

# Supporting Children & Young People Bereaving Suicide

*for parents, guardians and teachers*



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# Supporting children & young people bereaving suicide

## for parents, guardians and teachers

It's important that you feel prepared when supporting children and young people grieving. The Alex Panton Foundation (APF) has put together the following information to highlight how young people might feel and respond, and how to best support them. There are many resources, support groups and organisations in place to offer guidance and provide further help.

### Support tips and things to remember:

- We need to overcome our personal discomfort with death and suicide in order to support others.
- Everyone grieves differently. Some people may experience short-term reactions, while others may have long-term responses.
- Grief responses may differ depending on the age of the child.
- How a community and school responds can help or block the healing process.
- Cultural practices are important to acknowledge when dealing with grief.
- Recognise an increased risk for suicide in the days and weeks following the death.
- Accept the intensity and extent of time for their feelings.
- Help the child connect with a bereavement group for further support.
- Using the deceased person's name will comfort survivors.
- It is ok to use the word 'suicide', if it has been publicly confirmed. Acknowledging that the death is a suicide promotes healing and minimizes risk.
- Be gentle and non-judgmental.
- Avoid assigning blame.
- Your presence alone will be reassuring.



# Delicately discussing *difficult subjects*

## Language

Open communication is essential when supporting someone through grief. While death by suicide is a difficult subject, it is important that those in need of support are able to discuss their thoughts and feelings in a safe environment.

When supporting a child or young person through bereavement, strive to put aside your own discomfort with the topic and be prepared to answer questions and mitigate their confusion.



### Words to Use

Took his/her own life  
Died by own hand  
Died as a result of a self-inflicted injury  
Died by suicide

### Words to Avoid

Successful suicide  
Completed suicide  
Committed suicide  
Chose to suicide

# Guidance for parents *guardians & teachers*

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## How and where to start:

- Try your best to answer questions. If young people do not get their questions answered, they may use their imaginations to conceive scenarios that are often worse.
- Respond only to what the young person is asking about. Avoid providing more information than requested.
- Accurately describe what has occurred with concepts and words the young person can understand, while avoiding adding confusion by giving false information. For example, rather than saying, "Auntie is sleeping"; instead, you could say "Auntie was sick and chose to make her body stop working".
- Encourage children and teens to express their thoughts, feelings and fears. Help them to identify these feelings.
- If you are also grieving, make sure that you have your own support system in place, while you are also supporting children.
- Make sure young people know it is okay to feel happy as well as sad. Feeling happy (or feeling better) does not mean that they are not sad about the death or that they have forgotten the person.
- Provide and encourage consistency and routines for children and teens.
- Engage in activities that can take their minds off what has happened or can help them celebrate the person's life. This could include drawing, moulding clay, writing, playing with toys, making a memory picture book or a memory box with favourite mementos, framing a picture of the person, planting a tree or garden in the person's honour, lighting a memorial candle or visiting the cemetery.
- Allow curiosity and open discussion about what happens to the body.

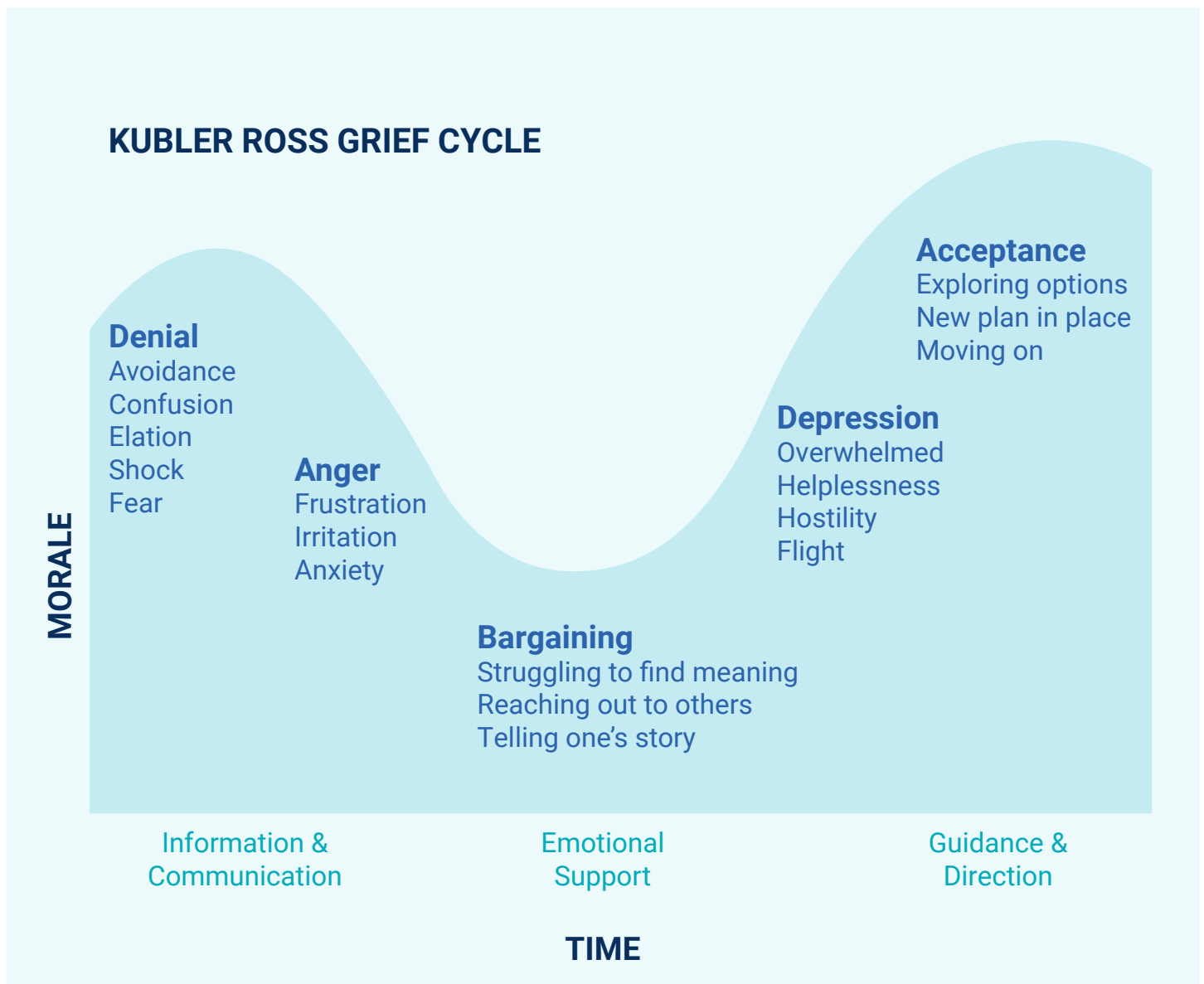


# Understanding grief

*& how it affects children & young people*

## Processing grief

Be mindful that children and young people do not show their feelings in the same way that adults do – feelings can often be expressed through behavior. When supporting a child or teen through grief, it is helpful to be able to recognise signs of misplaced emotions.



# Understanding emotional development *in young children*

Adults often misinterpret a child's inconsistent behaviour as a lack of capacity to grieve. They may, for example, cry for a while and return to play shortly after. This is an example of the child mourning in manageable chunks. Be mindful that it is common for children to grieve the loss of a loved family member at a much later time in their development.

## Grief in Young Children

- At the age of four years and younger, children often struggle to understand the difference between life and death.
- At around five to eight years, children begin to see death as final for all living things, including themselves.
- Children in the preteen years (nine to twelve) begin to understand that death can occur at any age.
- Emotions might be expressed in their behaviour and play.
- They may talk about their feelings with other children rather than with adults.
- It is important to be available to talk with them about the death, and signpost who else is available for them to talk to (someone you both trust).
- They may develop new feelings and new responses to the death, even years after the death.
- You may observe regressive behaviour, such as thumb sucking.
- Anger may be expressed through tantrums or being non-compliant.
- Physical responses may take place, such as loss of appetite, nightmares and having trouble sleeping.
- They may begin to develop anxiety about school. This could appear as irritability, withdrawal or difficulty concentrating and may be interpreted as behavioural problems.



# Having meaningful conversations *with teens & young adults*

There are a few things to consider when supporting an older child, teen or young adults. It is important to remember that these age groups are more widely influenced by their surroundings, and will intensify each other's feelings of grief. These age groups are at a higher risk of suicide so it is essential that open communication is kept a priority and support systems remain in place.

## Grief in Teens & Young Adults

- Teens and young adults may memorialise the person through themselves or other objects.
- These age groups may glorify the person and wish to continue to hold them in high regard long after the event.
- Teens and young adults are at an increased risk to develop depression and post-traumatic stress disorder following a suicide of someone they know.
- They might fantasize about their own death.
- They may experience grief again as they pass through various developmental events, such as graduations, getting their first job, getting married and the birth of their first child.





# Important messages

## when supporting a young person grieving

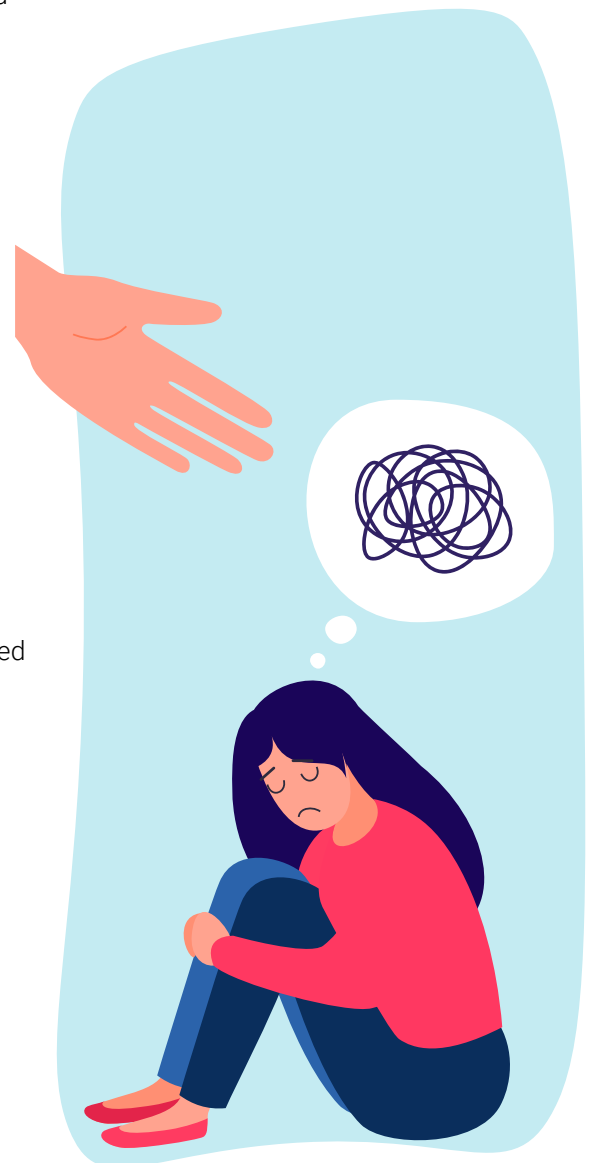
The grief process is complex and can take years. It is common to initially feel numb and shock, which can last for several weeks, or longer. Over time, the numbness fades and grieving process will proceed.

### When giving advice emphasise that:

- Healing does not mean forgetting - it means that the sadness and other feelings do not get in the way of your life as much as they did in the beginning.
- No matter what happened, this person's death was not their fault.
- There is always someone or somewhere they can go to for help.

### What else can I do?

- Keep up routines.
- Maintain proper diet and nutrition.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Exercise.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Reinforce self-care skills.
- Engage in activities that can take their minds off what has happened or can help them celebrate the person's life.
- Use spiritual and religious practices and/or relaxation skills.
- Be prepared that some triggers such as anniversaries, locations, smells and pictures might bring back strong feelings.
- Ensure you are also receiving the support you need.
- Encourage them to talk to other trusted adults as well.
- Connect them with a bereavement group and other support organisations.



# In times of crisis

it's important to know where to turn for help

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## URGENT RESPONSE

If you or a loved one are at risk and in need of immediate help, please call 911 and seek out your nearest hospital.

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### Alex Panton Foundation Resources

#### Kids Helpline

**Web:** <https://kidshelpline.ky>

**Tel:** +1 (345) 649-KIDS (5437)

#### Teen Talk virtual support group

**Facilitator:** Dr Shari Smith

Ages 13 – 17

First Saturday of each month

12:00 PM - 12:45 PM

*Takes place online via Zoom, click the link below to find out about upcoming dates*

**Web:** <https://alexpantonfoundation.ky/teen-talk/>

**Email:** [support@alexpantonfoundation.ky](mailto:support@alexpantonfoundation.ky)

#### Breaking Barriers support group

Ages 30+

Third Tuesday of each month

6:30 PM – 7:30 PM

*Takes place online via Zoom, click the link below to find out about upcoming dates*

**Web:** <https://alexpantonfoundation.ky/support/>

**Email:** [info@alexpantonfoundation.ky](mailto:info@alexpantonfoundation.ky)

### Public Service Providers

#### CayMind Mental Health Helpline

**Tel:** +1-800-534-6463

**Email:** [CayMind@hotmail.com](mailto:CayMind@hotmail.com)

#### Department of Counselling Services

**Web:** <https://www.dcs.gov.ky/our-services>

**Tel:** +1 (345) 949-8789

**Email:** [FOI.DCS@gov.ky](mailto:FOI.DCS@gov.ky)

#### Family Resource Center

**Web:** <http://www.frc.gov.ky/>

**Tel:** +1 (345) 949-0006

**Email:** [frc@gov.ky](mailto:frc@gov.ky)

## HSA Mental Health Services

**Web:** <https://www.hsa.ky/medical-services>

**Tel:** +1 (345) 949-5600

## Private Services Providers:

### Achieve Cayman

**Web:** <https://achievecayman.com/contact-us>

**Tel:** Teena +1 (345) 327-9999,

Trisha +1 (345) 321-4100

### Aspire Therapeutic Services

**Web:** <https://aspire.ky/>

**Tel:** +1 (345) 743-6700

**Email:** [info@aspire.ky](mailto:info@aspire.ky)

### Bethesda Counselling Centre

**Web:** <https://www.bethesdacounsellingcenter.com/>

**Tel:** +1 (345) 946-6575,

+1 (345) 923-6488

**Email:** [bethesda@candw.ky](mailto:bethesda@candw.ky)

### BHAC (Behavioural Health Associates Cayman)

**Web:** <https://bhac.ky/>

**Tel:** +1 (345) 746-0066

**Email:** [info@bhac.ky](mailto:info@bhac.ky)

### Cathy Alberga

**Web:** <https://www.caymanhealth.com/listing/alberga-catherine/>

**Tel:** +1 (345) 945-6570

### Hope Academy Clinical Services

**Web:** <https://www.hopecayman.com/clinical-services>

**Tel:** +1 (345) 769-4673

**Email:** [office@hopecayman.com](mailto:office@hopecayman.com)

### Infinite Mindcare

**Web:** <https://infinitemindcare.com/services/>

**Tel:** +1 (345) 926-0882

**Email:** [info@infinitemindcare.com](mailto:info@infinitemindcare.com)

### Kidsability Ltd.

**Web:** <https://kidsability.ky/clinical-psychology-services/>

**Tel:** +1 (345) 943 5437

**Email:** [info@kidsability.ky](mailto:info@kidsability.ky)

### Life Options Counselling Services

**Web:** <https://www.lifeoptions.ky/>

**Tel:** +1 (345) 940-LIFE (5433)

**Email:** [info@lifeoptions.ky](mailto:info@lifeoptions.ky)

## OnCourse Cayman

**Web:** <https://oncoursecayman.com/services/>

**Tel:** +1 (345) 745-6463

**Email:** [info@oncourse.ky](mailto:info@oncourse.ky)

## The Wellness Centre

**Web:** <https://wellnesscentre.ky/our-services/>

**Tel:** +1 (345) 949-9355

**Email:** [info@wellnesscentre.ky](mailto:info@wellnesscentre.ky)

## International Resources

### Befrienders Worldwide

**Web:** <https://www.befrienders.org/>

### Grassroots Suicide Prevention

**Web:** <https://prevent-suicide.org.uk/find-help-now/>

## Resources for SEND

### [Dealing with bereavement and support with grief | Speak to a bereavement counsellor | Mencap](#)

Easy Read guides, guides for caregivers and an online bereavement counselling chat function.

Bereavement | Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities

### [Bereavement | Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities](#)

### [Bereavement \(autism.org.uk\)](#)

Guides for autistic people, guides for their caregivers, guides for professionals