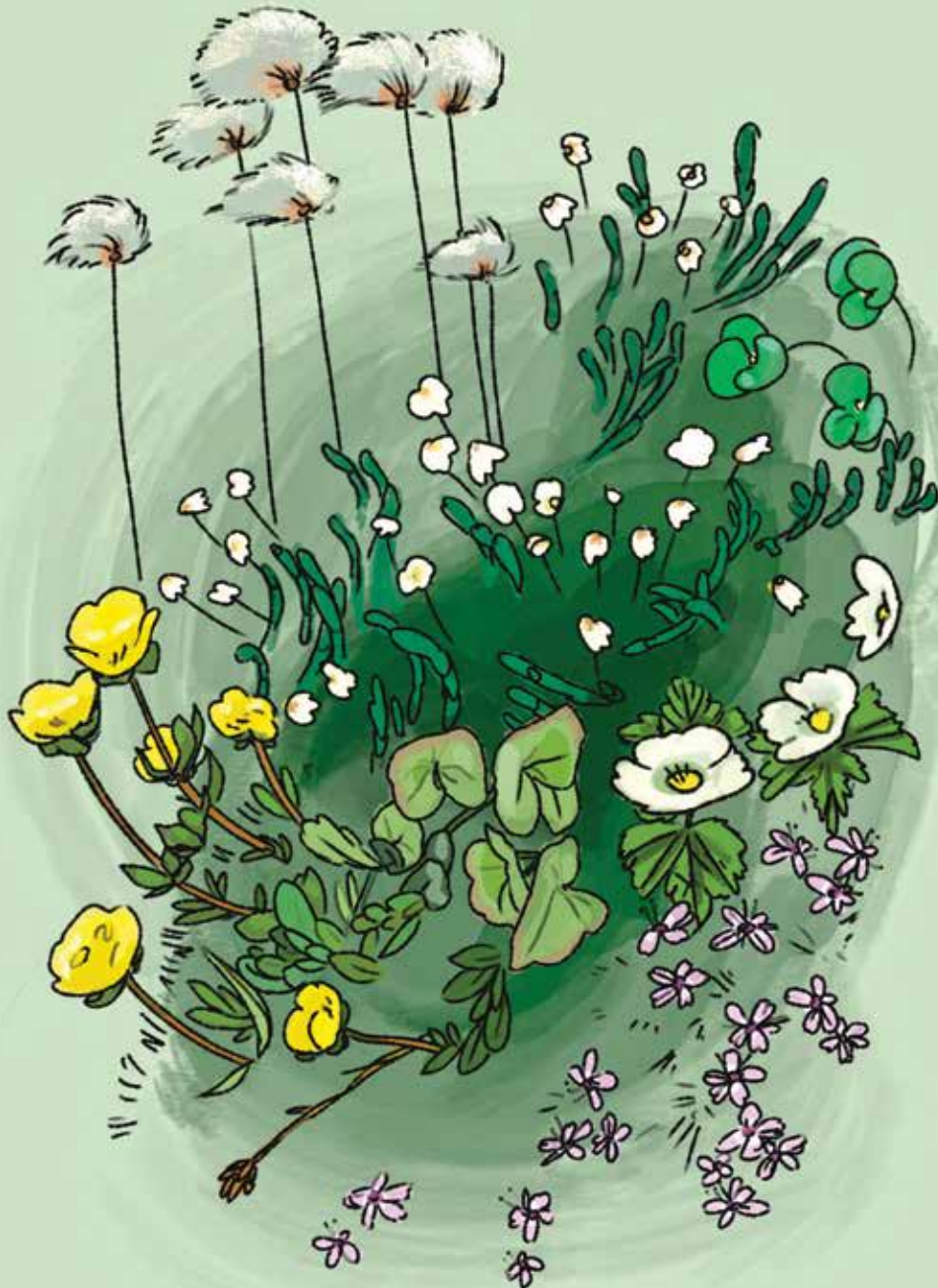


# HELPFUL INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES AFTER A SUICIDE



ΔΕΥΣΙΛΛΟ ΔΕΥΣΙΛΛΟ ΚΑΤΙΜΑΙΤ  
IKITIAHIMALUGU INUUHIK KATIMAJIT  
EMBRACE LIFE COUNCIL  
CONSEIL SAISIS LA VIE







# HELPFUL INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES AFTER A SUICIDE

This practical handbook is dedicated to Nunavummiut who have survived the passing of another person through suicide and is dedicated to the memory of those who have passed through suicide. If you are reading this handbook, it is because you have been impacted by suicide directly or indirectly. You are appreciated for taking the time to read this handbook.

Embrace Life Council thanks Klinic Community Health Centre and the "After a Suicide" Handbook Advisory Committee for allowing the adaptation of "After a Suicide" model to reflect the needs of the Territory of Nunavut and Nunavummiut.

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- Isaac Demeester (pages 38, 62)
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- Charlotte Karetak (page 59)

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If you or anyone you know is at risk for suicidal behaviour, please call

**the Kamatsiaqtut Help Line at  
1-867-979-3333 / 1800-265-3333**

or

**the First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Helpline  
1-855-242-3310**

Lines are open 24 hours / 7 days a week or you can also contact your local Mental Health nurse.

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visit [www.inuusi.com](http://www.inuusi.com)



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*“Suicide....one of the worst life changing things to happen. Answers never come as to why....you beat yourself up over and over and yet the answer never comes. Grief and sadness linger for a long time but time passes and the hurt slowly dissipates, there is always bouts of sadness at the memory of a loss but those come few and far between. Happy memories replace the loss and the ache. Family becomes even more precious and time spent together become good memories. A hug and a hello, a how you doing, emotional support of any magnitude is precious. After 30 some odd years of losing my sister it still hurts....and as my Mom (God rest her soul) used to say, “don’t cry for too long for tears will not bring them back” .*

*Suicide affects immediate family, relatives, friends for a long time.”*

George Naikak Hakongak  
(Cambridge Bay, Community Member)





*“Resilience is the ability to overcome even the most painful situations that seem to be unbearable. Live your life out till your time is up. You are loved!”*

John Palvialok  
(Cambridge Bay, Community Member)

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If you are new to the tragedy of a suicide, despair may be your companion. We hope you find some time to rest your burden and share your grief with those of us who do not need any explanation. You are not alone. The fact that someone died by suicide does not change our love for them, what they meant to us, their value, the contribution they made, and our right to celebrate and honour their lives. When someone dies by suicide, it does not mean that they did not love or value us. How a person dies does not define their life, us, or our relationship with them.

# ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

**This handbook was written to help you through the death by suicide of your loved one. It contains both practical and personal information, as well as a list of books, websites and support groups, that we hope will help you through your grief.**

Different parts of this resource may be of help to you at different times. Immediately after a death by suicide, there are many practical matters that families will need to attend to and questions they might have about what to do. This resource starts with addressing these practical matters.

Grief associated with a death by suicide can be complicated, and also very different to what people experience following death by other causes. Immediately after a suicide death, people are often in shock and unable to describe or explain their feelings or make meaning of what has happened. You may need time before you feel ready to examine what has happened, how it has affected you, what it all means, and what you need in order to begin healing.

Read the more personal information on suicide grief in this handbook when you are ready. Understanding and exploring your own thoughts and feelings might feel scary, but it is an important and necessary part of healing. You and only you will know when you are ready. As you read this, you may not even be aware that the process of healing has already begun.

Remember, you are not alone.





# PERSONAL INFORMATION

When a sudden or unexplained death occurs, there are many procedures that professionals will need to follow. This can cause great anxiety for the family and friends of the loved one who has died. Understanding these procedures and the roles of different service providers can help reduce some of that stress and anxiety.

# FIRST RESPONDERS:

**The RCMP Officers' first priority is the safety of the people around the deceased and also the person who might have died by suicide. There's always a good chance that the person may still be alive or could be resuscitated. When death is confirmed, an investigation is initiated. The RCMP Officers will stay with the family and affected persons until more help arrives.**

The Coroner's role and responsibility is to pronounce death, identify the deceased, conduct an investigation surrounding the death, determine how, when, where and by what means the deceased came to their death, and determine the cause and manner of death. The Coroner will determine if a post-mortem (autopsy) examination is necessary. Autopsy is not necessary in a non-suspicious suicide. A Coroner will certify the death and send the death registration to Vital Statistics. The Final Coroner's Report will be shared with the family members.

Family members should send a request for a copy (or multiple copies) of the certified true copy of registration of death from the Vital Statistics Office in Rankin Inlet. The death certificate is an important document to have in the weeks and months to come.

After the work of the RCMP and the Coroner is completed on the scene, the coroner or person authorized by the investigating coroner (e.g. RCMP) will take possession of the body and carry it to a secure location (morgue) until investigation is completed. The investigating Coroner will perform a thorough external examination and order a full toxicology when necessary for their investigation.

The coroner or persons authorized by the coroner also help to clean up any bodily remains of the deceased.

# SURVIVORS' ASSISTANCE:

## Crisis Response Team:

**Mental Health Crisis Response Teams (MHCRT) provide services that supports individuals, families and communities during and after critical events. These teams are mobilized through a centralized system to attend to the location of the critical event.**

For more information, please contact your regional office at:

**Kitikmeot Region: 1-867-983-4670**

(Department of Healthy Living – Cambridge Bay)

**Kivalliq Region: 1-867-645-2600**

(Pulaarvik Kablu Friendship Centre – Rankin Inlet)

**Qikiqtani Region: 1-888-331-4433**

(Ilisaqsivik – Clyde River)

# FUNERAL

**The costs of a funeral can be very difficult for family and friends. If you are a Nunavut Land Claims Beneficiary, some help may be available.**

Contact your local Hamlet Office to see if there is any help they can provide. You can also reach out to your Regional Inuit Association office. The three Regional Inuit Associations (RIA) provide the same Bereavement and Compassionate Program on behalf of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated. Each RIA provide these programs:

- Compassionate – An Inuk family living within Nunavut who has an immediate family member who is facing imminent death or receiving palliative care can apply for two (2) immediate family members to travel to the patient's location to provide support.
- Bereavement Option A – An Inuk family who loses an immediate family member can apply to send two (2) immediate family members to the community and or the final resting place of the deceased.
- Bereavement Option B – If the family of the deceased cannot afford to transport the remains to the final resting place, RIA's will usually support and cover the air transport to the final resting place.

If the family decides to utilize Option B, RIA's does not cover the cost to send two (2) family members to attend the funeral. It has to be 1 option or the other and cannot be both. The support for transporting remains does not include the coffin nor does it include any funeral home or preparation costs.

As part of the policy, the applicant is responsible in providing the family authorization documents: the next of kin granting permission of the two (2) travellers and a Doctor's note indicating the patients current condition or a death certificate.

In terms of eligibility, depending on which region the patient and/or deceased is/was from determines which region is responsible for taking on the application request. For more info, please contact your local RIA:

**Kitikmeot Region: 1867-983-2458**

or [www.kitia.ca](http://www.kitia.ca)

**Kivalliq Region: 1867-645-5725**

or [www.kivalliqinuit.ca](http://www.kivalliqinuit.ca)

**Qikiqtani Region: 1867-975-5391**

or [www.qia.ca](http://www.qia.ca)

If your loved one was in the Canadian Armed Forces (including Canadian Rangers), they may be given a military service. You will need to contact the Last Post Fund (1888-233-3073) at Veteran's Affairs for information.

If the loved one was a member of the Canada Pension Plan, her estate may be entitled to receive the CPP death benefit of up to \$2,500. This is a taxable benefit intended to cover funeral/final expenses. The relative who pays for this expense may seek reimbursement or may be paid through the estate.

If your loved one was on Income Assistance, you may be able to get some financial help from them for the funeral. Some life insurance policies also cover expenses, so contact the insurance company's benefits information department.

# WHAT TO SAY TO OTHERS

You might find it hard to tell others how your loved one died. It is your choice how to talk about your loved one's death. Acknowledging that a death was by suicide can be an important part of healing. However, only you will know when that feels right for you. You may want to reach out and talk to a trusted person or a professional, such as your doctor, Elder, spiritual advisor, a social worker, a mental health nurse/ outreach worker, another person who has gone through what you are going through now, or a counsellor from the:

**Kamatsiaqtut Helpline**  
**(1-867-979-3333 / 1-800-265-3333).**

They may help you figure out which words to use and how you want to talk about what has happened. There is no need to go into details of the death, and it is okay to let people know what you can and cannot talk about. Employers, co-workers, school, landlords, social groups and friends outside your community may need to be told of your loved one's death. You can ask someone else to make these phone calls for you if you cannot do this yet.









# UNDERSTANDING SUICIDE AND ITS IMPACT

## Why People Die by Suicide

Many people who experience at risk of suicide can be suffering from tremendous emotional pain. They may have overwhelming feelings of hopelessness, despair and helplessness. People considering suicide may feel as though their pain will never end and that suicide is the only way to stop their suffering. When people have thoughts of suicide, they often feel disconnected from others, their culture, land, language, and the world around them.

Someone can feel alone and hopeless even when surrounded by people who love and support them. Their pain can overwhelm their ability to ask for help and see options. At these times, it is difficult for them to access the caring and support around them.

Many factors and circumstances can contribute to someone's decision to end their life. Factors such as loss, addictions, traumatic events, multiple trauma events, abuse, depression, physical and mental illness, and major life changes can make some people feel overwhelmed and unable to cope. It is important to remember that it is how a person experiences an event, not the event itself that determines how a person responds. What might seem small and unimportant to some may seem large and unbearable to someone else.



## Know What to Expect from Yourself and Others

Contrary to what others may think and want, you don't and won't just "get over it". All grief journeys are unique. Do not make any assumptions about how long your grief might last and what you will experience. Instead, consider taking it one day at a time. As Dr. Alan Wolfelt says, there is "no reward for speed".

Emotional reactions to a suicide can be intense and complicated. Any death is a painful experience, regardless of the circumstances and whether it was expected or unexpected. A suicide death is traumatic and can leave someone feeling overwhelmed and struggling to cope. People respond to traumatic events in their own way, according to their individual coping skills, past experiences, and supports.

## Grief

In Nunavut, the closeness of families and relationships within a community are such that everyone is affected by suicide. That is why it is important to understand that communities can experience what is known as multiple loss. This can affect a person's ability to respond to traumatic events. In Nunavut, many communities don't fully heal from the trauma of loss due to multiple loss.

In the weeks, months or years following a suicide death, some people may have nightmares and flashbacks, focus on the act of suicide itself, blame themselves and others, isolate themselves, and have no energy to do tasks. Family conflict may arise due to intense emotions and different ways of grieving.

The death of someone precious is not to be resolved or fixed, but rather to be expressed, experienced, and gently, over time, to find its way to meaning. Never forget, however, that it does not mean there isn't peace, less pain, acceptance, accommodation, joy, and new meaning in our lives. We learn to live alongside our grief and to grow from it. Each person will grieve differently. There is no right or wrong way to mourn the loss of your loved one.

## Multiple Loss

The journey of grief can be extremely hard and there are many different aspects to it. In Nunavut, multiple losses affect almost every resident irrespective of whether community members are related or not. When suicide occurs in one community, other communities are affected as well. Family ties and close relationships are vast and strong across the Nunavut Territory. In other words, there is a strong sense of connection among Nunavummiut.

When suicide occurs in a community, we often hear of another suicide that has happened in another community shortly after or relive the past suicides in our lifetime. Often, there is limited time for people to grieve or recover from the loss of the previous death. Some people may not recognize that their healing journey from previous suicides has not started or completed. It is not unusual for the entire community to almost reach a standstill position. Community members already affected by the loss of a loved one from suicide often begin to have flashbacks and memories of the person(s) they are still grieving about.

The grief and recovery journey for communities, families and individuals must continually reflect the impact of multiple loss in Nunavut.

Multiple loss may result in feelings of:

### Grief

- Unresolved and anticipatory grief: can't bounce back
- Increased rage or guilt and physical symptoms
- Denial/delayed reactions
- Self-destructive behaviours

### Burnout: Workplace

- Decrease in productivity and morale
- Increase in conflict, absenteeism and turnover
- Difficulty in setting limits
- Decrease in positive feedback and informal supports

### Survivor Guilt

- Sympathetic "dis-ease symptoms" which mimic the infected

### Response Similar to Trauma Syndrome

- Wild swings between numbing and flooding
- Loss of feelings of safety and belonging in community

### Burnout: Individual

- Numbness-isolation
- Inability to emote/cold – not emotionally present
- Pessimism-fatalism
- Insecurity-despair

(AIDS Bereavement and Resiliency Program of Ontario, 2018)







**It is important to remember it is not  
your fault that someone made the  
decision to end their life.**

**You are not to blame.**

### Claim Your Right to Grieve

Not only is it important to grieve, it is necessary to experience the pain of your loss in order to gain relief.

### Working Through the Grief

Mourning the death of someone who died by suicide usually requires the support of others. No one should expect to do it alone. Grief is more complicated when a death is sudden. There is no chance to say goodbye. Surround yourself with loved ones for support.

Everyone is different, and everyone reacts differently. Over time, grief will become less intense. Take your time to grieve.

The trauma of suicide can become a defining moment in a person's life and can change all the rules. It can cause someone to question their sense of self, others, faith and beliefs, as well as the world around them. For a while, nothing feels certain, and trying to re-establish order, meaning, and balance is all the more difficult when we try to do it alone. Right after the death of a loved one, people often find it hard to think clearly. It is not unusual to feel sick, angry, and overcome by sadness, and it is not unusual to feel ashamed, guilty and embarrassed, or even numb or nothing at all. Frequently people have difficulty concentrating and sleeping, and may find themselves continually replaying what has happened over and over in their mind. Sometimes people minimize the effect this event has had on them. Even in the same family, people will grieve, react and cope differently.

Your reactions may be stronger if you saw your loved one's death or found them after they died. It is important to remember that you are not to blame for their choices. Try to get help and talk to others.

Sometimes people feel relief after a suicide, especially when the relationship with the person who died was difficult and chaotic, or if they were suffering for a long period of time. It is not unusual for some people to become depressed following a suicide, and may themselves experience thoughts of suicide. If you or someone you know is experiencing thoughts of suicide, call the:

**Kamatsiaqtut helpline (1867-979-3333 / 1800-265-3333)**

or local Mental Health team. There are trained and caring counsellors there who can and want to help you. Remember that time, sharing and support can move us to hope and healing and make us stronger.

# THE JOURNEY OF GRIEF



## Loss

Assumptions shattered.

The initial responses to loss are: shock, numbness, confusion, disbelief, anger, some physical symptoms

## Protest

Protesting the acceptance of the loss.

Anger at: Caregivers, the “unfairness of everything”, the deceased, anger at self, shame/guilt

## Searching

The felt experience of the missing



## Despair

The “Pit”

Hopelessness, agony/  
anguish, depression

## Reorganization

The “slippery slope”

Bursts of energy, fatigue,  
detachment, indifference

## Reinvestment

Recognize and  
consolidate gains from the  
period of active grieving

new sustainable interests,  
ability to talk about the  
loss without experiencing  
the pain and anguish,  
the experience of  
meaningfulness, purpose  
and hope for the future

### **Coping Strategies**

People will grieve in their own unique way. These ways can represent a person's coping strategies. Sometimes a person's coping strategies can fall under the title of avoidance. Avoidance can also be reflected in the following behaviours: gambling, alcohol, drugs, sex, etc. It is suggested that people develop healthy coping strategies rather than avoiding grief. See page 40 on Taking Action for suggestions on healthy coping.

### **Feelings**

Following a death by suicide, below are some of the feelings you may experience. If you experience any of these in a prolonged or severe way, seek the advice of a mental health practitioner.

### **Shock**

Suicide bereavement is one of the most intensely painful experiences you are likely to go through. Shock is the body's natural reaction to protect itself because of a traumatic event. Shock may cause you to feel like you are disconnected or on autopilot; sitting in the audience watching a play about your own life, but not really taking part in that life yourself. Emotional numbness protects you from what has just happened, but at some point, the numbness leaves and you will need to gradually experience the pain.

### **Deep Sadness**

Deep sadness is normal. Other common feelings associated with this sadness can include helplessness, hopelessness, fear, failure, rejection and abandonment.

## **Denial**

Denial is the failure to accept something into your mind that is true. It is often your mind's unconscious way of defending or protecting itself. Immediately after someone dies, you may not fully accept the reality of their death and you may move in and out of denial.

## **Overwhelmed**

This is when a person experiences many emotions or situations at one time and finds it difficult to manage them. This may result in a feeling of powerlessness or an inability to concentrate.

## **Fear**

You may fear that other family members or friends might die. You may also find yourself in a state of hyper-alertness to your fears.

## **Depression**

The world as you know it changed when your loved one died. As a result, you may experience changes in your sleep patterns, eating habits, concentration, energy and motivation. While the experience of these is normal, if it becomes intensified or prolonged, or if you are unable to function and cope in your daily life, you may be suffering from depression. It is important to pay attention to the signs of depression and to seek help. Even if you are not sure whether what you're experiencing is normal or is a symptom of depression, it is important to consult a health care provider.



## UNDERSTANDING SUICIDE AND ITS IMPACT

### Anger

Anger may be directed toward the person who died by suicide or toward those you perceive to be at fault. Anger is a message to yourself that something is wrong. It is important to define the feelings that develop into anger. Once this occurs, you can work through your feelings, which will result in manageable levels of anger and a reduction in negative behaviour.

### Guilt

Family and friends of those who died by suicide often feel they missed warning signs or symptoms. Others may have decided to give up trying to help or backed away because they themselves needed some distance from the person in order to stay healthy. You are not responsible for your loved one's decision to take their own life.

### Shame

When a loved one dies by suicide, it may be difficult to talk about because you are afraid you will be judged. It's o.k. to be honest and to give yourself permission to not talk about the loss if you are not ready. When you are ready, let family and friends know what you are feeling and what you need from them. Secrecy will only intensify any feelings of shame.

### Conflicted Feelings

If your relationship with the person who died by suicide was difficult or exhausting, you may experience some feelings of relief or a sense of reprieve as you don't have to worry about the deceased anymore. When we have experienced great stress from providing support, it is natural to feel relieved when the stress ends. This does not make you a bad person--it makes you human.

## **“Why” Questions**

Asking “why” over and over in an effort to make sense of what has happened is a normal part of the healing process following a death by suicide. With suicide, even when people think they have touched upon or know the “answer”, the “why” question can continue to surface. We struggle to find answers in an effort to ease our pain, but there is seldom an answer to our asking “why” that provides the relief and comfort we seek.

## **Changes in Relationships**

As a result of suicide, there may be some changes in relationships with family and friends. You may experience increased closeness or alternatively, a sense of abandonment.

## **Spiritual or Religious Beliefs**

Previously held spiritual beliefs and values may be challenged and you may begin to question the meaning and purpose of life. Alternatively, you might find comfort in your spiritual beliefs. Your religious or spiritual life might be deepened, challenged, renewed or changed as a result of your grief.

## **Thoughts of Suicide**

Due to the intensity of the grief, some people just want the pain to end and may begin to experience thoughts of suicide. Having these thoughts is not unusual and it does not mean that you will act on them. However, it is important to ask for and seek help to discuss these thoughts and feelings.







# MOVING FORWARD THROUGH GRIEF

## Express Emotions

It is important to recognize that emotions are real, valid and okay to have. Once you have recognized your emotions, it is important to express them in a safe and supportive manner in order to deal with them effectively.

## Let Others Help You

Mourning the death of someone who died by suicide usually requires the support of others. No one should expect to do it alone. Some people may not know how to support you and some may pull away, but even one compassionate, understanding, and supportive person can make a big difference. It is important to find that person and you may not have to look far. Support is all around you.

It can be difficult asking for help, but please do it. Coping with all the feelings is much easier if you let other people help you and share your burden. Ask your family, friends, Elders, Doctor or Nurse, Clergy, Community leaders, Teachers, Counsellors, Mental Health Workers, and Social Workers to support you in making decisions, and to help you identify and communicate what you need and want at this difficult time.

## Grief

In Nunavut, the closeness of families and relationships within a community are such that everyone is affected by suicide. That is why it is important to understand that communities can experience what is known as multiple loss. This can affect a person's ability to respond to traumatic events. In Nunavut, many communities don't fully heal from the trauma of loss due to multiple loss.

In the weeks, months or years following a suicide death, some people may have nightmares and flashbacks, focus on the act of suicide itself, blame themselves and others, isolate themselves, and have no energy to do tasks. Family conflict may arise due to intense emotions and different ways of grieving.

The death of someone precious is not to be resolved or fixed, but rather to be expressed, experienced, and gently, over time, to find its way to meaning. Never forget, however, that it does not mean there isn't peace, less pain, acceptance, accommodation, joy, and new meaning in our lives. We learn to live alongside our grief and to grow from it. Each person will grieve differently. There is no right or wrong way to mourn the loss of your loved one.





*“When someone we treasure is removed  
from us, it is healthy to grieve our loss.”*

Bessie Sitatak  
(Kugluktuk, NU, Community Member)

# TAKE ACTION

Take care of your physical health and be aware of what your body is telling you. Remember it is important to eat, especially country food, and have plenty of sleep. Do something active rather than just sitting and thinking. Physical activity is healthy and helps with healing and recovery. This could include spending time on the land, hunting, sewing, walking, preparing traditional foods, skin preparation, and exercising. Expressing yourself through creative pursuits like writing, drawing, painting, or carving can also be supportive to your healing.

Remember to do what feels right for you, and know that it is okay to say “no” when invited to do things you really don’t want to do. Elders and other community leaders remind us to find balance in all things.



### WHERE DO I SOURCE MY:

- Self-worth?
- Sense of Purpose?
- Knowing I am Loved?
- Sense of Belongingness?
- Safety in the World?

### CORE LOSS ISSUES

# WALKING THE PATH OF GRIEF

## Grieving Takes Time

As your spirit begins to heal, you may experience different feelings. Grieving takes time and the amount of time is different for each person. Celebrate your loved one and honour them by remembering good things, stories, and the time you shared with them. Share these memories with others who you trust and who will listen to you. Others can sometimes see and sense things that you cannot at this time and can share insights to help you with your healing. Remember that each person's individual grief journey is his or hers to own.

Laughter can be very healing, so do not feel bad about having some moments of joy during this difficult time. At times your feelings will be so strong that the overwhelming nature of them can be very confusing and perhaps feel like a setback. This is a normal part of grief and healing.

Healing does not mean forgetting those who have died by suicide. You do not dishonour their memory when you heal, laugh, and live your life again. Your life will not be exactly as it was before, but that does not mean it needs to be worse.

## Later Reactions

Some friends and family feel even more alone many months after their loved one's death. As time passes, others may think you no longer need their support. It is not unusual to relive many of the emotions of grief over and over in the years ahead. Be prepared to face some difficult times, and remember that even if you feel alone, there are family, friends and people in your community who are willing to help if you ask them. No matter how much time has passed since your loved one died, always reach out for help if need be.

## A New Normal

Often those bereaved by suicide, both adults and children, have found comfort in holding on to items that remind them of their loved one, or in passing them on to other family members or friends. Sometimes people are comforted by removing or discarding the belongings of the deceased. You may be comforted by changing residences or rearranging furniture. Namesaking your loved one might also help you on your healing journey. You are creating a new normal and how you adjust to this is up to you.

Some people have found it helpful to write stories, journals and letters about the loved one who died. There are many creative ways of communicating and processing our thoughts and feelings it's a matter of finding the one with which you feel the most comfortable.

## Difficult Days

There will be many times during your journey when things become more difficult, like the day of your loved one's death, birthdays, and holidays. You may have mixed feelings in the weeks leading up to those days. It helps to plan ahead and talk to other family members, friends and significant others about how you want to spend the day. This gives everyone a chance to prepare and support each other.

## Searching for Meaning

You may never know the answer to "Why?" You have to find what works for you. This may involve talking to Elders in the community or other people who may be of help.

## Sharing Circles and Support Groups

As time goes by, you may find it helpful to talk to others who have lost someone by suicide. The healing power and comfort of a shared experience is very strong. Many communities have peer support groups, friendship / Wellness centres or gathering groups specifically designed to help.

# CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS

**Children also grieve and it may look similar or different than adult grief. Children may be encouraged to participate in funerals and events associated with the death.**

When there is death by suicide, it is important to tell children the truth. How you tell them depends on their maturity and be as open as possible with the discussion.

Children learn from parents and other adults because they are their emotional teachers. When children see and experience grief, their own feelings and reactions are normalized and validated. They are given permission to express their own feelings and share them with others. If, however, they see the adults hiding their grief, they may learn to hide and bury their feelings.

Let children know that it is not their job to make things better for the family or to take care of others. Children benefit from maintaining established routines and a sense of safety.

Children and teenagers may also ask questions about why the loved one died or where they went. You may not be able to answer their questions, but you can reassure them that nothing they said or did could have prevented the loved one from dying. Comfort them and let them know they are still loved.

**Kid's Help Phone: 1800-668-6868**



**Remind children that it is okay to  
grieve and to talk about how they  
are feeling.**





# HOW YOU CAN HELP YOURSELF

**It is important to realize that your life changes following a traumatic loss. It is important to take care of yourself, and know your limits. Many people may want to help initially, and may want you to do things which you are not ready to do. Know that you can set your own limits in relation to what you can and cannot do at this time.**

Find people who will allow you to be yourself and let you talk about your loved one openly. Realize that you will experience many emotions during this time, so be patient with yourself. There may be times that you may need to reach out for help beyond your normal support network.

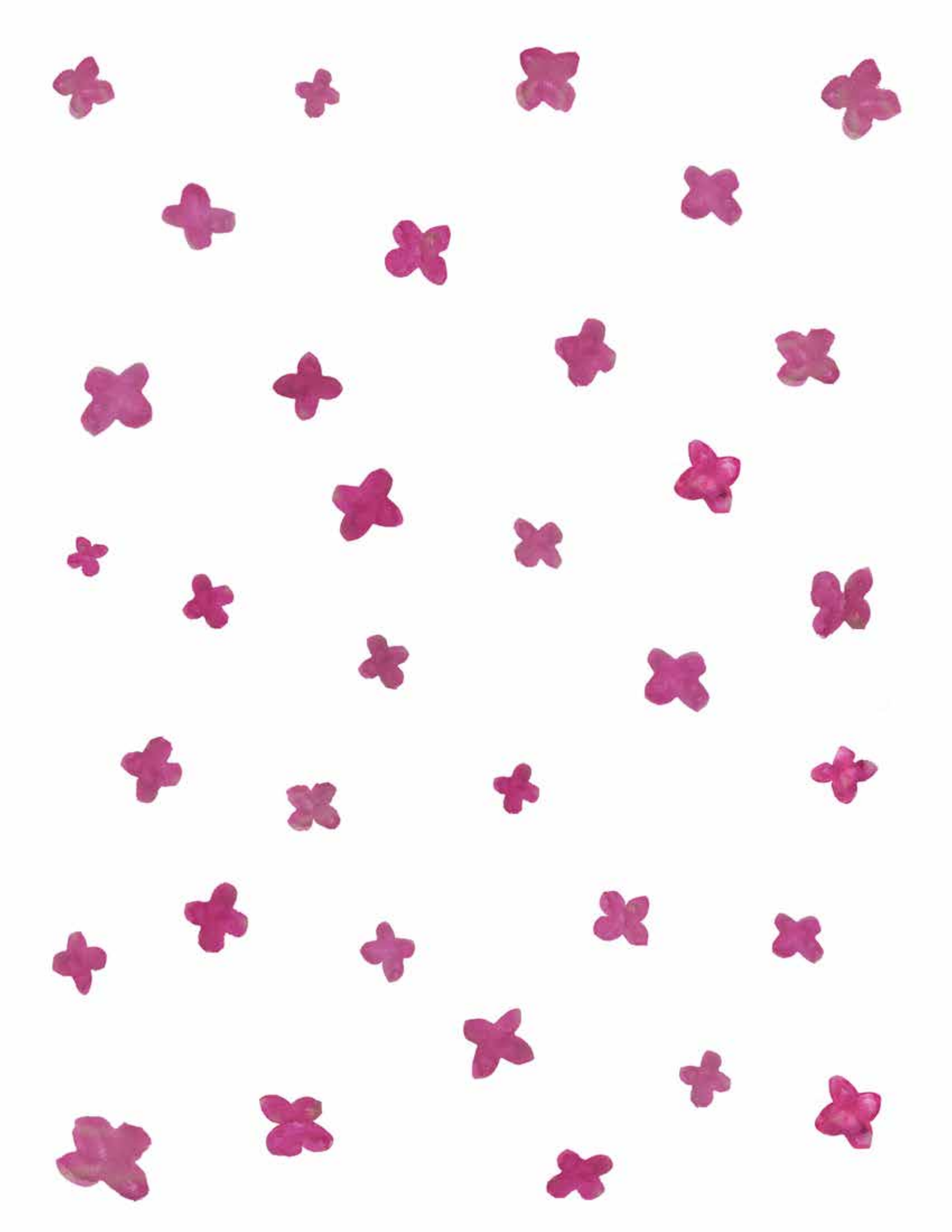
You may also find comfort in prayers and Qulliq lighting with Elders and loved ones. And there may be other traditional practices which will help you during this difficult time.

## Language

Words matter, and the language we use can either support people's healing and offer comfort. The terms "committed suicide" and "completed suicide" are used in connection with criminal offences. Suicide is not a crime. In addition, the term "successful suicide" does not reflect reality – suicide is always a tragedy. "Died by suicide" more accurately reflects what has occurred.

***“Some way some how there has got to be  
a healing, even if you have to find it alone  
for yourself!”***

Susan Sammurtok  
(Iqaluit, NU, Community Member)









# PRACTICAL INFORMATION

## **Legal and Financial Matters**

If you do not understand the banking and legal affairs of the deceased, let your family know and get help. The local law society can advise you, or if you belong to Indigenous and Northern Affairs, you may be able to get some help. Local organizations and communities can also help.

## **Assets or Belongings**

One of the survivors' first tasks is to gather the personal effects and documents of the deceased to determine if the individual left a Will. According to Inuit tradition, wills do not exist and the assets or the belongings of the deceased are passed on to relatives. However, in today's world, wills are essential documents.

If the deceased left a Will, then the disposition properties will be in accordance with it, subject to prior claims of creditors. If there is no Will, then the disposition will be in accordance with the Intestate Succession Act of Nunavut.

If you are familiar with the properties and financial dealings of the deceased and you have the time and willingness to look after settling the estate: collecting assets, paying debts and distributing the residue of the estate to the proper beneficiaries, then you can apply for administration of it, if necessary.

If you prefer to delegate the administration of the estate to a professional, a lawyer or the Public Trustee for Nunavut may assist, after you have provided the information and authorization necessary for the purpose.



If there is no will or wishes left by your loved one, and there is a dispute on the disposition of assets or belongings, please contact the:

**Office of the Public Trustee for advice**  
**(1867-975-6338 / [publictrustee@gov.nu.ca](mailto:publictrustee@gov.nu.ca)).**

## **Insurance**

If your loved one had insurance for a house, car or life, you must inform the insurance companies of their death. In Canada, life insurance policies must have been in effect at least 24 months to be valid when the death is by suicide. Talk to a lawyer if you have trouble understanding the insurance policy.

## **Personal Documents**

- death certificate – you must have the death certificate before you can cancel, transfer and apply for benefits and obligations
- birth certificate
- NTI Card
- Certificate of citizenship
- driver's license
- marriage certificate
- passport
- personal will or note from loved one
- Social Insurance Number
- income assistance cards

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### Banking and Financial Documents

- bank account numbers, passbooks, statements (chequing and savings)
- Debit and credit cards
- investment records (i.e., stocks, bonds, RRSPs, GICs, TFSA)
- lease and/or rental contracts
- loan agreements (monies owed or owing)
- mortgage papers
- safety deposit box number and key

### Health Documents

- Nunavut Health Care Card
- Veterans Affairs cards

### Property Documents

- Standard land lease or Equity Lease
- personal possessions (art work, jewelry)
- vehicle registration(s)

### Household Monthly Services

- It is important that you contact these service providers ASAP so extra charges are not incurred.
- Cable / Satellite
- Internet
- Municipal Services (Water, Sewage, Garbage)
- Telephone / Cellphone
- Heating fuel / Gas
- Electricity
- Monthly Subscriptions (i.e., On-the-land satellite services)

## Other Documents

- child support and alimony agreements
- divorce papers and child custody papers
- pardons and any other court documents (subpoenas, tickets, settlements, probation orders)
- pensions and veterans information
- income tax returns
- employee benefit booklets
- Unemployment Insurance payment cards
- insurance policies (life, medical, home, car, business, mortgage)
- membership cards (sports/recreation clubs, professional associations, libraries, points clubs)
- student cards, pass cards, and any photo identification

Once all documents have been gathered, you will have to cancel, transfer and apply for benefits or obligations. Be aware that there are rules and fees associated with some of these matters.

### Items to Cancel

- Bank cards in the name of your loved one – you will have to provide a certified copy of the death certificate, not a photocopy
- Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security – 1800-277-9914. Your loved one's estate is entitled to the pension cheque for the month they passed away
- Canada Post – redirect or cancel mail
- Cheques can be cancelled by telephone – you will be asked for the name, address and social insurance number of the person
- Credit cards – contact the issuing bank to cancel credit cards
- Disability benefits – contact the local Employment Income Assistance office and Canada Pension Plan for provincial benefits.
- Doctor and dentist – notify the person's doctor, dentist, and any clinics they regularly attended
- Email accounts and online social networks
- Income assistance cheques – contact income support
- NTI card
- Insurance policies – notify all insurance companies with whom your loved one had policies. If appropriate, notify the person's employer in case there were any workplace insurance policies in place
- Leases/rental – cancel any lease or rental contracts in the name of your loved one, or transfer them to another name
- Work pension
- Private Pension Plans
- Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement and Canada Pension Plan
- Memberships (sports/recreation clubs, professional associations, libraries) – cancel or transfer them to another name as appropriate
- Passport – if your loved one held a valid passport, you need to return it to the nearest passport centre or mail it in with a copy of the death certificate or letter stating why you are returning it. For more information, call 1800-567-6868
- Social Insurance Number – 1800-206-7218
- Income assistance
- Unemployment Insurance benefits – contact your local Employment Income Assistance office

## Items to Transfer

- Insurance policies or rebate programs
- Joint bank accounts, credit cards, investments like RRSPs, GICs, etc.
- Land titles
- Stocks and bonds – ask your financial advisor or bank how to transfer these assets
- Utility accounts (phone, gas, water and utilities) if your household utilities were in the name of your loved one
- Vehicle registration – contact a registry office to help transfer your loved one's vehicles registration
- Airmiles / Aurora Rewards Card / Aeroplan

## Items to Apply for:

- Children's benefit – 1800-277-9914. You may be able to get benefits for children under the age of 18 or for children between 18 and 25 who are full-time students. If any of these children are living with another caregiver (family member or guardian) and they are under 18, that person should apply for them. Children between 18 and 25 should apply for this benefit themselves
- CPP Lump Sum Death Benefits – 1800-277-9914. This is based on the CPP contributions of your loved one. You will need to send a copy of the death certificate or statement of death, your birth certificate, and social insurance number
- CPP Survivor's Benefit – 1800-277-9914. This is based on the contributions of your loved one. The amount given will depend on your age and other factors. Benefits for children may also be available
- Guaranteed Income Supplement- 1888-277-9914. This is paid to the surviving spouse (husband or wife) over the age of 65, and is based on your income
- Mortgage Life Insurance – this is not the same as mortgage insurance. If your loved one held a mortgage life insurance, the mortgage may be paid upon their death. The mortgage company will need a copy of the death certificate. Call the bank or company that held the mortgage
- Veterans Benefits for Aboriginal Veterans – 1866-522-2122. If your loved one was a veteran or a member of Canada's Armed Forces, you may be eligible for benefits.

Please note that some of these benefits are taxable to the person who receives them.

### Other Financial and Legal Matters

- Loans and personal debt – loans (individual or co-signed) from a bank, company, or other institution may or may not be insured
- Income taxes – a final tax return must be filed. If your loved one passed away between January 1st and October 31st, the final return is due by April 30th of the next year. If they passed away between November 1st and December 31st, the final return is due 6 months after the death.
- If tax returns from previous years have not been completed, they must also be filed. You should get a “clearance certificate” from Canada Revenue Agency. A clearance certificate shows that all amounts for which your loved one owed them has been paid. If you do not get a certificate, Canada Revenue Agency may try to collect your loved one’s debt from you if you are the spouse. Contact Canada Revenue at 1800-959-8281.
- Employer – contact your loved one’s employer to collect a final pay cheque and let them know where to send the T4 slip.
- Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada at 1-800-567-9604 / [www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca](http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca)
- GST credit – contact Canada Revenue Agency at 1-800-959-1953 for your loved one’s GST credit.
- Lawsuits – judgements from lawsuits and collection agencies either for or against your loved one may have a claim against the estate. Contact a lawyer to help you.
- Child support payments and alimony payments – if your loved one was paying child support, the Maintenance Enforcement Program office in Iqaluit should be contacted by the executor (1-800-792-4183)





# READING

**“The Wilderness of Grief: Finding Your Way”**

by Alan Wolfert, Phd.,

Centre for Loss and Life Transition (Companion Press, 2007).

ISBN: 1-879651-52-1.

**“Understanding Your Suicide Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart”**

by Alan Wolfert, Phd.,

Companion Press, Fort Collins, Colorado, 2009.

ISBN: 978-1-879651-58-6.

**“Someone I love died by suicide, A story for child survivors and those who care for them”**

Doreen Cammarata

[www.limitlesspress.com](http://www.limitlesspress.com)

# RESOURCES

## **Cambridge Bay Department of Healthy Living**

- (867) 983-4670 #277

## **Child First Initiative**

- 1-855-572-4453

## **Embrace Life Council**

- Iqaluit  
(867) 975-3233  
or Toll Free 1-866-804-2782
- Rankin Inlet  
(867) 645-2378
- Cambridge Bay  
(867) 983-4659

## **GN Employee and Family Assistance Program**

- Call 1 (800) 663-1142

## **Ilisqisvik**

- Traditional Counselors, Clyde River, English and Inuktitut  
Call (867) 924-6565

## **Inuit and First Nations Hope for Wellness Help Line**

- Call 1 (855) 242-3310

## **IRS Resolution Health Support Program**

- Referrals to a counselor, call 1-866-925-4419
- Transportation provided to see psychologists and other mental health professionals

## **Kamatsiaqtut Help Line**

- Volunteers based in Nunavut, 24 hours per day, 7 days a week and confidential.  
Call 1 (800) 265-3333

## **Kids Help Phone**

- To speak to a counselor, call 1 (800) 668-6868, 24/7
- To live chat, go to [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca) on the web or from a smartphone
- Text TALK to 686868

## **Mental Health and Addictions**

- To speak to a counselor, call your Community Health Centre
- Referrals and medical travel for addictions treatment, trauma care and specialized services

## **Pulaarvik Kablu Friendship Centre**

- Rankin Inlet, English and Inuktitut  
(867) 645-2600

## **VAC Assistance Services for retired Canadian Rangers**

- Call 1 (800) 268-7708

## **Victim Services**

- 1-866-456-5216



Healing does not mean forgetting those who have died by suicide. You do not dishonour their memory when you heal, laugh, and live your life again.

# THE SUICIDE SURVIVOR'S BILL OF RIGHTS (DR ALAN WOLFET)

The following list is intended both to empower you to heal and to decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in finding useful responses from hurtful ones.

1. I have the right to experience my own unique grief.
2. I have the right to talk about my grief.
3. I have the right to feel many different emotions.
4. I have the right to work through any feelings of guilt, and give up on any responsibilities for the death.
5. I have the right to know what can be known about what happened.
6. I have the right to embrace the mystery.
7. I have the right to embrace my spirituality.
8. I have the right to treasure my memories.
9. I have the right to hope.
10. I have the right to move toward my grief and heal.
11. You may find comfort in prayers and qulliq lighting with Elders and loved ones.





***“Our ancestors brought us here through  
struggles and kept going.***

***Keep the tradition of living strong!”***

Maddy & Curtis  
(Kugluktuk, NU, Community Member)



## **Disclaimer**

By using this “After a Suicide” handbook, you acknowledge and agree that any information contained in this handbook is provided on an “as is” basis. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, we do not provide any express or implied warranties on the accuracy of the information. By using this handbook, you acknowledge that there may be errors and that such errors, once known, will only be corrected through later editions of the handbook.

By using this handbook, you acknowledge that you understand and agree that the information provided through this handbook is intended for general understanding and education only.

This handbook is not, and is not intended to be used as, a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician, psychiatrist, psychologist, nurse, or other qualified healthcare provider before you undergo any treatment or seek answers to any questions you may have regarding any medical condition that may result from your grieving after losing your loved one to suicide.

This handbook is not, and is not intended to be used as, a substitute for legal advice. Always seek the advice of your lawyer before pursuing any legal avenue.





HELPFUL INFORMATION  
FOR FAMILIES  
AFTER A SUICIDE



ΔΕΛΤΑ ΔΕΛΤΑ ΕΜΒΡΑΙΣΜΟΝ  
IKITIAHIMALUGU INUUK KATIMAJIT  
EMBRACE LIFE COUNCIL  
CONSEIL SAISIS LA VIE