

You are not alone—shared experiences connect us

No 127

January/February 2021

Support After Suicide Newsletter

Welcome....

Support After Suicide Program

PO Box 162,
Lidcombe NSW
1825
Contact:
[Malynda Flarey](#)

Forensic Medicine

Sydney:
Cnr Joseph St
and Main Ave,
Lidcombe
(02) 9563 9000

Newcastle:
Rosella Close
John Hunter
Hospital
New Lambton
(02) 4935 9700

Wollongong:
Wollongong
Hospital
Crown St
Wollongong
(02) 4253 4501

Mailing List

The SAS newsletter is available electronically. If you would like to receive the newsletter via email please contact us at the above



The start of a new year is always a good time to reflect on the year just passed and to look to the year ahead.

2020 will be remembered as a year when our ordinary lives (buying toilet paper, hugging a friend, going to school) were upended by a pandemic that challenged and changed us forever. Who knew that lockdown and 'isolation would become stock standard in our conversations and that face masks could become a fashion accessory? For families grieving the death of a loved one 2020 challenged you in ways unexpected. Social distancing at funerals followed by distancing from our networks made it harder for many to share their grief and find support. We hope that this newsletter helped to keep you feeling connected to others who, like you, experienced such a loss and in finding ways to help navigate the year.

And so to looking ahead...

February 2021 will mark 21 years since the Support After Suicide Program began at Forensic Medicine Sydney. Over these years you have shared your grief and your resilience with us and we have learnt much from you. On our next pages we take this opportunity to both share with you the wisdom that you have shared with us over these years and to thank you for that wisdom.

H ealing in the New Year

" I love a new year, a fresh start, and a welcomed beginning. But new years are also tinged with sadness and nostalgia for me. Each new year marks another without my mom, my dad, and other beloved friends I have lost. Each new year reminds me that I am moving forward, while they are not.

In recent past I've taken to committing to two things in order to both honour and heal my grief. I commit to better self-care ...and I also commit to finding new ways to connect with and memorialise my lost loved ones.

Most importantly, I let it be okay that I still carry sadness. I let it be okay that my life has been forever changed by these losses. Let it be ok that you are not over your loss.

Remember that two things can be true at once: you can forever hold sadness over your loss, and you can also work to create a meaningful life for yourself "

Claire Bidwell Smith : <https://clairebidwellsmith.com/blog-podcasts>

Support After Suicide at Forensic Medicine

"My Mother's death was a possible suicide. That alone affected me in a way I never thought it would. Just saying those words out loud seemed to change my interactions ..."



The death of a loved one through suicide is often the hardest thing you will go through and many people express that their life has irrevocably changed. Many of you have been open to being vulnerable and share this loss and these changes with the Support after Suicide team at Forensic Medicine over these years. In doing so you have taught us that:

Suicide grief is hard:

"I'm still looking for answers to the why".

All grief is difficult but bereavement through suicide is particularly challenging. Many families tell us of the trauma they experience as well as the grief. The unexpected nature of the death, the traumatic way the person died can add a layer of suffering to the pain and loss.

Families bereaved by suicide can have two different experiences. For some the suicide comes after a long history of issues with the person's mental health and families are aware that their loved one has been struggling in some way. After reviewing the notes her son left her about his struggles with his mental health one Mum felt *"It made me understand what he was going through"*. However for other families the death comes completely out of the blue and is the first indication that anything is wrong. It makes no sense. *"I was very shocked; there was no inkling— I thought he was not that type of person"* or *" We had a lovely evening the night before— I'm just in shock"*.

A further aspect of bereavement by suicide is the acute sense of responsibility that many families feel. The feelings of guilt and the questions of 'why' and 'if only' are for many the most painful and ongoing part of grief and hard to get past. *" I have grief for her life. Memories of her childhood, happy memories ... what does it all mean if she wasn't as happy as I had thought?"* or *" I wonder if she'd stayed on her medication longer would she have improved?"* It can be hard for many families to realise that you are not responsible. *"I did feel guilt— blamed myself" " I feel very guilty" " What could I have done?"* Sometimes related to guilt can be feelings of protest and anger, at yourself, at others even at the person who has died. As Iris Bolton wrote following the suicide of her son *"(You) struggle with "why" it happened until you no longer need to know "why", or until you are satisfied with partial answers"...You may feel guilty for what you think you did or did not do. Anger, guilt, confusion, forgetfulness are common responses. You are not crazy – you are in mourning."*

You value the power of connection to others :

" I don't need counselling , I just need to talk".

Most people experience that family and friends want to be supportive of your suicide bereavement. Unfortunately sometimes you have found that family and friends do not always understand your grief *" I found others don't necessarily understand what to say"*. Sometimes people expect you to be 'over it' and 'move on' and this is difficult when you are still overwhelmed.

However people told us of the help and support they got from unexpected sources. The saying 'grief changes your address book' holds true for many and there are a myriad ways you have formed these connections. Many of you joined a support group. *" Hearing others stories was very positive" " I see a psychologist but having the connections with others (through the group) is fantastic"*. From these connections other opportunities emerge. In Sydney we have seen group members form a 'walk 'n talk' group meeting for a walk before finding a café for a coffee and sharing of stories.

And for so many of you this Newsletter has been an invisible cord that has connected you to others *" It has been amazing to receive because you feel so alone, especially as it was a suicide and you feel that there is nobody you can talk to about it ". "Even though my daughter's suicide was five (5) years ago, I am still finding value in the newsletter in different ways. Sometimes, it is through comfort knowing that I am not on my own and at other times I learn something new which I am able to put to use in my life and also share with a friend whose son also died (by) suicide"*.



Keeping connected also means finding ways to share your loss and someone who can offer support for you to grieve in the way that is right for you. As Doka and Niemeier (2012) write, people around you can have different ways of supporting you. Some are doers- who help in practical ways, some offer respite- distracting you from your grief- and one or two may be listeners, those people who you can honestly share your thoughts and feelings.

In the acute part of your grief some of you found it hard to find the energy and motivation to stay connected with friends and family at times. *"I have lost interest,...I don't want to go out and see people. What do I say to them?"* It is not unusual to want to avoid social situations initially and sometimes it can feel too difficult to reach out to others. But overall you have taught us that have found it vital to keep connected to others.

You taught us how resilient you are

"I didn't know how I could get through the night I was told (of her suicide). I phoned Lifeline. A wonderful counsellor taught me that I didn't need to think about how I am going to get through the rest of my life right now – just the next 30 minutes. I've taken that with me through my grief. I plan for the immediate future to get me through– then I can think about the next short term"

Simply put resilience is the process of adapting in the face of adversity or trauma but the road to resilience will mean that you are likely to face emotional distress. Resilience develops when we focus on building connections, finding purpose, foster our wellbeing and seeking help if we need to.

*"I remain strong for my husband and the grandchildren"
"I am getting through. I have focussed on my family and my work"
"I am focussing my energy on administering his affairs"*

Over and over again we hear the stories of resilience and survival in the face of devastating loss. Grief can be a transformative experience. We have been touched over the years by the care and compassion that people bereaved by suicide develop; for themselves, for each other and for others around them.

Know that you will never be the same again, but you can survive and go beyond just surviving.

Iris Bolton My Son, My Son'

LifeLine harbour to Hawkesbury Support Groups in 2021

LifeLine Harbour to Hawkesbury will be running suicide bereavement support groups starting in February 2021. There will be both face to face and zoom (online) meetings available. Information on dates and times is below. Face to face groups are held at Gordon. The Zoom meetings are open to anyone residing within Australia. Contact Caroline McGrory on (02)9498 8805 for further information and registration

Monthly Open Groups

Thursday 4th February 2021 7pm-9pm Face to Face
Thursday 18th February 2021 7pm-9pm Zoom
Thursday 4th March 2021 7pm-9pm Face to Face
Thursday 18th March 2021 7pm-9pm Zoom

Closed 8 week Group (must register)

Thursday 11th March 2021 until Thursday 29th April 2021 7pm-9pm Face to Face

**"SHE WAS NO LONGER
WRESTLING WITH THE
GRIEF, BUT COULD SIT
DOWN WITH IT AS A
LASTING COMPANION AND
MAKE IT A SHARER IN HER
THOUGHTS."**

-GEORGE ELIOT

WWW.WHATSYOURGRIEF.COM



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Support Groups

Forensic Medicine online meeting, 1st Tuesday of the month, beginning February 2021 6:30—8.00pm please call Malynda Flarey on (02) 9563 9000.

City: The Compassionate Friends

Supporting parents who have lost a child. Every second Wednesday of the month starting at 10:30am at Pitt St office. Contact Linda Campbell on 0413 750 571.

Eastern Suburbs

Suicide Impacting Me Support group. The first Tuesday of the month at 6pm at JewishCare at Woollahra. To RSVP email: familyandfriends@jewishcare.com.au Group is non-denominational and open to all impacted by suicide.

Northern Beaches

Lifeline Northern Beaches run a monthly Suicide Bereavement Support Group on the 3rd Tuesday of each month. This group is currently meeting face to face. For further information please call Barbara Rabbitts at *Lifeline* (02) 9949 5522 during office hours or email: counselling@lifelinenb.org.au

Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury , Gordon NSW

See information on page 3 of this edition

Macarthur

Monthly evening group and 8 week closed groups in areas around the south west. Contact Jackie Moore: Ph: (02) 4645 7208 or 0413286496

The Network

(formerly Western Sydney Suicide Prevention and Support)

The Network helps people bereaved by suicide through facilitated support groups in the Hawkesbury, Penrith and Blue Mountains local government areas. For more information Contact: Michelle Hookham: Ph: 02 4577 4435 or email: groups@suicidebereavement.org.au or see www.suicidebereavement.org.au

Restoring the Heartbeat of Hope

Closed group program and counselling in the Lower North Shore. Wings of Hope Association Project. Contact Dr Diana Sands, Ph: 0414 721 653 Website: www.bereavedbysuicide.com.au

Regional New South Wales:

Wollongong Salvation Army Support Group "ETC"

First Floor Program support group "etc .." 1st Tuesday each month, 6-8pm. Contact: Marilyn Dunn 4229 1079 (business hours) or 0411 143 586

Nowra

The 3rd Monday of each month at 5.30-7.30pm, at The Salvation Army, corner Salisbury Drive & St Anns Street, Nowra Ph: 4423 2102 for more details.

Ulladulla

1st & 3rd Thursday each month 6-8pm, at Mission Australia, 80 St Vincent St, Ulladulla. Contact Stephen on 0419 625 372.

Merimbula

1st Thursday of the month. Call for details 0428 430 368 or begaspan@gmail.com

Central Coast

An 8 week structured closed group, running 4 times a year in the evenings. Contact *Lifeline* during office hours. Ph: (02) 4323 6105

Newcastle

Forensic Medicine online meeting, 1st Tuesday of the month, beginning February 2021 6:30—8.00pm please call the Duty Social Worker on 02 4935 9700.

1st Wednesday of the month at 7pm-9pm at Lifeline, 12 Maitland Road, Islington. Contact *Lifeline* Newcastle & Hunter: (02) 4940 2000 or 0411 775 555 (Virginia Pethebridge) or 0407 002 463 (Faye Hawley)

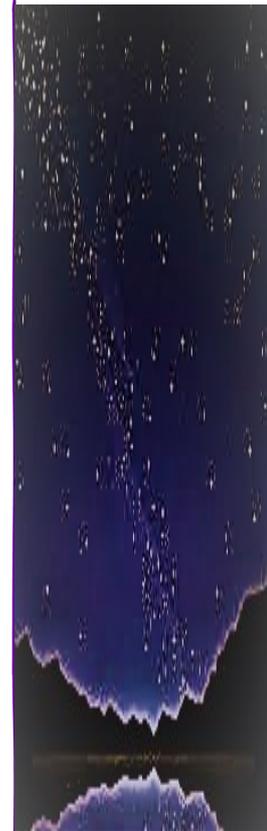
Port Stephens

Last Monday of every month, 7pm-9pm at Tomaree Library, Salamander Bay. Contact 0431 670 579 (Dave Sams) or 0402 472 815 (Belinda Fenwick).

Port Macquarie

4th Wednesday of every month, 6pm-8pm at 5 Sherwood Rd. Contact Kelly Saidey at *Lifeline* for further information. Ph: (02) 6581 2800

For other groups in rural and regional NSW please refer to: <https://postventionaustralia.org/>
The support groups advertised in the newsletter are not connected with FM and their advertisement in the newsletter is in no way an endorsement of the services.



"Perhaps they are not stars in the sky, but rather openings where our loved ones shine down to let us know they are happy."

Eskimo legend



Disclaimer

The information in this newsletter can only assist you in the most general way. If you need specific advice, please seek appropriate professionals who is knowledgeable in this area. Your local GP is often a good place to start. The contents of this newsletter should not be reproduced without permission.