

# Suicide in schools

## Information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

You might have heard a suicide has occurred at your young one's school.

### The suicide of a young one is a very sad and challenging time

It affects students, the school staff, families and the community. This fact sheet provides some useful information that can help you and your young one through this difficult time.

### How young ones may respond

#### Young people may respond to the suicide in different ways

You may notice times when they appear to be:

- confused
- cranky or angry
- fearful of death or dying
- feeling guilt
- in denial about the death
- betrayed or abandoned
- hurt
- sad and weak in spirit
- avoiding things they usually enjoy
- spending less time with family and friends
- longing for Country or home.

Your young one's response may be influenced by their personality, their relationship with the person who has passed away, what is happening in their life, past experiences and their ability to adjust to change. It's different for everyone – some reactions can happen weeks, months or a year after an event.

Young ones need opportunities to express their feelings in safe and helpful ways. They may need extra support during this time and could benefit from having a yarn about how they're feeling.

Family yarning and storytelling about cultural ways, spirituality and Sorry Business are important parts of their grieving. Be guided by the young one's need to yarn and make sure they understand that the family is there to support them.

Young ones who have experienced difficult times may find it harder to cope. They may stay away from everyone and want space, or they may be cranky one minute and then really happy the next. This could be confusing for them and the family, but it's part of them expressing how they feel. It's important that others who support the young one are made aware of the death so they can offer their support and care.



## Practical ways you can support a young one who's grieving following a suicide

**While many young ones will deal with their grief in their own time, there is a range of things you can do to help and support them:**

- Let your young one have some time out if they need it – they don't need to be with you all the time.
- Support them to connect with culture and think about how this can help with healing their spirit.
- Encourage contact with supportive family and friends.
- Encourage your young one to keep doing enjoyable activities, such as footy, fishing or camping. Yarn with them about how they can express their grief through music, dance, storytelling, art and connecting with Elders.
- Encourage them to get back to their regular sleeping routine, healthy eating and activities.
- Don't yarn about the method or other distressing details about how their loved one passed away.

## What else can you do?

**Your young one may have a lot of questions.**

Yarning about how the loved one passed on may not be helpful and could weaken their spirit. Where possible, when your young one brings it up, yarn about all the ways they can stay positive and strong in spirit. This could include yarning with family members, Elders, relatives, friends, teachers or a counsellor. It may also help if you speak with someone at the school about the difficulties your young one may be experiencing.

## Encourage young ones to support each other

Traditionally, during these sad times, all the family and friends come together. Young ones sometimes share their feelings about death and will often yarn about the suicide with their friends. Make sure they know to tell a trusted adult immediately if they're worried about a friend or family member.

## How you can help your community to heal

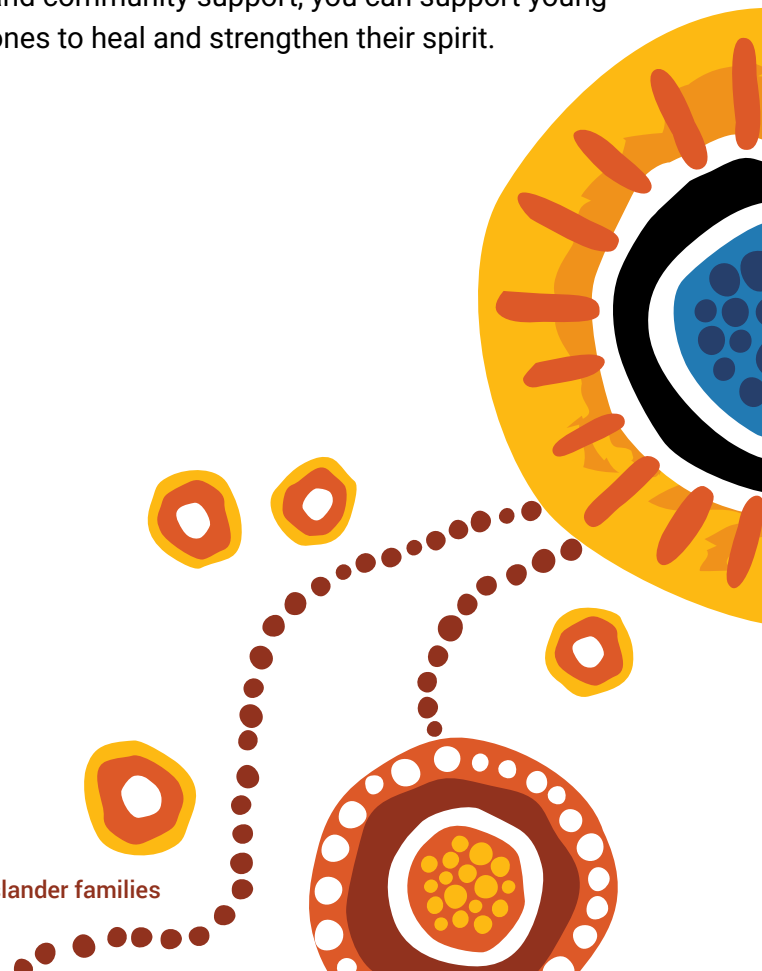
**After a suicide death, there's lots of yarning about it in the community.**

Collective strength and connection to culture are important in understanding suicide.

Community discussions of suicide and talking to Elders and community leaders can help everyone start their healing journey.

Too much talk about the details of the suicide, however, could further weaken a young one's spirit, so it's important to find balance in these yarns. Some people may decide not to get involved in these yarns to protect their families.

By encouraging positive actions through yarning and community support, you can support young ones to heal and strengthen their spirit.



## Where can families and young ones get more information and help?

**Local services** include Aboriginal Medical Services, community clinics, local Elders and community leaders.

**Thirrili** works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities affected by suicide. Anyone needing support can call 1800 805 801 or visit [thirrili.com.au](http://thirrili.com.au)

**13YARN** is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-run crisis support service. For support, call 13 92 76 or visit [13yarn.org.au](http://13yarn.org.au)

The **Beyond Blue Support Service** provides support any time of the day or night. To talk with a mental health professional, please call 1300 22 4636 or visit [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)

**eheadspace** provides online counselling and telephone support to young people aged 12 to 25. Go to [ehheadspace.org.au](http://ehheadspace.org.au) or contact on 1800 650 890

**headspace centres** provide support, information and advice to young people aged 12 to 25. For locations and other information, go to [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)

**Kids Helpline** 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services for children and young people aged 5 to 25, call 1800 55 1800 or visit [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)

**Lifeline** can provide support 24 hours a day at 13 11 14 or [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)

**Suicide Callback Service** can provide support to people who are experiencing suicidal thoughts, have lost someone to suicide or are supporting someone who is at risk of suicide: 1300 659 467

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Be You acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work and learn. We recognise their deep and ongoing connection to Country and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

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