

Understanding how and why bereavement by suicide is different to other bereavements can be helpful.

The grieving process is often complicated and lasts longer sometimes many years after the death. A death by suicide is usually sudden, often unexpected and may be violent.

Reactions

The shock and trauma may be greater compared to other types of bereavement, and people may struggle to make sense of what has happened often asking 'why did the person take their life?' and 'could I have prevented it?'. They may experience intense emotions which may be unfamiliar, frightening and uncontrollable including; guilt, shame, rejection, and fear. They may also experience physical reactions such as stomach pains, sleeplessness and poor concentration. Some people may struggle with post-traumatic stress and have flashbacks or nightmares, especially if they found the deceased's body.

Stigma

There is still a stigma attached to suicide, centred around weakness, blame, shame, and crime. Suicide can cause people to feel uncomfortable and unsure about how to react. This can prevent those who need it from seeking help, and others from offering support.

Isolation

Most people bereaved by suicide feel isolated. Others may not know what to say for fear of upsetting them and this can be perceived as uncaring. The bereaved person may avoid contact because they worry about upsetting other people, or about having to answer difficult questions such as, 'how did they die?'. Family can be a great source of support, yet for some they can be a source of tension and conflict adding to the hurt and isolation.

Privacy

When someone dies by suicide it can be difficult to maintain privacy. There may be emergency services and police at the scene, interest from the media, and a coroner's inquest. The inquest process can be lengthy, it will be open to the public and can result in media reporting. Investigations may reveal information about the bereaved person which was unknown to their family and friends.