

WHEN SOMEONE TAKES THEIR OWN LIFE...

What Next?





Acknowledgement

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional owners and custodians of the land, and we pay our respect to their Elders, past and present.

We recognise that suicide amongst our Aboriginal people is two and a half times that of other Australians.



Fremantle,
Cover page Cape Leveque





In the awful quietness of that first terrible night, as exhaustion took its toll and, one by one, our family drifted into fitful, fretful sleep, I remember the sudden sharp realisation that this was it, that our world had turned to ash and dust and that nothing would ever make sense again.

I could not envisage any possibility of recovery from this sort of loss, this unbearable pain. I just wanted it all to end. I just wanted to die right then and there.

I could not see how anything of value - our lives, those we loved, our marriage, friendships, even hope itself, could ever hope to survive such tragedy.

But I was wrong.

David, Kalamunda, following the loss of his son Guy to suicide





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Photography by Robin Kornet and Pui San Whittaker
Written by Sue Crock and Luka Donald-Johnson
Design by Tinderbox

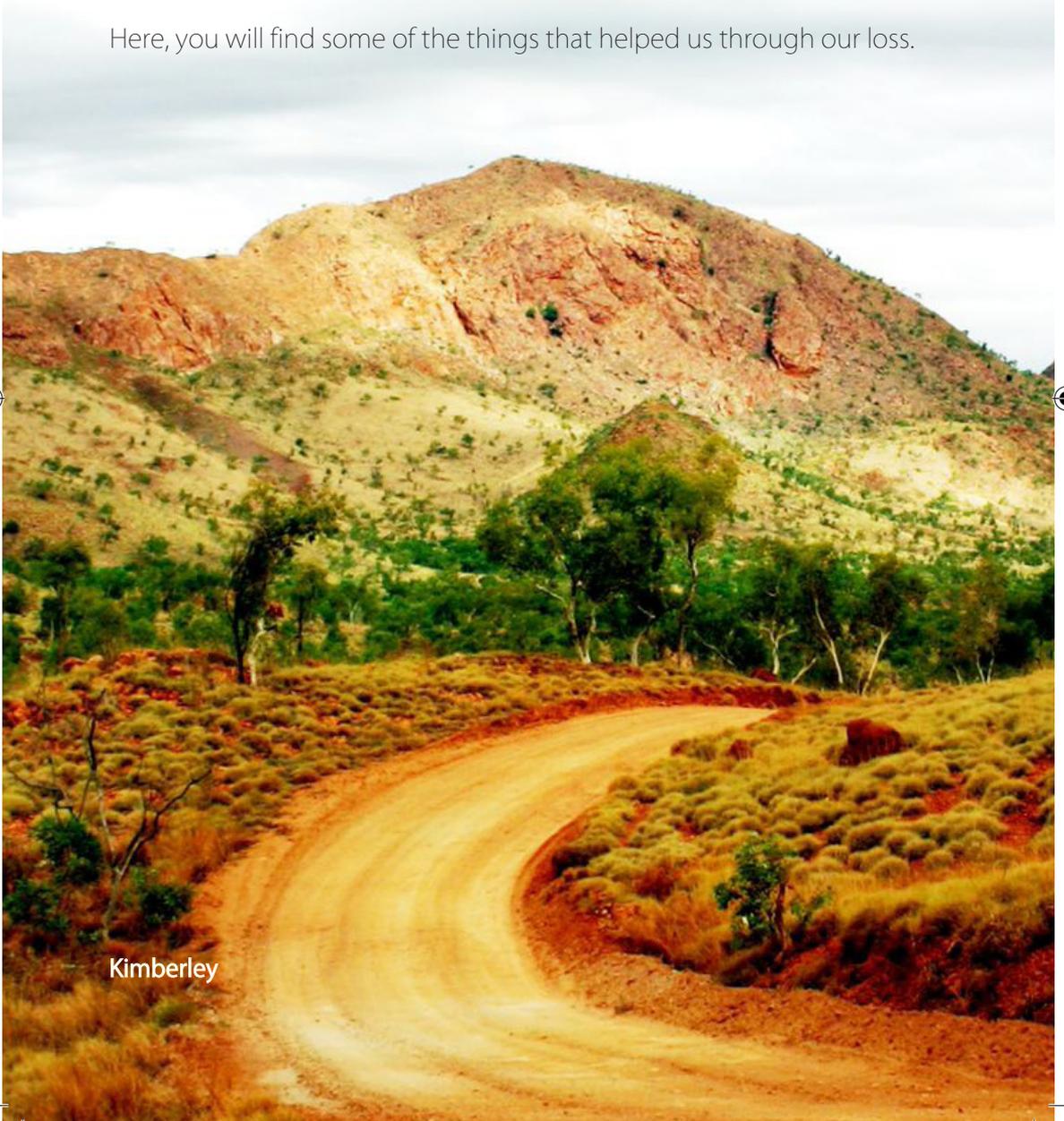




INTRODUCTION

If someone you know or love has taken their life, this is for you. It's been written by people who know what it's like. We have also lost someone to suicide.

Here, you will find some of the things that helped us through our loss.



Kimberley





FIRST THINGS FIRST

There are many practical things we need to do and there are other people who will be involved when someone close to us takes their life.

When we are in shock and we have strangers with whom we must deal we can feel helpless and powerless over what's happening.

Understanding what and who is involved in this process can help us in these early days.

Getting information

When we are first told of our loss, we are full of questions and need to find answers.

What happened? Where did it happen? Who was there? When? How did it happen? And the most difficult question for us all: Why?

We need to have as many of our questions answered as possible, as we try and take in what's happened.

Some of our questions never get answered properly and we are left wondering and trying to make sense of our loss.

People who can help us find answers in our early days:

- Close family and friends we trust
- the Police
- the Coroner's Counselling Service
- ARBOR (Active Response Bereavement Outreach)
- Lifeline
- Compassionate Friends and other support groups and online services are all ready to help.





Suicide notes

Some of us had a note that was left. Many of us did not. Even these did not always provide answers.

Police

The Police are usually the first called when someone dies by suicide. They will make sure the body of the person who has died is taken care of and will contact the Coroner to report the death. They are required to do this by law in cases of sudden or unexplained deaths.

Coroner

The Coroner investigates and determines the cause of death, how it occurred and details needed to register the death. The Coroner also has legal responsibility for the body of the person who has died from unnatural causes or where the cause of death is not known. This includes suicide.

Coronial Counselling Service

The Coronial Counselling Service is part of the Office of the State Coroner. This free service helps us navigate the difficult issues associated with the coronial inquiry process. This includes arranging viewings of our loved ones, explaining what occurs during the post-mortem process, as well as offering advice on helping our children adjust. The Coronial Counselling Service also offers grief counselling, and can refer you to other counsellors or support groups.

Visiting the site

Most suicides happen in or close to home. Most of us want to know where our loved one died and we may want to go to see this place. Sometimes the Police will be involved in the visit.

Some of us took photos and left something to acknowledge this special place. Some of us visit this place a long time later. It becomes important to us. For others, this site is not as important to us as our loved one's burial place. We go there to find comfort later.





Death Certificate

Whenever someone dies, their death needs to be registered with the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages and a death certificate issued. When someone dies of suicide in Western Australia, the death is considered a 'Reportable Death' and needs to be examined by a coroner before a death certificate can be issued. This usually shouldn't take long, but sometimes the Coroner may need to order complex tests to determine the cause of death and this can delay the process.

Things such as toxicology (testing for drugs, alcohol, medication and poisons) or histology (tissue sampling) reports may take time to generate. Most certificates shouldn't take longer than a few weeks, but sometimes take longer if determining the cause of death is particularly complicated.

GP

Your GP can show you the medical report and explain any medical terms for you. As well, your GP can assist with any health issues you may have or that may develop. Ask your GP about services and support you need. GPs can refer us to a qualified counsellor for a number of free sessions if we want professional support.

Funeral Director

The Funeral Director you choose will help you make the arrangements for the funeral and allow you to make the funeral the way you would like it to be. We sometimes needed to speak with more than one funeral company before we found one we felt was suitable and within our budget.

The Coronial Counselling Service can provide information if you have any questions or problems regarding the funeral of the person who has died.

Funeral

This is a very special occasion for most of us, as difficult as it is when someone we love has taken their own life. The memories we have from the day will stay with us as a reminder of the person we have lost. Planning the funeral helped us accept our loss. Most of us had the help of a Funeral Director to make arrangements.





Some tips we can share:

- Ask a friend or someone close to you to help arrange the funeral with you. They will support you so you don't carry that responsibility alone.
- Choose a Funeral Director who listens and who you trust. You are buying this service, so shop around until you find the right person/business.
- Choose a person (an elder, minister or celebrant) to conduct the funeral who you think will set the tone you want and be able to acknowledge your loved one's life well.
- Tell the Funeral Director and staff what you want (and what you don't want). If you don't know, they will guide you and offer options. Ask as many questions as you want.
- Let the Funeral Director know how you would like the person who has died to look for the funeral. A photo can help them with this.

They had put lots of makeup on my sister when I saw her body lying there. It wasn't like her. She didn't wear makeup. I wished I'd told them that at the funeral place. Then I realised she'd have laughed at this, and in the end, so did I.

Annie, Busselton

- How can the funeral best honour the person and their life? What do you and others close to the person want to honour them? What symbols and items with special meaning would you like included? (for example: songs, tributes, stories, prayers, photos, etc)
- What clothes or special items would you like your loved one to be dressed in?
- How can others, including children if appropriate, be involved in the funeral?
- If you are a long way away and cannot arrange a funeral, you can ask to have an unattended cremation and the ashes of the person you have lost sent back to you. The Coroner's Counselling Service will help you with this.





Insurance

Sometimes private health, life, sickness or accident insurance will provide assistance in paying for the funeral of the person who has died. If the deceased had insurance, call their insurance company to ask if assistance is available. If you have lost a child and have insurance, your insurance company can advise you. We sought help from trusted people to assist us with seeking information when we weren't able to do it.

Financial Matters

When we lose someone to suicide we are unable to function as well as usual. Many of us are unable to work for some time, placing us under financial pressure we had not expected.

The time following the death of our loved one can be made even harder by financial difficulty. In some cases, we can apply to release our superannuation early based on compassionate grounds or severe financial hardship caused by the death, burial or funeral.

We may need support to get information and consider our financial situation. Family, friends or a financial advisor we trust can help with this. Some of us asked one of these people to take on the management of our bills during this time.

Banks

Banks have a specific process to go through when closing an account following the death of the owner. You will need to provide a Proof of Death document, as well as forms of identification for yourself. Most banks will try to make this process easy for you and will guide you through the process.

Phone or visit the website of the bank you need. If you find going in person easier, we found it helped to look up what information we needed to bring beforehand.





Public Trustee

The Public Trustee can help us with any legal difficulties following the death of a loved one. Issues regarding wills and assets or fulfilling the role of an executor may arise. We found taking someone we trust with us to help was important.

Sometimes these responsibilities may require us to understand legal or financial details that are beyond our grasp. The Public Trustee provides services to assist us in processing these issues.

Possessions and property

We all deal with the clothes and possessions of the person we have lost when we are ready. Some of us did this sooner and some later. For some of us it felt so final we didn't want to do it. We waited until we felt ready. For some of us this took years.

Since my son died I wear some of his clothes on special days such as his birthday, anniversary and Christmas.

Phil, Piara Waters

Others needed to say goodbye by sorting these things. We kept some items that were special. We shared things with others who were close to the one we'd lost.

Do it when you're ready and take as long as you like. Don't feel pressured by others. Some people want to keep lots and some don't but these decisions are hard to make when you're in shock. Wait til you're well and truly ready.

Helen, Swan View





Denmark



THE SHOCK OF GRIEF

When someone close takes their own life our whole world can feel shaken...



When someone takes their own life grief can hit us suddenly or slowly. It is different for each of us. And it changes, so how we are one minute may be very different to the next minute, or the next day, or the next month. We know grief is a healthy response to our loss but it can feel overwhelming.

On a father's cry for a daughter lost. To create with loving, tender care and watch grow into a beautiful daughter, sister, mother and friend. Only to see her slip away to a position in which no one could help is grief, and pain beyond belief.

Gary, Collie

Our experience of grief will be different depending on how close we were to the person we've lost, how important they were in our lives, how long we'd known them, and how they died.

Grief can be so powerful we can feel it's taken over our lives.

Our bodies may react: soreness, headaches, exhaustion, muscle aches and tightness, tears that seem to never stop, nausea, pain, numbness.

Our minds may feel confused: closed down, unable to think straight, distracted, unable to focus, fearful of our own or others' safety.



We had **vivid dreams**: some distressing and some comforting. We pined and dreamt about bringing back the person we'd lost.

Many of us found it **hard to make simple decisions**, to **concentrate** or to **remember** day to day things. We felt like our minds had **shut down**. Some of us had thoughts of suicide ourselves in our sense of hopelessness. The intensity of our pain seemed too much to bear. This is not unusual when we have lost someone to suicide.

Our feelings may be overwhelming: anger, deep sadness, disbelief, loneliness, numbness. Some of us feel angry at the person we have lost and don't understand why they weren't able to reach out to us.

Some of us felt a sense of **relief** when we'd known the person's suffering. Some of us felt **disbelief**, as if this was not real. Our denial lasted for different lengths of time. We felt how senseless and unfair it was. And sometimes we felt **numb** and **frozen**.

Some of us felt **guilt** and **remorse** for not doing more. We regretted we couldn't make a difference or **blamed ourselves** for not seeing this coming. Some felt we'd failed as a parent or partner, that it was somehow our fault.

For many of us the world felt **less safe** and secure for a long time after our loss. We **struggled to understand** how others could get on with normal things when our lives had been changed so dramatically.

If we are the one who **found our loved one** after their death, our grief can be complicated by the impact of that trauma. We may not want to talk to our family about this. We found professional support helped us.

All these reactions are normal following our loss by suicide.

I couldn't talk about how he died for years. I wanted to protect our kids. I wanted to push it out of my mind. I was struck by how little he looked. I didn't want to remember him like that. He was so much more. Eventually I told my sons and they were relieved, too, that we could finally talk about how their Dad died.

Jessie, Broome





Our behaviour may be disturbed: not able to sleep or wanting to sleep more, changing eating patterns, unable to work or do our usual activities. Some of us withdraw from other people while others do not want to be alone. We may be unable to stop crying, or worried that we can't cry.

We may expect our loved one to walk in the door or be on the phone when it rings. We may not be able to believe they have gone. It seems unreal.

Our Spirit

We may dream about the person we've lost, or imagine we see them in the street or elsewhere. Some of us hear the voice of the person we have lost or have a sense of their presence.

Some of us may not be able to go to work or do our usual things. Others of us need to keep work and routines going to help us through this time. Or we may lose our sense of enjoyment and motivation for things we normally like to do.

The shock of losing someone to suicide is intense. We don't grieve in 'right or wrong' ways. We just grieve.

We learnt that allowing ourselves to experience our grief will help us later. We found that when we tried to avoid our grief it stayed and took longer to resolve.

Many months after my daughter took her life I went shopping and lost my purse. I couldn't believe it. I cried and cried, wondering what was wrong with me. It was only a purse, after all. But it wasn't. When I lost my daughter I couldn't cry. I felt I'd failed her. Then I lost my purse and the dam wall burst. After that, I felt so much better.

Valerie, Port Hedland

If you are thinking of suicide, seek help immediately.

Emergency services: 000 (all hours) if it's life threatening
Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 (free, 24 hours, 7 days a week)
or Lifeline: 13 11 14 (free, 24 hours, 7 days a week)





Kings Park



WHAT HELPS?

After suicide we are in shock, often lost and confused. Taking a day at a time helped us through the dark times.

Our family has survived that darkest of times. We survived because we were loved and supported. We survived because our pain was heard and our loss acknowledged. No one tried to make it better. No one offered solutions or answers to those unanswerable questions we kept asking. No one told us they understood how we felt or that we would eventually get over it.

Friends and family would just sit with us each day and hold our hands and listen with their hearts as we wept silently and said nothing.

Somehow the chores got done, the dog got fed, the garden watered, the bills paid. I am not sure how or by who.

The space we were in, traumatised and grieving, was respected. Those around us may have been concerned but they also believed we had the resources, the strength of character and the courage and resilience to survive.

They were right.

David, Kalamunda

You will know what is best for you and what you need. And that will change. And some times you may not know.

Some of us found **sitting** with a friend, even **in silence** helped. Some of us **walked** or **ran** or **swam**. Movement helped us de-stress and sleep better. Some of us found **water** soothed us, walking on the **beach**, along the **river** or having a **bath**. Watching the **sun set**, sitting under a **tree**, watching **birds** in the **garden** and other ways of being **close to nature** helped us too.



Some of us poured ourselves into **practical things**, cooking or cleaning or sorting the back shed.

And some of us escaped to a special place we love, a place where we could just be with our grief and feel safe.

Our communities help us at this time too: being with others, sharing a cup of tea or stories or yarns, crying (and laughing) together, playing music or cards together, remembering the person we have lost and the gift of their life.

It helped some of us to **talk** and to go over what has happened with someone who listened to us. Some of us needed to do this often, retelling our story again and again.

Some of us needed time to be **alone**.

Some of us found comfort in our **spiritual traditions**: returning to our country or to where our family and community are, or attending our place of worship such as our mosque, church, temple or synagogue. We grappled with what had happened and for some of us our **faith strengthened** and consoled us through this time.

For others, our spiritual traditions seemed to offer no comfort but only raised **doubts and questions for us**. We struggled with big questions: Why had this happened? What is life about?

In time, we come to an **acceptance of our loss** and find a way through our grief. There are no rules. We each find our own way, one step at a time, one day at a time, one month at a time.

Some of us found **writing** and **music** helped: a letter, a poem, special songs. Others of us used **drawing** and **art** to express our grief. Some made a **memory book** or a **journal** to remember the person we've lost. These can become special items that we look back at as reminders of this difficult time. Later, they remind us that we don't feel like this forever.

Special items belonging to the person we have lost can have more meaning now and remind us of them. They became our keepsakes. They help some of us **reframe our loss**.





My sister gave me a photo of us together, stuffing our faces with chocolate cake when we were young. We both look hideous but I love this photo now.

It makes me smile every time I see it because it reminds me she was not always depressed and had a great sense of fun and joy. That's who she really was. I don't want her defined by her suicide.

Sue, South Fremantle

Grief passes. Usually the intensity of our grief eases gradually, but it can come and go in intensity for a long time and may return at special times like birthdays or anniversaries. Expecting this means we are not so distressed by it.

Our needs change at different times in our grieving. Sometimes we felt OK and as though our lives were getting back to normal. At other times we felt that nothing helps our pain. It overwhelmed us. In these times we learnt to take extra care of ourselves. We reminded ourselves that it will pass. Like ocean waves, **our grief will come and go.** Ours softened over time when we were able to let it come and go.

We found ways to honour the person we've lost. When someone dies suddenly we don't have the chance to say goodbye. Talking about the person and sharing stories and memories is an important way to honour them.

We found ways to **remember and honour** helped us too: planting a tree, naming a place in their honour, carrying a sign or symbol on us every day, having special photos to keep the person close or making a CD of their favourite music to play.

We always remember what's happened but we've learnt to live with our loss. Although the intensity of our grief is strongest in the weeks and months after the death, it takes most of us between two and five years (or even longer) to learn to live fully with our loss. **Looking after ourselves** through this time helps us accept our loss and engage with life again.





Staying well **with gentle exercise**, healthy **diet** and **being with others** we care about allows our grief to take its course. Eventually, it enables us to come to an acceptance and to live with our loss.

I thought I'd never recover when my husband took his life. But in time, and with support, I have. It's changed me. I've become more understanding of others. I know there is often far more to a person than we ever really know, after this.

Paula, Dianella

We learnt to accept help. Our friends and wider family will be happy to help if we let them. Practical things: picking children up from school, cooking a meal, cleaning the bathroom, taking us for a walk or a coffee, coming with us to a bereavement support group, if that's what we want. It's also OK for us to ask for the kind of help we'd like.

Some of us joined a **bereavement support group** to be with others who understood. We felt less alone and it helped to know others had found a way through the grief. It helped to know our reactions were simply grief, and that others had experienced this too.

Some of us found **support from professionals, elders or spiritual leaders** who understand grief. Some of us did not want to burden those we loved who were also grieving. We felt free to speak to someone outside our family and friends who could be with us in a supportive way. We found support in sharing our story, praying, meditating or sitting in silence.

Seeing this bloke helped me feel stronger again. He didn't say much really but I knew I wouldn't shock him. Like when I was so mad at my daughter for what she did. He just sat there quietly. I couldn't have told my wife. She was too cut up. Our daughter was our pride and joy.

Colin, Bunbury

Our relationships. Loss from suicide can strain our relationships. When we are all grieving it can change how we relate to each other. This can add to our pain.





Our relationships may look different through the eyes of grief. Allowing each other to do this in our different ways is not always easy. Family members may worry about each other. Arguments and differences may arise.

Some of our relationships grew stronger, while some were severely strained. Finding out about grief helped us to avoid conflict.

For example, men and women grieve in different ways; young people may turn to their friends more than families at this time and use social media to connect to others. Family relationships can change following a loss from suicide.

Our own health. Even though we often didn't feel like it, eating healthy food, doing gentle exercise and avoiding drugs and alcohol helped us through our grief and allowed it to take its course.

We avoided making big decisions until we felt ready. Giving ourselves space to grieve and not expecting ourselves to cope with our usual demands helped us too.

Take time out. When we are grieving we can feel guilty for laughing or enjoying ourselves. This is normal. Taking time to do things we like, even if we don't feel like it, will help.

Only do what must be done. By giving ourselves some space we allow our grief to be expressed. Expecting ourselves to do all our usual activities like work is hard on our selves. Deciding what we needed to do and letting go of less important things helped us through this time.

If you are thinking about suicide get help immediately.

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 (free, 24 hours, 7 days a week)

Staffed by people with professional qualifications who call you, at a time that suits you.

or Lifeline: 13 11 14 (free, 24 hours, 7 days a week)





WHAT DOES NOT HELP?

People keeping away. When friends and others did not contact us after our loss, we felt hurt and let down. We understood they were uncomfortable or not sure what to say, but we needed to know others would be there for us and some were not.

I felt abandoned by my friends at the church and the school when my son died. Nobody came near me or called. It made me question my faith. I thought they were Christians. I was hurt and disappointed.

Helen, Swan View

Other people's reactions can sometimes be unhelpful, especially if they make judgements or give their opinions or advice. It does not help to hear comparisons, or be told that others are hurting or are worse off.

'Move on', 'You'll get over it', 'It's God's will' and other such comments stop us expressing the pain we feel. We are not 'breaking down' or 'falling apart'. Being upset is healthy, but others can find it uncomfortable, not knowing what to say or do.

When others are distressed by our tears it does not help us grieve. Tell them you need to cry. It's healthy!





Numbing our pain by using alcohol or drugs delays our grieving. For many of us, this only creates other problems later.

Refusing to talk about the person we've lost or mention their name is not helpful. We needed to acknowledge what had happened, not deny it. While Aboriginal people do not use the name of the person who has died as a mark of respect, they can talk about the person without using their name.

Not having information about what's happened meant we were left asking questions and left wondering and worrying. This stopped us moving on.

Endlessly searching for answers to why the death occurred. Information can help us understand and accept our loss but we may never find all the answers we would like. Some of us find this difficult to accept, while others of us find a way to feel at peace about the mystery. Speaking to people who have also lost someone to suicide in a support group helps us understand just how common it is to never get all our questions answered. Learning about the causes of suicide and some of the issues behind it helps some of us to find some of the possible answers. Rarely do we find them all.

At some point you have to get to the place where you know you'll just never know why.

Helen, Swan View





TALKING ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENED

When someone takes their own life it can be hard to talk about. We may worry about other people's reactions. The stigma and misunderstanding about suicide makes it more difficult for us.

We found that when we were able to speak about it, we felt better and not so alone. We told people who could really listen without judging us or what had happened. They could put their own needs aside for us.

If we had others who wanted to give us their advice, judgements or opinions at this difficult time we avoided them. We did not have the energy for them. Some of our friends drifted away, some moved closer.

We found it helped us to talk to people who could listen and accept us as we were.

when people ask me how many children I have, I always tell them I lost my son. otherwise it would feel as though I was denying he ever existed.

Helen, Swan View

Some of us had trouble speaking about our loss because we felt responsible or guilty. We wished we could have done more or somehow stopped this death from happening. We felt helpless and that we had let the person we have loved down.

Even though it's hard for some of us to talk about, others will appreciate the truth. Being honest helps our own grieving process.

Some people will not use the word 'suicide'. For some suicide is still seen as shameful. Attitudes to suicide are tied to our cultural and religious beliefs. For some of us, this makes it even more difficult to speak about.

Anniversaries and other special times

Birthdays, anniversaries and special occasions bring back our loss and are often a difficult time for us.





The first anniversary of the death is often tough. Some of our earlier signs of grief may return and if we do not know this is normal, we can feel overwhelmed by it.

We may want to talk about our loss at these times. Having a way to honour the person who has died helps us too.

Our family and our community's rituals help us through this time. We will want to remember and honour the person we have lost. This helps us at these special times.

Gathering with others, attending a ceremony or service, sharing a special meal, visiting the place of burial, remembering our loved one in whatever way we wish supports us and honours the person we have lost.

Other people's stories

Following our loss, many of us were approached by people who had also lost someone to suicide. We were not prepared for this and sometimes couldn't give the support they wanted.

At other times we found comfort in sharing our stories and knowing we were not alone. Many people are touched by suicide but most will not speak about it unless they think others will understand.

We found it useful to have some information of where people could get help. We could provide this when we didn't have the energy to hear their stories.

The Getting Help section at the back has these contacts.

Although I'm young other people often ask me for help. Now I know what to say but, earlier, I felt overwhelmed. Because I'd lost someone close to suicide, I was seen as someone who knew all about it. I didn't, but I have learnt a lot now.

Josh, Fremantle



TALKING TO CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Caring for our children when we are thrown into grief ourselves is a big challenge. We turned to close family and friends and our wider community for help to care for our children when we could not. Some things helped us:

- o **Keeping to routines as much as possible.** For babies and small children especially, this gives them a sense of security through the upheaval. Some routines (bedtimes, meal times, going to school or usual activities) help all children feel more secure at times of stress. Our children need extra support and reassurance that they will be OK and that we will look after them, even when we are distressed. We asked trusted friends to help with this and to keep an eye out for our kids.
- o Young children (3 and up) need to be **told simply and honestly what has happened.** Tell them in a way they can understand. They will accept what's happened and ask questions if they need to. We used photos and our children's drawings and stories to talk about the person we'd lost and involve our children in saying goodbye.
- o Our older children will be grieving too. They may want to **talk about their loss.** They want to know they can do this and that someone will listen. They may want to spend more time with their friends. We learnt that it's best to be honest and give them information so they are not left guessing about what's happened. They often have ideas about how they'd like to be involved in planning the funeral and saying their goodbyes. This helped our children's grieving and ours as well.
- o Our children sometimes express their grief through their play and some show their distress by wetting the bed, being teary or **being more sensitive than usual.** We learnt that this is normal and it passes. When it doesn't, it's helpful to talk about this with a GP or health professional.
- o Sometimes our children may feel responsible and we needed to reassure them **that what happened was not their fault.** Sometimes we sought professional help for children when we felt concerned about them.



- As parents, some of us felt fearful about our other children and needed to protect them, even over-protect them at times. We needed to learn to **manage our own fear** so it didn't spread to our children and increase anxiety for them.

I lost my sister when I was 8. My parents' overprotection then felt comforting.

At 14, when my Dad died, it felt overwhelming and suffocating. I felt like shouting "Get out of my space!"

Luka, Stirling

- **Schools, TAFEs and Universities** can support children and young people when someone close has died. They provide student services including free counselling services.
- We informed teachers and other key people and asked them to watch out for our children and young people following our loss. Teachers and school student services' staff helped us with our concerns about social media and its impact on our young people.
- **Sports clubs and other social or community groups** with which our children and young people are involved can also provide support and help maintain their usual routines at this time.

Read more on supporting children bereaved by suicide:

au.reachout.com/tough-times/grief-and-loss





TALKING TO OTHERS

Sharing our grief with family and friends helps us all. This time can bring us closer together. For some of us though, it can be stressful when others are also distressed.

Acknowledging our relationship with the person who has died and talking about it with others helps many of us. In some cultures this is not the case. For many Aboriginal people the person who has died is not mentioned by name following their death. This is done as a sign of respect.

This is a special time when stories and memories are shared. Lots of families find laughter and humour important. For some of us it can feel strange to share laughter when there is so much sadness and distress. Like tears, humour is another way to express our grief. For some of us it is an important relief.

Acknowledging others who have been close to the person who has died also helps. It's best if someone they trust can break the news and in person. If we had to phone people, we warned them that we had some bad news and made sure they were not left alone.

Managers and workmates of the person who has died and with whom we work will want to know what's happened. Some of us didn't tell them ourselves but asked a trusted person to let others know.

Other people will sometimes be distressed by the news. They may have had someone close to them take their own life. Suicide touches everyone. Telling others about what's happened gives us a chance to talk about it. However, it can touch others' experiences and pain.





WHEN SOMEONE YOU KNOW HAS LOST SOMEONE BY SUICIDE

Be there for us. It takes courage to face someone who is distressed. This is especially true following a death to suicide. However, it's very important for those of us who have lost someone, to connect to other people after our loss. It helps us greatly to know you are there for us.

We feel shocked and it is reassuring to know there are people who care about us. A phone call, a visit, a cup of tea, a letter or card, an email, an SMS means a lot to us. It tells us you are thinking of us and we are not alone.

Our son took his life in his donga on the mine site where he was working. No-one ever contacted us. It felt as though he didn't exist to them. We just wanted them to acknowledge what had happened, to get in touch with us. That's all. Is that too much to ask?

Anita and Pete, Oldbury

Keep in contact. Contact us regularly, not just once. Don't expect us to "get over it" quickly. Our grief will take time and much longer than is often understood. We will never "get over it" but we will learn to live with our loss and our grief will soften. Your phone calls, visits and other contact will help us feel connected.

Listen rather than speak. If you don't feel you know what to say, tell us that, or say a simple "I'm sorry". Sitting in silence is sometimes just what we need. You don't have to speak. Just being with us is enough. Do talk about our loss, how it touches you and share your memories with us.

When we are grieving we want to be able to express our feelings and feel safe. Please don't judge us or the person who has died. It does not help. So don't tell us they are now at peace, not suffering any more, it's God's will, that they were selfish. Just sit with us. Saying nothing can be the hardest thing to do, but it can be the most valuable.

We will be struggling to understand why this has happened.

Please don't try and explain it. We will come to our own understanding in time. Your opinions are not helpful unless we ask you for them.





At times we may say or do some things that are right out of character. It may be part of our grieving or it may be something is wrong. Please help by learning about grief and loss. If you are still worried, help us visit our GP for advice.

If you want to give practical help, ask us what help we need. If we can't tell you, then cook some food, offer to help care for our children, hang out some washing, do some shopping or help clean our house. You can see what needs to be done and we will appreciate your help, even if we cannot tell you or don't seem to notice.

Support us to honour the person we have lost. Ask us what we'd like, when the time is right. You may be able to help with the funeral or anniversaries and special days. Remembering these occasions with us will be much appreciated.

If you are worried about us, stay with us or make sure someone else can. Ask for help. If you continue to feel worried, make sure we have 24 hour access to support from other family members or a friend.

Your support to take us to see our GP or other help is helpful. You may be able to advocate for us with a health professional if we cannot do it ourselves.

"You'll get over it..."

It is the cliches that cause the trouble. To lose someone you love is to alter your life forever. You don't get over it because "it" is the person you loved. The pain stops, there are new people, but the gap never closes. How could it? The particularness of someone who mattered enough to grieve over is not made anodyne by death.

This hole in my heart is in the shape of you and no-one else can fit it. Why would I want them to?"

Jeanette Winterson, Written on the Body





SOCIAL MEDIA

Communicating with others via social media is very different to normal communication and has benefits and risks.

In the wake of the loss of a loved one, it can be a great stress to keep things together and maintain our relationships.

Social media such as Facebook can provide a way for us to continue to communicate with others without the added pressure of responding immediately or face to face. Young people especially use social media to keep in touch and find out what is happening. It provides a sense of connection that can be a very important support.

It can also provide a space for us to talk openly to people with shared experiences. All of our thoughts and feelings are valid, but sometimes we feel we cannot share them with the people we know from our day-to-day lives. Social media opens up communities to us where we can talk openly. There are many online groups available to those of us who are grieving.

However, social media can also create concern when our young people are vulnerable. Rumours, inappropriate messages or antisocial behaviour online may add to their anxiety and grief. We asked them about what was happening on social media and encouraged them to spend time with friends, not only online. The school principal or psychologist can advise on any concerns we may have about social media and its risks following a suicide.

Online Memorial Pages

It is very common for young people to set up memorial pages for their loved ones. It is possible that friends have already created a memorial page on websites such as Facebook or Tumblr. We may find this comforting and want to contribute, in the short term or down the track.

The creators of these memorials are dealing with their grief as well. If there's something on the page we don't like, we need to be aware of this and respond with care. Again, we can ask for help to do this if we are not able to do it ourselves. We can also ask for what we would appreciate seeing on these pages.





BOOKS & TV

A word of warning: There are many stories about suicide and its impact that can be helpful. When we are grieving these can affect us deeply.

We were sensitive to what we read and watched in order to look after ourselves at this time. We were more cautious about what our children watched on TV through this time of grieving. Even the news can add to our distress when grief is raw.

Later, we found others' stories comforting. They made us aware of how suicide touches everyone.

'Nothing Prepared Me For This'

Written by Australians who have experienced the loss of a loved one to suicide

available from Jesuit Social Services

www.jss.org.au/research-and-advocacy/research-publications

'Behind The Smile: A Hidden Battle Against Depression'

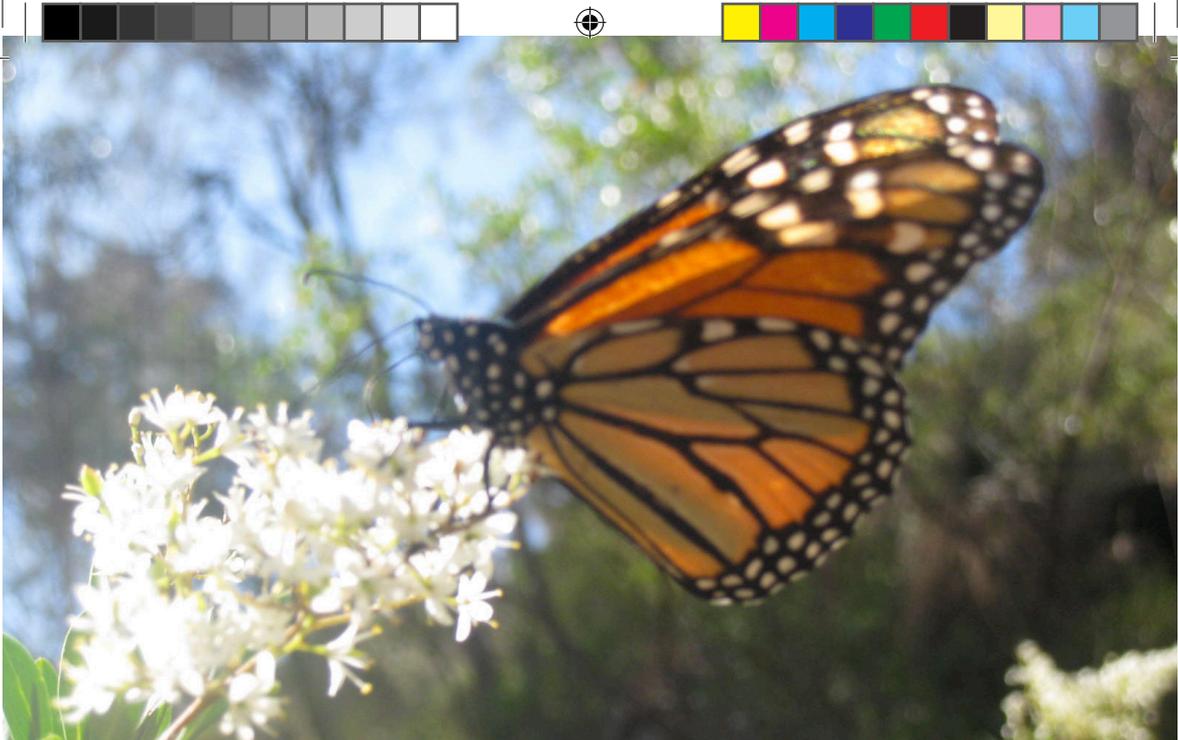
WA author Joshua Cunniffe's journey of recovery from depression and losing his grandfather.

Available from: www.roundhousepress.com/behind.html



Hyde Park





GETTING HELP

Emergency contact information - 24 hours every day

Ambulance/Fire/Police: 000 for life threatening emergencies In an emergency you can also visit your local hospital's emergency department.

Crisis Support 24 hours every day

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467

For young people 5-25 years: Kids Help Line: 1800 55 1800 For men of all ages: Men's Line Australia: 1300 78 99 78

Support from people who understand suicide

- Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467
A free nationwide telephone and online counselling support service. Operating 24/7, expert counsellors call you, at a time that suits you, and provide support through up to six 50 minute counselling sessions.
- Lifeline: 13 11 14 (24 hours, 7 days a week)
or email: crisischat.lifelinewa.org.au (6pm -10pm, 7 days a week)
- ARBOR (Active Response Bereavement Outreach):
1300 11 44 46 (9am to 4:30pm, Mon -Fri)
or email arbor@anglicarewa.org.au
Provides recently bereaved (3 months to 1 year), long-term bereaved, Men's support, and Aboriginal Yarning support groups. All services are free, non-discriminatory, and confidential.
- Beyond Blue Support Service: 1300 22 4636 www.beyondblue.org.au

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

- Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service:
www.sewbmh.org.au

For people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background

- Mental Health in Multicultural Australia: www.mhima.org.au

For LGBTIQ other sexuality, sex and gender diverse people

- MindOut: www.lgbthealth.org.au/mindout
- QLife: 1800 184 527 [www.qlife.org.au](http://www qlife.org.au)

Veterans and Veterans' Families Counselling Service

- 1800 011 046

For Young People

- Headspace: www.headspace.org.au
- Youthbeyondblue: 1300 22 4636 www.youthbeyondblue.com
- ReachOut: au.reachout.com
- Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 www.kidshelp.com.au
- YouthLink: 1300 362 569
- Youth Focus: www.youthfocus.com.au

Other services and support:

- Compassionate Friends: 08 6107 6257
www.compassionatefriendswa.org.au
Support specifically for bereavement following the loss of a child.
- Salvation Army Hope Line for suicide bereavement support:
1300 467 354
- The Samaritans provides emotional support to the lonely, despairing and suicidal:
Samaritans Crisis Line: 135247
Samaritans Youth Line: 1800 198 313
Support via email: support@samaritanscrisisline.org.au
- Coroner's Court of WA: 8.30 – 4.30pm Mon – Fri
08 9425 2900 or 1800 671 994 www.cornonerscourt.wa.gov.au
- The Public Trustee: www.publictrustee.wa.gov.au
- Department of Human Services (Centrelink): 1300 131 060
www.humanservices.gov.au
You may be eligible for the early release of superannuation for a dependent's funeral expenses
- Australian Funeral Directors' Association: www.afda.org.au
- Funeral Assistance Line: 1800 854 925 www.dcp.wa.gov.au
The Bereavement Assistance Program can help meet funeral costs where families lack funds.



RECOVERY DOWN THE TRACK

As our grief eases, many of us wanted to do something to help others. We needed something positive to come from our loss.

If we are to really make a difference in reducing suicide and eliminating stigma we must work together and include those bereaved by suicide by listening with understanding and compassion, assist them in their time of need and learning from these experiences. No more must we close the door and leave well alone!

Estelle, Perth

What we've learnt can help make a difference to others. Some ways we found to do that:

- o Talk openly about suicide when we felt Ok to do so.
- o Join ARBOR, Lifeline, Samaritans, Zero 2 Hero and volunteer our time to support others.
- o Share our experience with others when it feels OK to do so. This helps to shift the stigma about suicide and encourages others to share their experiences.
- o Learn about services available to help others and share this.
- o Get involved in the communities our loved ones were involved with.
- o Learn more about the issues behind suicide: why are our Aboriginal people at such risk? Why are young Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex people at increased risk?
- o Attend training in mental health awareness and suicide prevention.
- o Make a donation or bequest to support suicide prevention or another cause that's important to us.
- o Write a story or a book, make a video, draw or paint our experiences.





Bibbulmun Track





I have learnt many things since losing my son. I have learnt both how strong I am but also how vulnerable I can be. I have learnt that I am not alone in the world and that every breath, every heartbeat and every footstep I take has been given to me. That I can choose what to do with these gifts is a powerful thing.

More than anything, I have learnt to always remember that Life is beautiful and wondrous and what makes it so is the love we have for each other.

Life is also sometimes very fragile. Don't take it for granted, whether it is your own or someone else's. It is far too precious.

David, Kalamunda





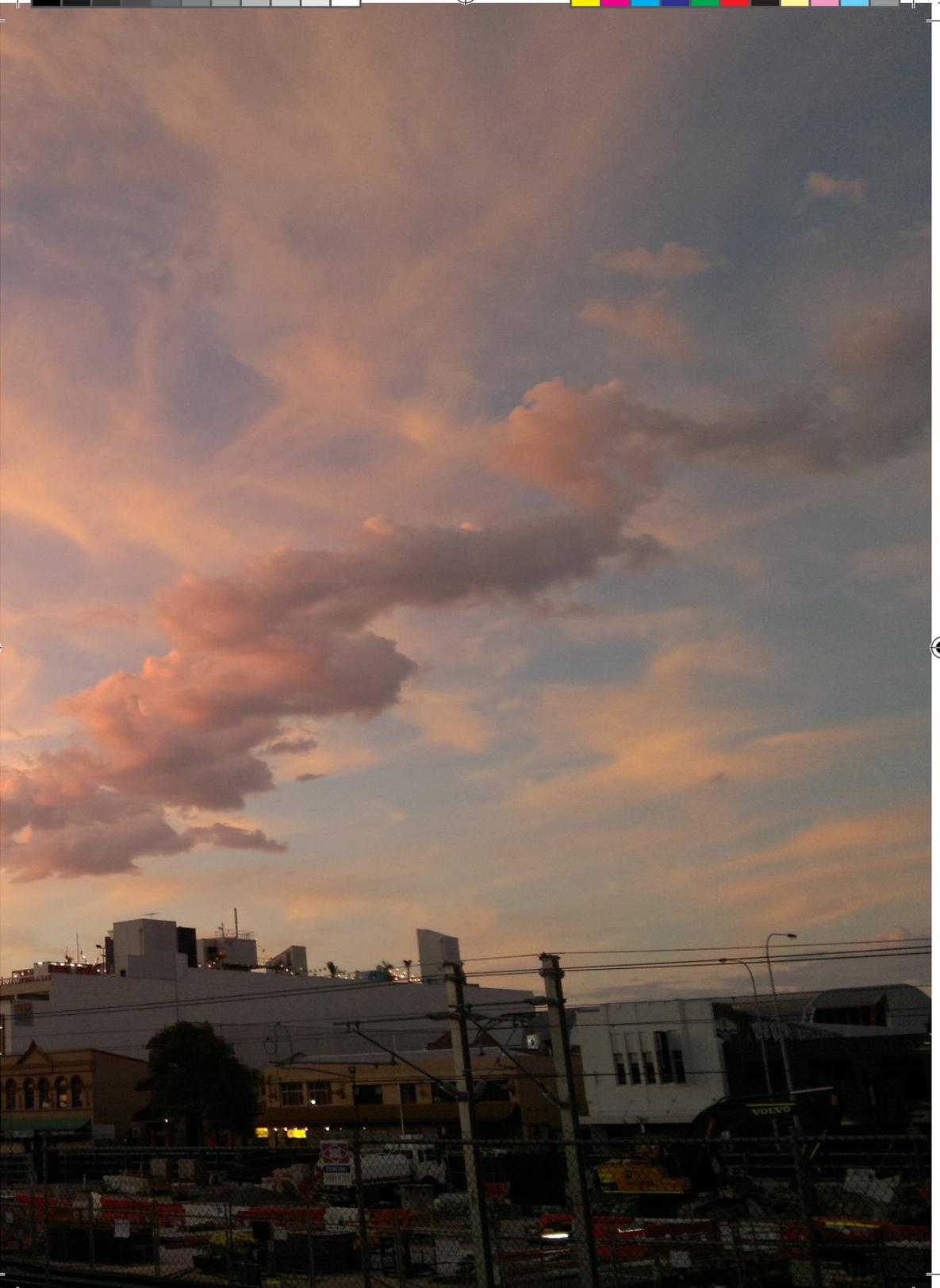
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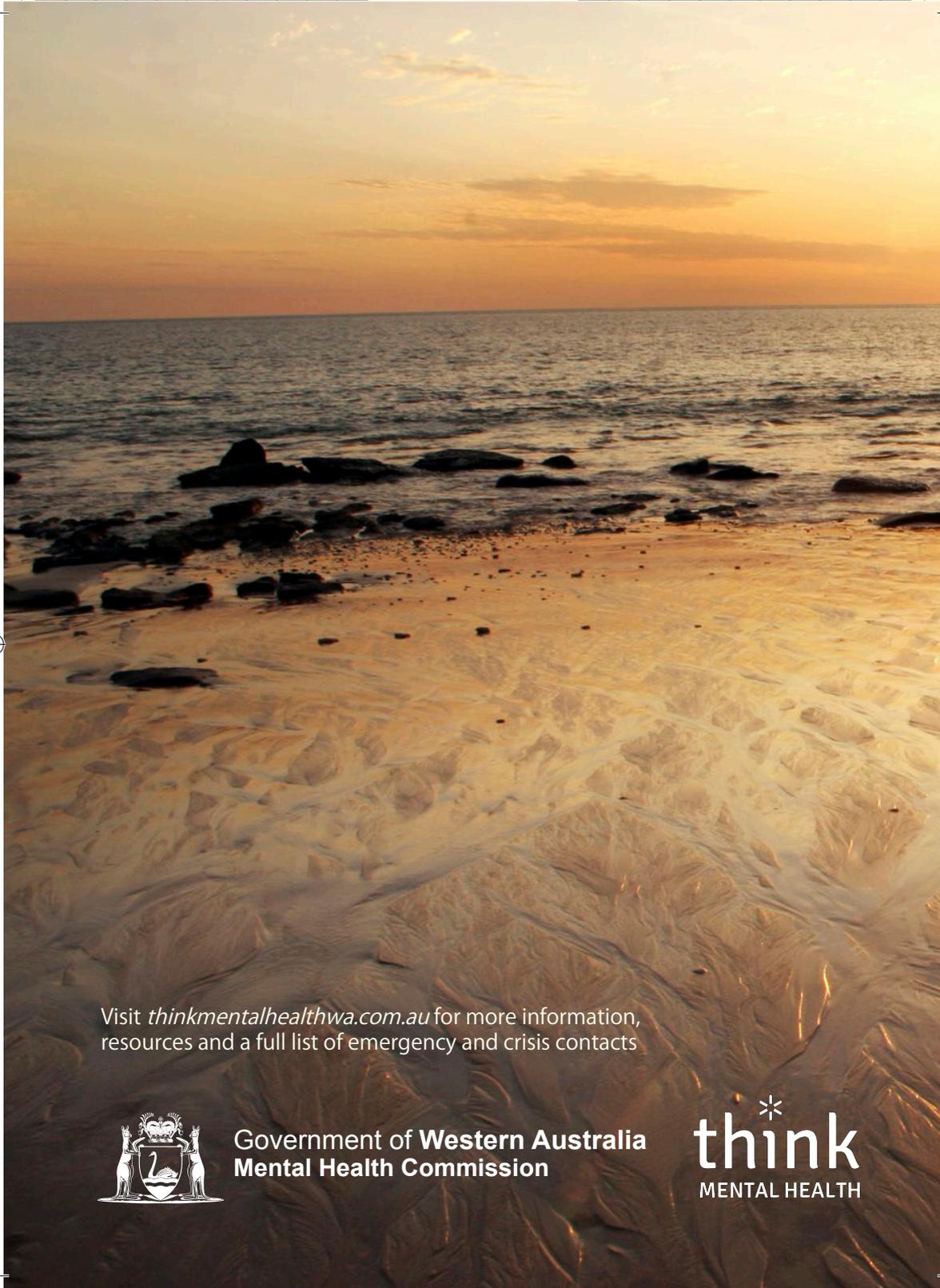
The people who shared their stories here show us how recovery following grief and loss is possible.

Thank you David, Phil, Helen, Gary, Paula, Colin, Jessie, Josh, Annie, Valerie, Anita, Pete, Estelle, Luka and Sue.

Northbridge







Visit thinkmentalhealthwa.com.au for more information, resources and a full list of emergency and crisis contacts



Government of Western Australia
Mental Health Commission

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MENTAL HEALTH

