



**HOPE**  
BEREAVEMENT  
CARE

Level 2, Kitchener House  
289 Ryrie Street  
Geelong 3220  
[hope@bereavement.org.au](mailto:hope@bereavement.org.au)  
Phone: (03) 4215 3358

# *Support After Suicide Men Grieve Too*

*“no-one should be alone in grief”*

We know that just like different cultures and ages have different ways to grieve, men may also have a different experience when they are bereaved. The Freemasons Foundation of Victoria, an organisation of men, have seen the impact and have provided Hope with funding to provide Support after Suicide in Geelong. This publication is a way of sharing the experiences of men, who are grieving after a suicide, with other men.

When someone you love has died by suicide, you are left to deal with the consequences: the pain of unbearable sadness; dismay and confusion; empty feelings of abandonment; anger; guilt; and the relentless persistence of unanswerable questions. This is the experience for 8 families everyday in Australia.

As a generalisation (and there are always exceptions) men can often express anger as they grieve; be physically active; and search for problems that can be defined and solved. They may find benefit in reading books about how others have coped, and to search for people who can tell them what to do. They are more often attracted to information-giving seminars than to counselling. If it is a child who has died, men are frequently asked how their partner is coping, rarely about themselves. They may feel a social pressure to take care of their partner at a time when they have few resources, and in the process be denied the opportunity to express sadness and have someone care for them.

Bereaved men may find it easier to express their feelings to another man or to relate through the experiences of other men.



**SAS**  
SUPPORT AFTER SUICIDE  
SPONSORED BY THE FREEMASONS FOUNDATION VICTORIA

# Men Grieve Too

Australian men, unfortunately, have not been raised to deal with grief.

We are told from a young age that "real men don't cry", to "stop sooking", and "act like a man".

Two traumatic life experiences helped me understand that being stoic and ignoring grief is harmful. Toughing it out has devastating effects on both the man internalising his grief and those around him. The first experience was the abrupt end of my twenty-five-year relationship with my ex-wife: the second, the unexpected suicide of my much-loved stepson.

I have learned five vital elements that enable a man to effectively deal with his grief.

Firstly, there is a considerable need for support. If it isn't offered, seek it out, seek it from family, seek it from friends and seek it from professionals. Seeking support takes courage. Sometimes we may feel shame, or undeserving of support, we may feel we are burdening others or that others will consider us weak. The amazing thing you will find when you seek support is that many people are eager to support you. When you accept that support, it assists the shouldering of the burden of your grief. I can't stress how important it is to seek the support of others. Support can be the simple act of having a coffee or a beer with a friend who will openly listen and just be there for you. Support may be a friend providing a meal so that you don't have to deal with cooking. Or it could be seeking professional counselling to support you in sorting through your grief. Your grief is unique. Nobody can possibly know how you feel. Sharing how you feel with another helps them to understand you and makes their support more appropriate to your needs. Sharing gives you a much-needed connection with others. Don't try and do this alone.

Secondly, there is a need for internal focus. Grief is caused by an event. Trying to just keep on going without considering how this has affected us compounds our grief. As men, as humans, we need to understand our feelings. How the event has affected us emotionally, mentally and physically. It is virtually impossible to understand this if we don't focus on ourselves. Seeking professional support will ease the burden of grief.

Thirdly, external action is vital. This can take many forms, walking the dog to 'clear the cobwebs', going to the gym and becoming active in organisations. External action is essential as it ensures that we do not stagnate and isolate ourselves in grief.

Fourthly, remember. Sharing the memories of the person we are grieving. Talking about them. We need to accept their choice, that it cannot be changed and we have no control over others. Remember the good times, and particularly the funny times. Laughing may seem inappropriate when you are grieving. However, it can relieve tension and awaken positive memories. It shifts our focus from that single tragic event.

Finally, the most crucial thing in my experience is to cry!

Cry, Howl, Scream! Crying, for some bizarre reason, is generally seen as a sign of weakness. In fact, crying is a sign of strength and courage. Crying has meaningful, emotional, mental and physical purposes, it provides a release of the build-up of powerful emotions. It reduces tension and allows us the freedom to express our humanity. In the last year and a half since my stepson died, I have cried a lot, I have cried in private, I have cried in public, but importantly I now cry without shame. I don't care if anyone sees me crying, be it in the supermarket, the car or at home.

If I need to cry, I cry!

So to make it simple, Seek Support, Work through your feelings, Do something, Laugh, and Cry.

*Colin Kynoch*

## Grief after Suicide:

### What you may expect

- Feeling stunned and in disbelief
- Barely being able to move
- Feeling confused
- Behaving in an agitated manner
- Experiencing a range of physical sensations such as increased heart rates
- Crying or appear super controlled.
- Being less interested in sex
- Being angry
- Feeling shame
- Having periods of happiness where you forget your grief

All of these (and more) are normal. You may experience some or all of these or none at all

### What may help

- Learning about the grieving process
- Telling your grief story to people who care
- Talking about your loved one
- Allowing yourself to feel how you feel for as long as it takes
- Telling people what you need
- Avoiding increasing your alcohol and drug usage
- Talking to a bereavement counsellor
- Attending a bereavement group



## *Men Grieve Too*

Men are notoriously less likely to seek help when grieving the loss of a loved one through suicide and less likely to express their emotions and deepest feelings, or to confide in trusted friends or family members.

Often this inability or reluctance for men to share their grief and emotions even extends to not adequately communicating and confiding in their wives or partners. Psychology tells us that these traits in men are due to the belief that men are supposed to be the strong ones, the head of families, the providers and protectors setting a strong example for coping with loss.

These attitudes are a sad fact and consequently can lead to extreme internal mental turmoil for men grieving alone as a result of a suicide event.

As the father of a son who took his own life at age 25, I now know that it is harmful and potentially dangerous to grieve alone. Soon after my son's death I reluctantly attended grief counselling sessions with my wife, believing that professional counselling would probably be a waste of time and ineffective. How wrong I was. The counselling sessions were extremely valuable allowing my wife and I to share our innermost hurt and grief to each other and better understand each other's true feelings and emotions. Moreover, I learnt that there are coping mechanisms for controlling the intensity of grief. Encouraged by the counsellor and others I also learnt that it can be very beneficial for men to join men only support groups.

As an attendee at the monthly Support After Suicide 'Men's Group' meetings in Geelong, I can attest that the meetings provide a forum where men can seek great comfort from one another through discussing their mutual lived experiences of losing a loved one to suicide. The meetings are informal and friendly and in fact there is no obligation for attendees to even talk if they don't feel inclined, although my experience is that once a member has been to a couple of meetings they generally start to contribute. There are no rules and an all-male environment allows for sometimes colourful language and even humour.

I encourage any man suffering grief from suicide to attend these meetings and I'm sure like me, you'll leave each meeting a little less burdened by grief and feeling that you don't need to grieve and suffer alone.

*Danny Keating*

A few words regarding my experience on the above topic.

In the early days of my son's death, I remained in shock and was numb for quite a long time. I seemed to move from there to guilt and laying blame. All the usual questions, why didn't the medical professionals see this coming? Why did friends seem to shun us? As well as why didn't I do more myself? I didn't seek any help for myself, and so I continued to sink further into what I can only describe as a depressed state. My tolerance for things went out the window; small things were big.

I found that even though I have great mates, most just didn't get it. And so I struggled to relate my issues with them. I was confused as to why some things were ok one day and just about impossible the next. I have been far more emotional than before. When I tried a grief group, I was troubled by the other stories and didn't return.

Do I have a handle on grief now? Probably not fully, but after joining the Support After Suicide Men's group in Geelong, I have appreciated being with men who know what I am going through as well as I can relate to their confusion, anger and pain. Having guest speakers who discuss issues that are related to what we have gone through, allows us to form and ask questions amongst ourselves. This has eased the 'burden' of grief for me. Amidst all of this I am aware that I have been very self centred. By being involved in SAS, I am able to view life from another perspective, one of (hopefully) helping others to see that there really is light at the end of the tunnel.

*Craig Wilkinson*

## **SUPPORT AFTER SUICIDE MEN'S GROUP**

**During 2019 a new Support After Suicide (SAS) program was introduced. This program is designed specifically for men and provides an opportunity for men to meet and discuss their suicide bereavement experiences, feelings and coping strategies in an all-male environment.**

This monthly group is essentially for bereaved men to meet other men who have lost a loved one to suicide. Each month the meeting commences with a guest speaker who shares his own thoughts and experiences in life, providing points for discussion and an opportunity for questions during the remainder of the evening. Participants are welcome to contribute as much or as little as they choose. Some participants say very little but have acknowledged that they still draw comfort and reassurance that they are not alone in their grief, as well as learning from other people's experiences and feelings.

The program is modelled on a similar service which has been provided in Melbourne by Jesuit Social Services for a number of years.

There is an emphasis on stressing to the Men's Group attendees that grief following a suicide can be complex and overwhelming and as a bereaved person they may experience a broad range of thoughts and feelings such as sadness, anger, guilt and confusion. Suicide grief can be an intense and difficult experience and the group discussions revolve around open dialogue regarding these varied emotions.

It is apparent from the Men's Group meetings that some men experiencing suicide grief feel well supported by family and friends while others feel isolated and misunderstood. Reactions can be many and varied and may seem difficult to understand. In these circumstances the group can assist attendees to feel not only supported but also understood.

The Men's Group is facilitated by Adam Green and Danny Keating who both have lost loved ones to suicide. Behind the scenes they are supported and guided by Hope's senior bereavement counsellor, Annie Norrish. The group is totally non-judgmental and attendees range from men who have lost loved ones recently to those that have lost loved ones many years ago.

The Men's Group meetings are held at 6pm on the first Wednesday of each month at Kitchener House Geelong, 285-289 Ryrie Street Geelong. All men bereaved by suicide are welcome to attend.

**Danny Keating, Chair SAS, Director Hope Board and Peer Facilitator.**

This publication is generously funded by the Freemasons

