

*Supporting NSW communities,  
families and individuals  
experiencing loss and grief.*

[www.nalag.org.au](http://www.nalag.org.au)



**NALAG**  
National Association for  
Loss and Grief (NSW) Inc

## Helping someone who is grieving

When someone has experienced a loss, there will be big and small adjustments needed to be made in their lives. These could bring uncertainty, frustration, fear, sadness and change as each new day comes along. Grief is about adapting to change in life, thoughts, hopes, beliefs and the future.

### Be a good listener

Grieving people need to talk about their loss and acknowledge that they have been through a difficult experience. You can't fix their grief, but you can be there to hear their story and share their journey.

### Be a shoulder to cry on

Allow the person to cry with you. Crying helps the release of emotions and improves the healing process.

### Be in touch with them

Visit the person or call them. Let them know you've been thinking of them. Write a letter, send an email, remember their special days like birthdays and anniversaries.

### Be a friend

Often just being there is all that is needed to support someone who is grieving. Everyone's journey through grief is different and can last a long or short time. Don't be afraid to speak up if you think your friends needs help.

*(Adapted from the writings of Doris Zagdanski)*

For more information  
& referral, please contact:

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[info@nalag.org.au](mailto:info@nalag.org.au)

[www.nalag.org.au](http://www.nalag.org.au)

PO Box 379  
DUBBO NSW 2830

#### NALAG BRANCHES:

##### MUDGEES

0488 225 710

[mudgee@nalag.org.au](mailto:mudgee@nalag.org.au)

##### BELLINGEN/NAMBUCCA

0448 084 792

##### HUNTER

0409 151 646

[jperino@nalag.org.au](mailto:jperino@nalag.org.au)

##### GRIEF SUPPORT

(Telephone only)

0439 922 201

##### GREATER SYDNEY

0427 614 010

*Please note that NALAG is unable to provide crisis support. Our operational hours are from 9am-5pm weekdays.*

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# Suicide

Grief reactions associated  
with a death by suicide

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## Grief reactions associated with a death by suicide

Someone you love has chosen to end their life and you are left to deal with the consequences: the pain of unbearable sadness; dismay and confusion; empty feelings of abandonment; anger; guilt; and the relentless persistence of unanswerable questions. You may have to bear the additional burden of trauma if you were the person to find your relative, friend or colleague after their death, or have witnessed the death occurring. You may be left with persistent memories of images, smells or sounds that make it difficult to concentrate on anything else, and make you long to remember the person who died, to remember them as they were.

### Some initial reactions

You may initially:

- feel stunned and in disbelief, barely able to move;
- feel confused;
- behave in an agitated manner and have difficulty staying still;
- experience a range of physical sensations including increased heart rate, difficulty breathing, nausea, sweats and a feeling of pressure in your head;
- cry, show anger or appear super controlled.

### Some later reactions

You may experience some or all of the following as initial numbness recedes:

- increased feelings of anxiety, occasionally as severe as panic;
- difficulty sleeping, eating, concentrating, or remembering simple details;
- yearning and pining for the person who has died
- anger at the deceased for the choice they

made and its effect on you;

- overwhelming feelings of helplessness;
- questioning of previously held beliefs about the person who has died and the nature and strength of your relationship with them;
- loss of confidence in your ability to “read” signs of distress or to solve problems;
- a crisis of faith;
- shame and embarrassment;
- loneliness and despair;
- overwhelming tiredness;
- desire to be with the person who has died, to be dead (or asleep) and free from pain coupled with a fear that in fact, you may die;
- a feeling of being trapped in incessant circles of unanswerable questions;
- inability to care deeply about anyone or anything, to give anything, especially to oneself;
- fluctuating feelings of guilt or blame;
- a sense of futility and meaninglessness; and
- if your relative/friend/lover/colleague had been suicidal for some time, you may experience initial relief, sometimes followed by guilt. Your feelings may be more intense at particular times of the day or week, for example: the time of day at which you believe the death occurred; sunset, when most families are returning home; Sundays, often another family time; and special dates such as birthdays, anniversaries and significant celebratory occasions.

### Legal issues

Grief may be inhibited to some extent until all legal processes are complete. This “holding back behaviour” seems to be part of a fairly large need to assure survival and safety before feeling safe enough to grieve with all of our being. The

police will need to investigate what happened. They may need to question the family and friends and you may be asked to make a statement. While the cause may seem obvious it is still necessary for the coroner to act as an advocate for the deceased and rule out any other possibilities for example, murder, accident or misadventure.

It may be some time before full details of the coroner’s report are available to you. When that time comes it is usually helpful to read it in the presence of a sensitive and compassionate person; If the details are too distressing, read only as much as you can tolerate in any one sitting, and come back to it later when you feel ready. You may of course, choose not to read it at all, and that’s fine; having a real choice is important and empowering.

### Some immediate needs

- simple, clear, truthful information;
- an advocate – someone who knows you and your needs well, who will absorb information that may be overwhelming for you, and who will help you deal with the police, the Coroner’s Court or the media. Ideally, this would be a friend or relative, but a sensitive support worker or other health professional may be good as well;
- NALAG can give support with the reading of the Coroner’s report;
- access to the person who has died;
- love, sensitive understanding and support;
- safety.

For more information on NALAG services, visit [www.nalag.org.au](http://www.nalag.org.au)