



after a suicide death:

information for families and friends

What the police will do

What the coroner will do

What the funeral director will do

Support and counselling



NSW HEALTH



What the police will do

The police will need to investigate what happened. They may need to question the family and friends and you may be asked to make a statement.

If the suicide death took place in the family home, the police will need to visit the home to get further information. Police will explain any legal matters and the usual procedures and why they are necessary.

The police may ask for someone to formally 'identify the body'. This can be very difficult. It is advisable to:

- have someone who has experience with such procedures accompany you if possible
- ask the police officer and/or the assistant at the mortuary to prepare you for the experience by sensitively describing for you what you are about to see
- have a support person with you to help you through the process and be there for you afterwards.

Please refer to the *coping with grief after a suicide death* booklet included in this package for more information.

The police may have to come back several times to ask questions. The police may help families and friends to contact others such as clergy, funeral directors and other community agencies.

What the funeral director will do

The funeral director has an important role after someone has died from suicide. Funeral directors can help you with many of the formalities at this difficult time and they are there to carry out your wishes. It is, however, important that the bereaved have a chance to slow down and consider carefully what they wish to do and how and where they wish to do it.

With your instructions the funeral director can help arrange all the practical issues such as official notifications, flowers, time and place

of the funeral ceremony, and someone to conduct the funeral if you don't have someone in mind. The funeral can be arranged by anyone almost anywhere. It is usually more beneficial if the service is conducted by someone familiar with funeral rituals. There are very few restrictions. Refer to *coping with grief after a suicide death* for further information.

Family and friends often want to have the funeral over quickly. It's important to remember there is no hurry. Take your time and help organise a rite of passage that means something to you. The funeral director can benefit the family by helping with a carefully organised funeral.

Family and friends may prefer a private funeral. However this often leaves the family feeling isolated and without the social support which may be needed later.

These days most families recognise the benefits of spending time with their loved one after the death and the funeral director can arrange this. Even though this is difficult for many people it seems important that everyone has the opportunity to do so. It is important to give children of all ages the opportunity to do this also. For children, simple encouragement is enough. Do not force them.

What the coroner will do

In NSW it is a legal requirement that deaths from unnatural, violent or unusual causes, including apparent suicide, are reported to the coroner.

Police officers act on behalf of the coroner to investigate and document such deaths. The purpose is to determine the manner and cause of the death which includes details of surrounding circumstances.

An inquest is not automatically held following a possible suicide death. The coroner may be satisfied with the reports prepared by police and medical reports. In these circumstances the coroner would not conduct a hearing and would finalise the matter on the basis of what has been produced. Alternatively the coroner may hold a hearing into the matter.

Most importantly, the coroner might make recommendations which may lessen the likelihood of a similar tragedy occurring in the future. Counselling for relatives of the deceased can be arranged through the local Area Health Service.

Support and counselling

The bereaved are usually too shocked to benefit from formal counselling at the time of death. In the immediate aftermath of a suicide death it is generally the support of family and friends which helps the most. In the weeks which follow, as the reality 'hits home' and support subsides, the skills offered by a trained bereavement counsellor and/or a Bereaved Through Suicide Support Group can be invaluable. Word of mouth is the best way to find a suitable group or counsellor. You will need someone who is experienced and has dealt with many people bereaved through suicide. Counsellors can sometimes be found through your funeral director, community health centre, or local mental health team.

Further copies are available from:

Better Health Centre
Locked Mail Bag 5003
GLADESVILLE NSW 2111
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