

If you discover or witness a suicide death



here
for
you

If you discover a person's body after a suspected suicide death, or witness that death, you can find yourself caught up in circumstances beyond your control. Traumatic events like this can have a lasting impact. They are shocking and distressing. What you saw or heard may be difficult to deal with. This is especially true if the person involved was someone you knew or were close to.

We're here for you

Our Support Workers are available to support you personally, or as a family or whānau, for as long as you need us. You can call us 24/7 on **0800 842 846** to be connected with a Support Worker.

“ The experience can be overwhelming – and the memories are not easily forgotten. ”

Report what's happened

Call police on 111. Police will ask you to provide a witness statement. A police officer will write down or record what you saw, heard, or know. After such a traumatic experience, people's memories of what happened can be a bit foggy or uncertain. Take your time and do your best.

- What you say must be true. Giving police false information is a serious matter.
- You'll be asked to read through to check it's correct and sign to confirm it's an accurate report of what you witnessed.

As the investigation continues, you may be interviewed again and asked to give evidence as a witness in a coronial inquiry. Your coronial case manager will explain what this involves. A Support Worker is available to support you at the inquiry and can also answer any questions.

Common Reactions

Everyone's different and will react in their own way.

You are likely to experience a wide range of strong reactions. Common first reactions include shock, disbelief, horror, fear, helplessness, sadness, and anger. People can also sometimes find themselves feeling guilty and wondering ... *Was there anything I/we could have done to have stopped this from happening?* These are all completely normal reactions to a traumatic situation.

Physically you may find your body reacts in different ways: shakiness, nausea, a racing heart, a tight chest, body aches, headaches, difficulty sleeping, changes in appetite, uncontrollable sobbing or crying, or needing to sit or lie down. Existing health conditions might worsen. You might find you are exhausted.

It may be hard to remember things, or to concentrate. Some people find they stay on alert and feel anxious in case something like that happens again. You might withdraw from others or need to be near others more. You might find you're more irritable than usual.

You might feel curious to know more about the person if you didn't know them and want to make sense of what happened and why.

CONTACT

Victim Support

Get Help: 0800 VICTIM (0800 842 846)
enquiries@victimsupport.org.nz
victimsupport.org.nz


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You may have disturbing thoughts or memories about what you saw or heard repeating in your mind. You might have nightmares, or flashbacks as if it were happening to you again. Often people try to avoid anything that brings back bad memories.

If the discoverer or witness is a child or young person

If the discoverer or witness is a child or young person, they will need loving support and understanding from caring adults around them. They may also need help from professionals with trauma support skills, even if they didn't know the person who has died.

Supporting a child or young person who may have discovered or witnessed a suicide

In a quiet place, gently ask them what happened. Keep it simple. They may not remember much at first and it may come back to them later. They might not want to talk because they're in shock or very frightened. Just be with them quietly instead.

Let them know you understand it was scary for them, and they're safe.

This is a very traumatic and overwhelming experience, and it could be a troubling time for them. They're likely to have some physical reactions - feeling sick, headaches, stomach aches, being shaky, bedwetting, or less appetite. Difficult memories could keep coming back. They might find it hard to sleep and could have bad dreams about what they saw.

Arrange for them to see a doctor, counsellor, or psychologist to help them work through any negative effects of what they have experienced. Ask your Support Worker about this or call us 24/7 on **0800 842 846** to be connected with a Support Worker.

For more suggestions, see:

Advice on supporting your kids after a traumatic event (Ministry of Health)
<https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/supporting-your-kids-after-a-traumatic-event-16mar2018-v2.docx>

Helping Children after Trauma (Ministry of Health)
<https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/emergency-management/managing-stress-emergency/helping-children>

A blessing of the site

A blessing of the site where a person has died is very important for some families, whānau, and communities. If you would like to attend a site blessing, or if you are a close family member and want to arrange one, you could contact your local church or faith centre, your local marae, your cultural leaders, the officer in charge of your case, or speak to your Support Worker.

If you don't personally know the family or whānau, speak to a Support Worker if you would like to attend any blessing of the site that is being arranged.



Dealing with media interest

As a discoverer or a witness, media may want to get comments from you, or interview you. Media can be demanding and intrusive. Our information sheet, *After a suicide - Managing Media Interest*, provides information on dealing with the media and useful tips for wisely using social media at this time. Download it from the Suicide section of our website under GET SUPPORT, or you can ask your Support Worker for a copy.

Coping with the impact

All these reactions listed above are normal responses to a traumatic situation and they can affect people more than they expect. Recovery from this traumatic situation will take some time and support.

Looking after yourself is important

Encourage others who have been affected to do the same. Eat healthy food. Drink enough water. Keep up routines and get good rest and sleep, as best you can. Do some simple exercise. Take some slow, deep breaths. Spend time with people you can relax with, or with a pet. Spend time in nature. If you find keeping busy helps, find useful tasks to do. See a doctor if you're unwell, extremely anxious, or are having difficulty sleeping. Draw on any cultural or spiritual beliefs you may have. Accept caring offers from others if that would help.

Flashbacks

A flashback feels as though you're back in the middle of your traumatic experience or reliving some aspect of it. This can be in vivid detail and during a flashback it can be difficult to connect back to the present and to what is real. To better understand flashbacks and ways to manage them, see our information sheet *Dealing with Flashbacks* on our website www.victimsupport.org.nz under the *Coping with Grief and Trauma* section under PRACTICAL INFORMATION.

Talk about what happened

When you're ready, talk to someone you trust about what happened, such as a trusted member of your family or whānau, a close friend, your doctor, a counsellor, a psychologist, a respected elder, rangatira, or a Support Worker. If any aspects of your story are particularly disturbing, speak to a professional. Talking honestly about how things are can help release the stress and emotional tension inside.

Tips for coping with your reactions

To understand more about trauma and grief, and to learn ways to manage your reactions, see our information sheets *Coping with Trauma*, *Dealing with Flashbacks* and *When You're Grieving* on our website www.victimsupport.org.nz on the Coping with Grief and Trauma section under PRACTICAL INFORMATION.

Your reactions are normal responses to a traumatic event. Even though it may not feel like it now, they will gradually lessen in the weeks and months to come.

If they don't lessen, or get worse and disrupt your daily life and work, it is best to seek the help of a professional who has experience supporting people after trauma. Some people may, for example, develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). If you have concerns, see your doctor, a counsellor, a psychologist, or ask your Support Worker about help that is available to you.



If your reactions trouble you

- Visit your doctor. They can do a health check and support you with any ongoing issues, such as sleeplessness, anxiety, flashbacks, or depression.
- Consider talking with a counsellor or psychologist. They can help you work through your reactions and the consequences the crime has had.
- Find a doctor, counsellor, or psychologist here <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/in-crisis/find-a-gp-or-counsellor/>

How we can help

Our Support Workers are available to support you personally, or as a family or whānau, for as long as you need us. You can call us 24/7 on 0800 842 846 to be connected with a Support Worker.

What we can offer

Our Support Workers can support you with:

- someone to listen, talk with, and support you to cope through trauma and loss
- help to understand your rights and make informed choices
- information and help to answer your questions
- help to access local support services and counselling to suit your situation
- practical support and assistance to deal with things like the coronial process, which you may be asked to provide evidence to
- someone to assist and support you as a witness at any hearings and dealing with police and other government agencies.

We are committed to providing quality support to strengthen the mana and wellbeing of all those who have discovered or witnessed a suicide death.

If English is your second language

If you require support in your first language, Victim Support can use Ezispeak to connect with an interpreter over the phone. Call us on **0800 842 846** and let us know. We will try to match you to a Support Worker who speaks your language.

Helpful Links

- *Coping with Trauma* (Victim Support) www.victimsupport.org.nz/practical-information/coping-grief-and-trauma/managing-your-grief-reactions
- *Dealing with Flashbacks* (Victim Support) www.victimsupport.org.nz/get-support/sudden-death/finding-ways-cope
- *Mental health advice for coping after a traumatic event* (Ministry of Health) <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/mental-health-and-addictions/mental-health/mental-health-advice-cope-after-traumatic-event>



**Our service is
free, personal,
and confidential**

24/7

365
days of the year

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