



Supporting Murrumbidgee communities impacted by suicide

Introduction

The impacts of a death by suicide are often far reaching, impacting family, friends workplaces and communities. For those impacted it can be difficult to know where to go and what to do at a time of immense sadness and loss. For those who know and support the bereaved, it can be hard to know what to do and what to say that helps. This manual contains practical information and tips to help communities across the Murrumbidgee region during these difficult times.

Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land in the Murrumbidgee region. We pay respect to past and present Elders of this land: the Wiradjuri, Yorta Yorta, Baraba Baraba, Wemba Wemba and Nari Nari peoples.

We acknowledge people with lived experience of suicide bereavement that contributed to the content of this guide. We recognise the importance of the voice of lived experience in shaping the work we do in suicide prevention and aftercare.



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Murrumbidgee Local Response Group

The Murrumbidgee Local Response Group (LRG) comprises of five organisations dedicated to supporting local communities during times of need. These organisations include, Murrumbidgee Local Health District, Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network, NSW Ambulance, NSW Police and Wellways Murrumbidgee. Each member of the Local Response Group is employed by the mentioned organisations but bring individual experience and expertise to the group.

The LRG convenes to respond to the needs of the community after a suicide event or critical incident has occurred and adheres to the Murrumbidgee Suicide Event/ Critical Incident Communications and Response Protocol.



If you are aware of a critical event, including a suicide within the Murrumbidgee region you can notify the LRG at localresponsegroup@mphn.org.au



**Supporting suicide prevention and
aftercare in the Murrumbidgee**

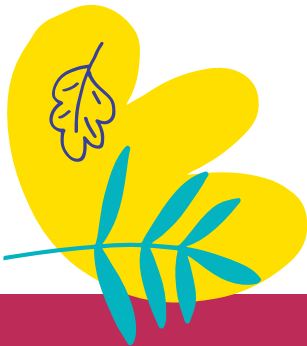
Murrumbidgee After Suicide Support



Wellways Australia provides the After Suicide Support program in the Murrumbidgee region, providing support to families, friends, workplaces and communities following a death by suicide.

The program provides a range of supports for people bereaved by suicide including material aid, emotional support, written resources, guidance on how to speak to children or loved ones about their loss and referrals to relevant support services.

After Suicide Support is available to anyone living in the Murrumbidgee region who is bereaved by suicide regardless of where or when the person passed away.



To make a referral contact Shannon O'Brien,
Senior Support Worker.
sobrien@wellways.org
0437 274 316
[wellways.org/our-services/after-suicide-support](https://www.wellways.org/our-services/after-suicide-support)



Safely communicating about suicide

When talking about suicide in the community it is important we consider the language we use. Our language can contribute to the stigma surrounding suicide and create feelings of shame or judgement, often unintentionally. The following information is intended to support you to talk about suicide safely.

Rather than saying *committed suicide* you would say *died by suicide* or *suicided*.

Avoiding the words *successful, unsuccessful or failed*, instead you would say *took their own life, suicide attempt or a non-fatal suicide attempt*.

Certain details provided to the public in relation to a suicide attempt or death can increase the risk of contagion. It is recommended to avoid talking about *specific suicide data*, speaking in *generalised terms* is best, especially when talking about statistics. Do not mention where or how a person has died.

Avoid using words such as *epidemic, crisis or cluster*, this can create a sense of fear in the community. Instead use *hopeful* messaging and *refer to local supports and referral pathways*.

It is important to capture specific details of an incident which will inevitably include the method, means and surrounding circumstances of an attempt or death. Information such as this can be triggering for the general community, where possible *avoid disclosing details to bystanders, community and the media*. Before divulging certain information, consider the purpose for which they need to know. Simply saying a person has died by suicide is all that is required, particularly when speaking with the media.

Wherever possible provide contact details for 24/7 national helplines as well as local Murrumbidgee services and supports to people impacted by the event. These details can be found at the back of this guide.

Supporting people who are bereaved

Supporting people who are recently bereaved by suicide can be challenging and emotional. They are often experiencing a range of emotions including, confusion, sadness, shock, anger and disbelief.

Below are some helpful tips that can support your interaction.

- Speak slowly.
- Personalise the interaction, if possible and culturally appropriate, use the name of their loved one.
- If possible, offer water, as this can assist with regulating shock and distress.
- If you can, offer practical assistance that can reduce additional worry. Examples include collecting children from school, putting out bins, providing food.
- Where available and safe, include other support persons, such as a family friend, neighbour, or work mate in communication.
- Offer the bereaved person, family, workplace to support services, such as Wellways After Suicide Support Program to assist (page 3).

Supporting people who are highly distressed can be confronting and upsetting for you too. Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings and remember to connect with others to support your own self care and wellbeing (page 11).



Appropriate timing of suicide prevention training

Following a suicide death it is normal for the community to want to do whatever they can to help prevent this happening again. Often, communities will want to turn to suicide prevention training. It is important to consider the timing of suicide prevention training in communities who have been bereaved by suicide, as providing this training too early can increase distress, confusion and worry for those impacted. Although there is no rule regarding the right timing, it is recommended waiting three to six months after a suicide event before considering the promotion and rolling out of prevention training.



There are things that can be done to support community connection during these times. They include:

Hosting a gathering such a BBQ or community event to promote the importance of connection. Referral pathway information can be available for those who may need additional supports.

Provide a short workshop on understanding grief reactions, ways to support children, managing social media, or other topics that might be relevant to your community.

For support to organise an information session or gathering please contact the Wellways After Suicide Support Team (page 3).

What to consider when holding a community event

Holding a community event can be a great way to promote hope, healing and awareness about suicide prevention. There are some key considerations that can help inform the kind of event you would like to create.

- Have defined goals and desired outcomes for the event. For example, do you want to provide referral information to a large group of people or promote help seeking information?
- If possible, engage with the bereaved family regarding event plans.
- Ensure people attending are aware of what to expect when attending.
- Provide support information people can access and take with them for when they need.
- Ensure there are formal supports available at the event to support people who may become distressed.
- Hold event in a neutral, safe space. Avoid places that might be traumatic or connected to passing.
- Create a welcoming environment with access to water and refreshments and provide messages of hope and connection.

Memorials

When a family, school, workplace, sporting group or community experiences the death of a friend, loved one, or teammate, it is human tendency to want to do something in memory of the deceased. These memorials can range from spontaneous tributes such as flowers at the place of death, events or activities in the person's name, to more permanent and lasting tributes like placing plaques in halls or planting trees or gardens in someone's name. There may also be ceremonies, assemblies and activities to bring together members of the school community to share memories and grieve together.

While grieving collectively can be supportive and beneficial (especially for young people), it is important memorial events are held in a way that does not unintentionally idealise suicide.

To ensure a safe and beneficial memorial avoid promoting, linking to, or setting up a public memorial on social media, this can be distressing for people who are closely connected to the deceased person.



Below are some considerations and guidance to help plan a memorial event.

Avoid permanent memorials such as plaques, planting trees in public places, naming events or places – this can, for some, be perceived as glorifying the suicide and may contribute to future suicides.

Create a memorial that is life-affirming and encourages coping skills and resilience, especially in the face of difficult life events. Examples of these types of activities include:

- Making donations to a local crisis centre or other charitable organisation
- Collecting money to help family with funeral expenses
- Participating in an event to raise awareness about suicide prevention
- Service projects to emphasise the importance of people taking care of each other
- Service projects providing opportunities to help others
- Writing notes to the family to give the 'gift of memories'
- Collaborating with community agencies and groups promoting good mental health and community connections

Don't make the event about a specific event – often there are others in the community who are bereaved by suicide. Making it about one event can lead to increased feelings of being isolated and devalued.

If you are hosting an activity or event, always ensure you have appropriate support people available for debrief and information.

For events, ensure there are resources with help seeking information, such as local and 24/7 supports.

Ensure media coverage is in line with Mindframe media guidelines (page 10) and do not depict individual deaths, and have hope filled, life affirming and help seeking messages

If in doubt, reach out to Wellways After Suicide Support Coordinator or the Local Response Group for guidance and support (pages 2 and 3).

The media

Media, including mainstream and social media can have a significant impact in determining social attitudes towards suicide and mental illness. It is important, if using media as a means of communicating your suicide prevention messages you develop well planned responses to help reduce risk of further harm and support safe outcomes for families, friends, workplaces and communities impacted by suicide.



Some things to consider:

All social media posts should include help-seeking services when discussing suicide. Important considerations include, services being available 24/7 by telephone, chat or online. It's also important the services suggested are appropriate for the age, gender and demographic of each audience. There are examples of appropriate helplines at the back of this guide.

Social media posts align with [Mindframe media guidelines](#). Visit mindframe.org.au to find out more or contact the Mindframe team at mindframe@health.nsw.gov.au

Where possible, check with family and friends of a loved one regarding messages for media and consider that without inclusion, they may feel increased feelings of distress.

Online public memorials should be carefully considered as they may inadvertently glorify suicide and present it as a desired outcome for people at risk themselves. These are also often unmoderated. Online memorials for someone who has died by suicide should be carefully monitored and, in some settings, such as schools, they may be discouraged.

What is self care?

Self care is care provided *for you by you*. It is a conscious act someone takes in order to promote their own physical, mental and emotional health.

It is particularly important when supporting those bereaved by suicide to ensure you are managing your own self care to enable you to effectively support others.

Self care is a key suicide prevention strategy and should be practiced often.

It is about identifying what you need to help keep yourself well and connected to your loved ones and community. Self care is about treating yourself as kindly as you treat others.

By incorporating self care activities into your regular routine, like going for a walk or socialising, give your body and mind time to rest, reset, and rejuvenate, so you can avoid or reduce the symptoms of stress and anxiety.

Self care makes you more effective and productive. When you take time for yourself and give your body the food, rest, and activity it needs, you will have more energy to meet the demands of daily life.

When you avoid doing things that make you feel physically, mentally and emotionally well, you deplete your confidence and self-esteem. This can mean becoming disconnected from your community and the people who can support you.

Caring for yourself also shows others they too need to put themselves first and not overextend or overwork. A good way to remember to take time to care for your own wellbeing, is to schedule this in your diary, preplan a day solely for the purpose of doing something you enjoy.

Black Dog Institute has a wonderful resource:

'How to use self-care planning to improve your emotional wellbeing, even when you don't think you need it.'

blackdoginstitute.org.au/news/how-to-use-self-care-planning-to-improve-your-emotional-wellbeing-even-when-you-dont-think-you-need-it/

Further information and supports



mphn.org.au

wellways.org

kit.wellways.org

lifeline.org.au

mensline.org.au

suicidecallbackservice.org.au

blackdoginstitute.org.au

beyondblue.org.au

headspace.org.au

ruok.org.au

thirrili.com.au

qlife.org.au

blackrainbow.org.au

grieflink.org.au

headtohealth.gov.au



Helplines and local services

If in a crisis or you are concerned for someone's safety, phone 000 immediately.

Free, confidential crisis support can be accessed 24/7 at the below phone numbers:

Lifeline

13 11 14 or [lifeline.org.au](https://www.lifeline.org.au)

Beyond Blue

1300 224 636 or [beyondblue.org.au](https://www.beyondblue.org.au)

Murrumbidgee Accessline

1800 800 944

Mensline

1300 78 99 78 or [mensline.org.au](https://www.mensline.org.au)

Mental Healthline

1800 011 511

Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN)

1800 008 774 or [clan.org.au](https://www.clan.org.au)

Suicide Call Back Service

1300 659 467 or [suicidecallbackservice.org.au](https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

headspace

[headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)

The following number are not crisis lines but are available in the Murrumbidgee region to support you:

Murrumbidgee PHN Central Access and Navigation Service

1800 931 603

9am-5pm, Monday to Friday except public holidays

Wellways Helpline

1300 111 500

Free, confidential advice, information and service referral from peer volunteers
9am-5pm, Monday to Friday except public holidays



This resource is made available thanks to a grant under the headspace NSW Community Collaboratives Grants Program. The NSW Community Collaboratives Grants Program is funded by the NSW Ministry of Health as a Towards Zero Suicides Initiative which is being led by headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation in partnership with Lifeline Australia.