain' as this may suggest suicide as a desirable outcome.	Include messages of hope and recovery such as posting links to videos or poetry with relevant content.
	Allocate a moderator(s) for any social media memorial, considering who has the time, resources, knowledge and support networks to undertake this often emotive and difficult task.

Sources: *headspace, 2015; Huber, 2020; Robinson et al., 2018.*

Schools and other organisations working with young people are encouraged to take a proactive response to social media memorials for suicide, especially if it was a young person who died.

The WA Department of Education have a policy about memorials after a death by suicide which can be found in the References below.

These resources provide further useful information for young people and schools on this topic and can be located and downloaded for free online here:

- <https://headspace.org.au/assets/School-Support/Managing-social-media-following-a-suicide.pdf>
- <https://www.orygen.org.au/Training/Resources/Self-harm-and-suicide-prevention/Guidelines/Using-social-media-following-the-suicide-of-a-young-person>

Also see 'References'.

Alcohol

Consider the availability of alcohol at memorial events and activities. Excessive alcohol consumption may increase feelings of distress and hopelessness. Promote and encourage safe levels of alcohol consumption. Consider how to reduce any risk of alcohol related harm, including planning and supporting the safe return home of people attending. See Additional Resources for Alcohol and Drug Support.

Additional Resources

Suicide Bereavement, Grief counselling, and other support services	
StandBy Suicide postvention program dedicated to assisting people and communities bereaved or impacted by suicide. 1300 727 247	Roses In the Ocean Peer CARE Companion Warmline call-back service provides a safe place for people with a lived experience of suicide to connect with others with a similar lived experience. Call back within 24 hours. 1800 77 7337
ARBOR (Active Response Bereavement Outreach) Suicide bereavement support for adults. 1300 11 44 46	CYPRESS (Children & Young People Responsive Suicide Support) Suicide bereavement support for children and young people. 1300 11 44 46
Griefline Free, confidential counselling for individuals and families experiencing loss and grief.	Compassionate Friends Supporting parents and families who have had a child die.

Suicide Bereavement, Grief counselling, and other support services	
1300 845 745	1300 064 068
SOLACE GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP WA Grief support group for those grieving the death of their spouse, partner or fiancé. 0488 991 084	Thirilli Indigenous Postvention Service Provides emotional and practical support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples impacted by a loss from suicide or other fatal traumatic incidents. 1800 805 801
Suicide Call Back Service Online and telephone counselling for anyone who is feeling suicidal, worried about someone else or who has lost someone to suicide. 1300 659 467	

Additional Resources

Mental health and wellbeing services and information	
Lifeline Support for anyone experiencing a personal crisis. Available by phone, text or online chat via their website 13 11 14	Beyond Blue Online and telephone support for anyone feeling anxious or depressed. 1300 22 4636
QLife Provides Australia-wide anonymous, LGBTIQ+ peer support from 3pm to midnight. 1800 184 527	13 YARN Run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Free and confidential service available 24/7. 13 19 76
Youth Focus Counselling on the phone or face-to-face for young people aged 16-25. 08 6266 4333	Mental Health Emergency Response Line MHERL is a 24-hour telephone service for people in the Perth metropolitan area experiencing a mental health crisis.

Mental health and wellbeing services and information	
	1300 555 788 (Metro) or 1800 676 822 (Peel) or 1800 552 002 (Country/Rurallink)
RightByYou An online platform designed by and for young people (12-25) who want to help a friend expressing suicidal concerns online. https://rightbyyou.org.au/	Here For You A statewide confidential, non-judgemental, telephone service for anyone in Western Australia concerned about their own or another person's mental health issue. 7am – 10pm, 7 days a week. 1800 437 348
Alcohol and Drug Support Line The Alcohol and Drug Support Line is a confidential, non-judgemental telephone counselling, information and referral service for anyone seeking help for their own or another person's alcohol or drug use. 08 9442 5000	Kids Helpline Free 24/7, confidential and private counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years. 1800 55 1800
PANDA Counselling service delivered by professional counsellors and dedicated peer support volunteers with a lived experience of perinatal mental health issues. Monday to Friday 9am to 7.30pm AEST. 1300 726 306	Samaritans WA Volunteer Counsellors Provide emotional support to individuals, every day from 8:00am-8:00pm (AWST). 08 63839850
Strong Spirit Strong Mind Strong Spirit Strong Mind Aboriginal Programs provides culturally secure information and resources that aim to increase awareness of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs related harm and improve social and emotional wellbeing among Aboriginal people. https://strongspiritstrongmind.com.au/mental-health	Think Mental Health The Think Mental Health education campaign is part of a comprehensive approach in Western Australia that aims to build mental health and wellbeing and reduce mental health issues with a view to reducing Western Australia's suicide rate. https://www.thinkmentalhealthwa.com.au/

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WA Department of Education; Association of Independent Schools Western Australia & Catholic Education Western Australia (2021): *School response and planning guidelines for students with suicidal behaviour and non-suicidal self-injury*.



More information

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Proudly working on the traditional lands of the Whadjuk people

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**This service is not a crisis response service. If you require crisis support,
please call 000 or Lifeline 13 11 14.**



We acknowledge Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities as the Traditional Custodians of the land we work on and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise that their sovereignty was never ceded.

Neami celebrates, values and includes people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, cultures, bodies and abilities.