



GRIEF
SUPPORT SERVICES.



After Suicide

SUPPORTING
CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE



Table of CONTENTS

Where do we start?.....	3
Let's talk to our children.....	4
Common reactions and behaviours.....	6
When would you need professional support?.....	8
How can you help?.....	9
Concerned about suicidal thoughts or behaviour?.....	10
Other useful helplines and websites.....	11

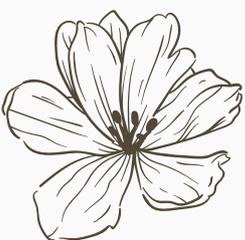


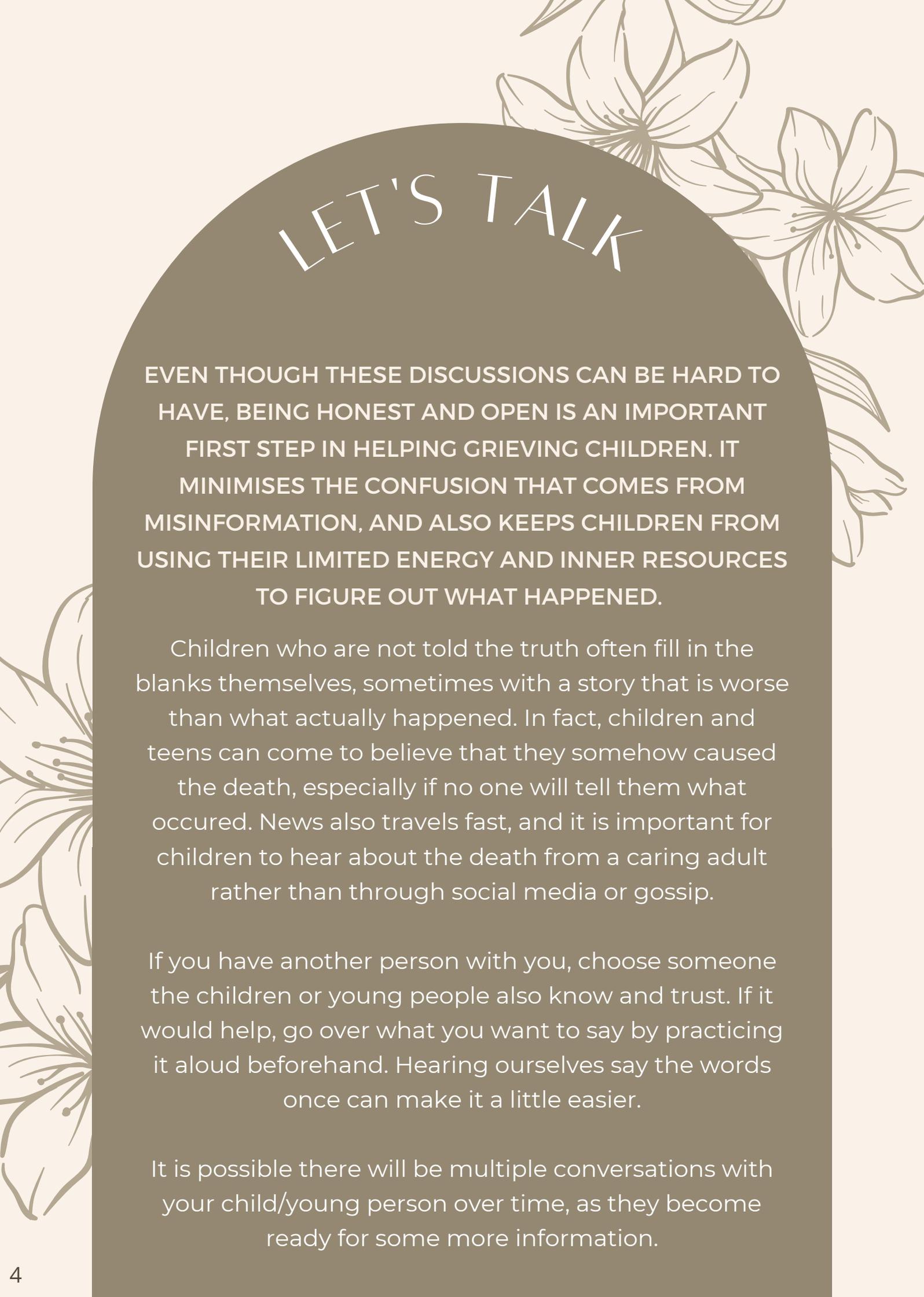
WHERE DO WE *Start?*

LOSS TO SUICIDE IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO EXPERIENCE. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WILL GRIEVE IN THEIR OWN WAYS. AS ADULTS WE NEED TO FIND METHODS TO BEST SUPPORT THEM WHILE MANAGING OUR OWN GRIEF.

This includes considering hard questions such as “do we tell them?” and if so “how much should we share?” In this booklet we will share suggestions with the hope it offers some support in making these decisions with love, kindness, support and everyone’s best interests in mind.

Explaining bereavement by suicide to a child or young person can feel overwhelming and intimidating. As adults, we often want to protect them from the level of grief, uncertainty, and possible stigma and shame that may accompany such a death.





LET'S TALK

EVEN THOUGH THESE DISCUSSIONS CAN BE HARD TO HAVE, BEING HONEST AND OPEN IS AN IMPORTANT FIRST STEP IN HELPING GRIEVING CHILDREN. IT MINIMISES THE CONFUSION THAT COMES FROM MISINFORMATION, AND ALSO KEEPS CHILDREN FROM USING THEIR LIMITED ENERGY AND INNER RESOURCES TO FIGURE OUT WHAT HAPPENED.

Children who are not told the truth often fill in the blanks themselves, sometimes with a story that is worse than what actually happened. In fact, children and teens can come to believe that they somehow caused the death, especially if no one will tell them what occurred. News also travels fast, and it is important for children to hear about the death from a caring adult rather than through social media or gossip.

If you have another person with you, choose someone the children or young people also know and trust. If it would help, go over what you want to say by practicing it aloud beforehand. Hearing ourselves say the words once can make it a little easier.

It is possible there will be multiple conversations with your child/young person over time, as they become ready for some more information.

Some TIPS

- Start with a short, simple explanation of what happened in words they can understand.
- The most important piece of information to share first is that the person has died. They're likely to then ask you how. Telling them that the person died by suicide, and explaining what suicide means, will help them to better understand what has occurred. Search for "explaining suicide to children and young people" at www.skylight.org.nz.
- If you think they might have already heard the news, check what they know, in case they have been told things that are wrong or confusing for them.
- Give small pieces of information at a time. There will be a lot for them to take in all at once. The level of information needs to be appropriate to their age.
- You might need to repeat the information. Shock makes it hard to digest information.
- Use non-judgmental language. Speak respectfully of the person who has died.
- They may ask questions, perhaps very blunt or random ones. Answer as best you can. Allow their questions to guide the conversation.
- Let them know they can talk with you some more about what has happened whenever they need to.
- It's okay if you feel tearful. A child or young person can sense this is a serious, sad time. If you get very distressed, take a minute to get some control before continuing.
- They will need reassurance from you. Use caring eye contact. They might need a hug, or their hand held. Be kind and let them know they are being looked after, and by whom.
- They might ask unrelated questions or start to do an activity to distract themselves. This may seem puzzling but is normal. They are just working through the news in their own way.
- Invite them to come back to you when they're ready to know more or ask questions. In the meantime, be loving, kind, and caring. If they do not come to you gently encourage conversation and remind them you are there for them and will answer any questions they may have.

COMMON REACTIONS *and Behaviours*

Children and young people have the same emotional reactions as adults, yet they may not know what to expect, why they feel a certain way and how to look after themselves when they become overwhelmed. We can support them by knowing what to look for and teaching them that all reactions they have in their grief are normal. Together you can find names for what is happening, and talk through ways to cope.

Grief can be described like waves, it can come in strong and fast or it can look calm on the surface. Each child will have different reactions. This can be due to age, personality and emotional awareness.

Behaviours are a form of communication for what the child does not have the words for as yet.

Some common things we may see in your children and young people can be:

EMOTIONS

Shocked, confused, numb: in denial – Can't believe it's true, acting like it isn't.

Rejected, abandoned – Didn't they love me/us? Why did they leave me?

Guilty – Was it my fault? What could I have said or done to stop this?

Sad and tearful – They are not here anymore and never will be again.

Angry – At the person, others who they blame, or at their God, gods, or the universe.

Worried and anxious – Will someone else I know die too? Who is going to look after me now?

Shamed, embarrassed, whakamā – What will others think?

PHYSICAL

Feeling nauseous, stomach aches, headaches, body aches.

Eating less or more.

Sleeping less or more.

Existing conditions get worse.

BEHAVIOUR

Avoids talking about it, or wanting to talk about it a lot.

May choose to hide the news from other people.

Withdrawing from others, or spending more time with others, clingy, more fretful, irritable, acting out, more tantrums.

Temporary developmental regression, such as using favourite comfort items again (blanket, toy), separation anxiety, a loss of confidence, bedwetting/soiling might start, speech confidence may decrease.

SPIRITUAL

Searching for answers and meaning – Why did they do this? What happened?

Looking for the person who has died, sensing the presence of the person who has died.

Leaning into their culture and/or faith and beliefs

Having big questions about life and death.



WHEN WOULD YOU NEED *Professional Support*

IN THE FIRST FEW MONTHS AFTER THE LOSS ANY AND ALL REACTIONS CAN BE EXPECTED AND CAN NATURALLY BE SUPPORTED WITH FAMILY AND YOUR EXTENDED COMMUNITY, USING TOOLS YOU ALREADY HAVE SUCH AS LOVE, TIME AND AFFECTION. EACH CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON WILL GRIEVE DIFFERENTLY. AGAIN THERE IS NO "CORRECT" WAY TO GET THROUGH SOMETHING LIKE THIS BUT THERE ARE HEALTHY WAYS AND THERE ARE UNHEALTHY WAYS WHICH CAN HINDER SOMEONE'S WELLBEING (EG. DRINKING, DRUGS, WITHDRAWAL). WE DO WANT TO SUGGEST A FEW THINGS TO BE AWARE OF AND TO KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR. THESE MAY SUGGEST YOUR YOUNG PERSON MAY NEED SOMEONE TO TALK THIS THROUGH WITH WHO IS SEPARATE FROM FAMILY. THEY MAY NOT WANT YOU TO WORRY OR PERHAPS DO NOT KNOW THE LEVEL OF NEED THEY HAVE THEMSELVES.

You know your child or young person best. You will feel and notice when they are not coping. But do listen if someone else points this out to you. If any of the signs below are causing concern it may be worth making contact with a health professional. Please remember this is not a reflection on your parenting and love, it is not a sign anyone has failed. This form of grief is complicated and traumatic, and sometimes we need additional supports to help us work through this. If you notice any of the following, consider them as a cue to offer a helping hand or to have a korero.

- Dramatic personality change, eg. becoming introverted when normally extroverted, less agreeable when normally agreeable, closed to people when normally open;
- Making statements about suicide, wanting to die or not be here;
- Starting to have issues at school and at home, perhaps unusually rebellious or anti-social behaviours;
- Showing little to no interest in things they once enjoyed;
- Believes no one understands or cares, very low mood;
- Using drugs or alcohol to cope;
- Any additional stressful life events;
- Changes in sleeping and eating patterns; or
- Giving away personal belongings.



How You CAN HELP

OFFER YOUR TIME AND PATIENCE REGULARLY for your young person/child to keep talking about and remembering the person who has died, as well as the painful aspects of grief. There is no way to "fix" this loss or make it go away but it is possible to find ways to manage the sadness and pain, sharing is one place to start. What does your young person/child understand about this loss? There may be incorrect or unhelpful information on social media or at school that is compounding an already difficult time.

REASSURANCE Not everyone who is sad or depressed goes on to take their life. There are ways to manage these times and there are people who can help.

EXPRESS YOUR CONCERNS BUT DON'T LECTURE Try to not focus on the behaviours but what the message behind the behaviour might be. Listen with care, your young person/child may struggle to find words for what they are going through. Let them know they can ask you questions at any time. Check in if they seem distracted or distressed.

LIFE AS USUAL There will be times when your young person/child needs time out from the intensity of their grief and to connect with familiar aspects of their life. This does not mean they are not coping or dealing with their grief. Moving back and forth between facing grief and having time out from it is to be expected. If you're not sure how your young person/child is managing, check in with them about that.



CONCERNED ABOUT

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS OR BEHAVIOUR?

Asking someone if they are having suicidal thoughts will not prompt the thoughts to be acted upon, sometimes it can be a relief to be asked.

www.mentalhealth.org.nz/suicide-prevention/connecting-through-korero#takaha

Following are some questions to help you with these conversations:

- Have you had thoughts or feelings about hurting yourself or taking your life, or of being dead?
- How often do you have these thoughts or feelings?
- Have you thought about how you would hurt yourself or take your life?
- Do you think you will carry out this plan or act on these thoughts?

The level of concern comes from the answers to these questions. It is not unusual to think about death when coping with strong emotions and the intensity of grief. If the thinking is specific to suicide with some sort of detail or plan, it is time to get professional support. Do not remain alone with this information. Do remind your young person/child that these are just thoughts and feelings that do not need to be acted upon and that it is important to share these when they come. Remind your young person/child that you are there for them, at any time.

It is also important to make a coping plan together. "I hear what you are saying, how painful this is and how you are doing your best to cope. Let's now focus on what we can do and what might help us get through this together."

- How will you know when you need support? (Eg. panic/intrusive thoughts/despair/anger/sadness.)
- What are the sorts of things that have stopped you acting on the thoughts so far?
- What has helped you in difficult times in the past that you could try again?
- Is there somewhere you like to go where you feel safe?
- Who is there for you to check in with: at home/school/other scenarios? (Eg. family/friend/teacher/counsellor/1737/Youthline.)
- What are the good things about life that you want to remember or stay connected to?

OTHER SUPPORT

Websites, Information & Call Centres

Need to Talk txt/call 1737

Lifeline 0800 543 354

Suicide Crisis Helpline 0508 828 865

Depression Helpline 0800 111 757

Anxiety Helpline 0800 269 4389

Youth Line 0800 376 633

Parent Helpline 0800 568 856

Family Services Helpline 0800 211 211

For full range of local social service providers in your area search:

www.familyservices.govt.nz

Websites for information and articles
specific for suicide bereavement:

www.afterasuicide.nz

www.mentalhealth.org.nz/suicide-loss

www.skylight.org.nz

www.standbysupport.com.au

www.supportaftersuicide.org.au

www.healthed.govt.nz

www.shop.mentalhealth.org.nz

GRIEF SUPPORT SERVICES OFFERS:

Support, understanding and counselling for grief and loss:

- Individual and whanau/family counselling
- Specialised child counselling (from age 6)

Specialised support after loss to suicide:

- Counselling for individuals, children (from age 6), whanau/family.
- Horizons - suicide bereavement monthly information and support groups.
- Suicide Loss Support Peers - informal support with a person who has undertaken training and has lived experience of loss to suicide.
- WAVES After Suicide Group - an eight-week education and support group.
- Counselling available to those affected by someone's suicidal behaviour.



Contact Us

Phone: 07 578 4480

Email: support@griefsupport.org.nz

Web: www.griefsupport.org.nz

We are located in Greerton, Tauranga.

147 Chadwick Road. 3142.

New Zealand