

Funerals in Aotearoa after a death by suicide

Guidance for bereaved whānau and
those supporting them





Ruia te pō, ka ao, ka awatea

Move from the darkness into the light

Waerea, Waerea
Waerea i runga, Waerea i raro,
Waerea i roto, Waerea i waho
Waerea ngā taimahatanga o te wā,
kia wātea
Tūturu o whiti, Whakamaua kia Tina,
Haumi e, Hui e, Tāiki e!

Clear a path ahead
Clear above, clear beneath,
Clear all obstructions within and outside,
Clear and relieve us of any burdens that
today may bring
And let us be free in mind, body and spirit.
We comprehend and agree,
and we make it so.
Haumi e, Hui e, Tāiki e!

Kei ō tātou taonga kua riro atu i
ngā rā, i ngā wiki, i ngā marama kua
pahure ake nei. Haere, haere, haere
atu rā koutou ki ō tātou tūpuna e
tatari ana ki a koutou.
Kei ngā whānau e noho pani nei,
koutou kua pā i tēnei mamae roa,
kia kaha kia māia, kia manawanui.
He rourou iti noa tēnei rauemi nā
te aroha hei hāpai, hei āwhina, hei
tautoko i te oranga o te iwi.

To our dearest loved ones we have
lost within the days, weeks and
months that have passed. Farewell
and return to the loving embrace of
our ancestors that wait to welcome
you. To all the whānau and families
who have lost loved ones, be strong,
be brave and be steadfast. This
resource is a small token of love to
help and support the wellbeing of
your whānau and whānau all around
the nation.

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Introduction

If you've lost a loved one to suicide or suspected suicide, please know you don't have to go through this alone. We hope this resource can support you in planning your loved one's funeral or hui mate in a way that honours their life, addresses suicide safely and helps you and your whānau cope with your grief.

While this resource incorporates mātauranga Māori, our intention isn't to give advice on the rituals or processes/tikanga around tangihanga or hui mate, nor any other funeral ritual or burial rite. We would also like to acknowledge any cultural and religious differences in grieving. Please, take only what you need from this resource and feel free to adapt any of this information to your own situation.

Hui mate can translate to 'a gathering for a loved one who has passed'. For Māori, this includes tangihanga, waerea, kawē mate and hura kōhatu. For the purpose of this resource, hui mate will focus on key aspects of a tangihanga ceremony after a death by suicide. This ensures we don't diminish any processes specific to tangihanga.



He pou tautoko Leaning on others for support

*I ngā wā taimaha, tūhonohono atu ki tō whānau he pou whirinaki mōu.
In heavy and trying times, lean on your whānau, your pillars of support.*

As you plan to farewell your loved one, lean on those you love and trust to help get you through.

- You might like to ask someone you trust to be the main point of contact – they can liaise with the funeral director or kaumātua and help with organising official processes on your behalf.
- If you can, let people know how they can best tautoko/support you. It might be dropping off kai/food, sharing a karakia/prayer, looking after tamariki/children, picking up flowers, or simply being there with you.
- Kōrero/talk and connect with people you love.
- If you need to, reach out to a grief counsellor or phone a helpline. There's a list at the end of this resource.



He mamaeroa

Navigating grief after a suicide loss

Ko te here o te aroha tē taea te wetewete.

A loving bond cannot be undone.

Any death is difficult; however, a suicide loss is traumatic and especially hard to cope with. It might leave you with lots of questions that are impossible to answer. You may be experiencing shock, pōuri/sadness, taimaha/intense pain or heaviness, whakamā/shame, numbness, anger, or even relief if your loved one was unwell for a long time. All of these are common feelings and reactions. Suicide is complex and influenced by a combination of many different factors coming together at once.

It's never the result of one thing only and never anyone's fault.

Coming to terms with what's happened takes time. Holding a funeral or hui mate is a time to remember, honour and whakanui/celebrate your loved one.





He āhuru mōwai

Creating a safe space for grief during the funeral or hui mate

Ko te tuku roimata me te tuku hūpē he rongōā mō te whānau.

Mourning our loved ones who have passed away through the shedding of tears and mucus is an integral part of the healing process for whānau.

You are dealing with incredibly tough things right now, and there are lots of decisions to be made. We hope these tips will help you and people attending the funeral or hui mate.

- **If possible, you might like to spend time with your loved one's body.** You may also wish to help prepare their body by washing them and/or choosing clothes for them. Your funeral director can advise you on the options.
 - **If you would like to, your funeral director can arrange for your loved one's body to be brought home or to the marae.** You may want to consider where to place the body and whether to have set visiting times for other mourners.
 - **If you are comfortable with it, it's best practice to tell people your loved one died by suicide or suspected suicide.** Safe kōrero around suicide at a funeral or hui mate can provide comfort and hope to people, including those who may be having suicidal thoughts. It's also a powerful way to help lift any feelings of whakamā/shame and stay in charge of what information is shared.
-

Suicide as the cause of death should be acknowledged early on, compassionately and non-judgementally. – Cushla

Here are some tips to make sure any kōrero around suicide is safe:

- Don't include any distressing details, including the method or suicide note.
- Avoid the term “committed suicide” – suicide is not a crime. It's better to say “died by suicide” or “took their life”.
- Remind people that suicide is never anybody's fault.
- Focus on who your loved one was rather than the way they died – e.g., talk about what they loved about life or mention their contributions to their family, whānau, community, marae, hapū or iwi.
- Let people know help is available and remind them it can make a difference. Provide helpline numbers – there's a list at the end of this guide.

After the service, friends told us the most useful thing we did during the funeral was point out information about mental health and share a message of hope. – Anna and Martin



To learn more on safe kōrero about suicide, please see the companion guide “Funerals in Aotearoa after a death by suicide – Guidance for whānau, kaumātua, funeral directors, celebrants and faith leaders”.

- **Invite people you trust to kōrero at the funeral.** It's best to choose speakers ahead of time. An open invitation to speak sometimes means you have less influence over what is said, and someone may say something that could distress you and others. Check with the speakers if they would like to have a support person with them.
- During the hui mate, mourners have the opportunity to kōrero and waiata freely to whakanui/acknowledge the person who has passed. **Your kaumātua, whānau leader or funeral director should create a safe space by letting kaikōrero/speakers know what is appropriate to share.**
- **If it feels right for your whānau, find a way to include children and youth in the service.** Research shows it's best to let young ones know if a person died by suicide and support them to take part in the farewell. There are simple ways to help them feel important and included – for example, by choosing a waiata/song, carrying a photo, creating a slide show, or writing a message on the coffin.



For ideas around how to talk to young ones about suicide, visit Victim Support's website – Telling others after a suicide.
<https://victimsupport.org.nz/get-support/suicide/telling-others-after-suicide>

Ask kids how they're doing. When they say "fine", you can say "I know that, but how are you actually going?" – Kat

- **Find someone you trust to lead the funeral or hui mate.** Your funeral director, celebrant, church minister or kaumātua should be able to navigate the kōrero around suicide with confidence, compassion and aroha. If you don't feel comfortable with a particular service provider or their approach, it's okay to change your mind and find a new provider. You may like to ask for recommendations from friends or whānau or ask Victim Support for a list of local funeral directors.

*We felt safe with the church we used. They left our son's photo up on the wall for a year after he died, along with the photos of other people who died during the year. His death was no different.
That to us felt safe. – Anna and Martin*

- **Honour your loved one by weaving some of their favourite things into the ceremony.** You could share a poem, waiata or whakataukī that had special meaning to them. After the service, you might like to offer kai they enjoyed the most. Whatever you decide to share, be mindful of how it could affect you or other people. Avoid imagery or wording that contains graphic descriptions of pain, hopelessness, or wanting to no longer be alive.
- **Allow whānau to help out with the hui mate through koha/contribution.** This could be koha-ā-waiata/sharing aroha through song, koha-ā-moni/helping with hui mate costs, koha-ā-kai/helping with food preparation or serving, koha-ā-whakaaro/helping out by cleaning, doing the dishes, or taking up a role such as kaikōrero/speaker or kaikaranga/caller.
- **Include others and give them a safe space to release mamae and hurt.** You can invite people to write a message to go in the casket, perform a haka or waiata, or leave a meaningful taonga/treasure to farewell your loved one.

*Think about who's going to be affected by this loss outside the family. You're not responsible for them, but how you include them is important.
– Warren*

Ngā rangi i muri mai i te hui mate

After the funeral or hui mate

Takahia te ara ki te ao tūroa.

Keep to the path of enlightenment.

Make sure to look after your hauora/wellbeing in the weeks and months after a suicide loss. We all grieve differently, and it takes time to heal.

Here are some useful tips to help you take care of yourself.

- **Find a support person.** This could be another whānau member, friend, elder, kaumātua or counsellor.
- **Stay connected.** Ask loved ones to keep checking in with you once the funeral or hui mate is over. Spend time with people who uplift your wairua/spirit.
- **Do things you find comforting.** Kōrero with people you love or a spiritual leader such as a priest; listen to music; read; write. Pray or meditate if it's helpful.
- **Spend some time outside.** Connect with te taiao/nature and get fresh air and sunlight.
- **Talk to others who have 'been there'.** When you're ready, you may be open to talking with others who understand the grief and loss that follows a suicide death. You might like to join a support group (check under 'Relevant organisations and resources' at the end of this guide).



He tohu āwhina Coping with suicidal thoughts

When someone you love has died by suicide, you might start thinking about suicide yourself. These thoughts and feelings are common and can be very distressing. You deserve support and care to get through.

Tell someone you trust so you can get the help you need to feel better. If you can't immediately find someone you know to talk to, there are helplines you can contact 24/7. You can find a list at the end of this resource.

If things are at crisis point for you right now or you need urgent help, go to your local hospital emergency department or call your local mental health crisis assessment team. If you're in danger right now, **please call 111.**



He pou whirinaki

How to support someone bereaved by suicide

If you're supporting someone bereaved by suicide, you can tear out this page to keep this information handy.

Mā te ngākau whakaiti, mā te ngākau māhaki me te ngākau aroha koe e ārahi.

Humility, empathy and compassion will guide you.

If you're supporting a friend or whānau member who lost a loved one to suicide, you might not know what to do, or you might be worried about saying or doing the wrong thing. That's okay. Suicide loss can be overwhelming and make people feel isolated or ashamed. They may experience stigma and not know where or how to reach out for support. Your caring presence and aroha can be comforting at this difficult time.

Here's how you can be there for them:

- Someone who's grieving may not have the energy to let you know what they need. Ask them about specific ways you can help. It's not so much about what you want to do, but what they want or need.
- Make it easy for them by offering suggestions. For example, if you've made a meal, you can ask if they would like you to bring it over.
- If you find it hard to know what to say, it's okay to say that.
- Let them know you're here to kōrero or listen whenever they'd like to.
- Validate whatever emotions they're feeling.
- Join them in prayer or karakia if they find it comforting.
- Be there for them not just in the short term, but in the weeks and months to come.
- Encourage them to talk to a trained counsellor. A free suicide bereavement support service (such as Aoake te Rā) or a peer support group can be good options, too.
- Take care of yourself and your wellbeing in the process.



Nominate a care person for family members during a funeral or tangihanga. They need someone dedicated to them. Someone who doesn't have to ask and can bring them a cuppa, some food, ask them if they're actually sleeping. – Kat



He ringa hāpai

Dealing with practical matters

- “After a suicide” website (www.afterasuicide.nz) includes a lot of practical information and guidance around official processes and people involved after a suicide death, applying for a funeral grant, telling children and other people, and accessing more support.
- Victim Support (www.victimsupport.org.nz) Available 24/7 - call 0800 842 846. Victim Support provides immediate and ongoing support after a suicide loss. Their website includes useful resources on supporting a child or young person bereaved by suicide.
- The “Funerals in Aotearoa after a death by suicide – Guidance for whānau, kaumātua, funeral directors, celebrants and faith leaders” resource might be useful if you’re planning to lead a funeral or hui mate for your loved one.





He ringa āwhina

Where to find assistance and more information

Relevant organisations and resources

Asian Helpline - Asian Family Services

www.asianfamilyservices.nz

0800 862 342

Free and confidential services available in ten languages.

Aoake te Rā

www.aoaketera.org.nz

Free counselling support to individuals and whānau bereaved by suicide. You can refer yourself or somebody else online, via email or by calling 0800 000 053.

Chatsafe by Orygen

www.orygen.org.au/chatsafe/remembering

Tips on how to talk online about someone who has died by suicide.

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

www.cab.org.nz

0800 367 222

CAB may know about support groups and grief programmes in the local area. They can also connect you with a budgeting service to help you manage funeral costs.

Coronial Services of New Zealand

<https://coronialservices.justice.govt.nz/coronial-services/>

The Coronial Services' website has a pamphlet on coronial services in New Zealand when someone dies suddenly.

LeVa

www.leva.co.nz

Information and support for Pasifika families on mental health, addiction and suicide prevention. Includes a resource on supporting Pacific communities bereaved by suicide: <https://leva.co.nz/resources/pacific-suicide-postvention-supporting-pacific-communities/>

LGBTIQA+ Suicide Postvention Response Plan

www.switchboard.org.au/s/Switchboard-LGBTIQA-Postvention-Final-Launch.pdf

General guidelines developed by Switchboard Victoria for LGBTIQA+ communities and peer organisations involved in providing postvention.

Mental Health Foundation

www.mentalhealth.org.nz/suicide-loss

- Visit <https://mentalhealth.org.nz/getting-through-together/grief-and-loss-in-covid19> for guidance on dealing with grief and loss during Covid-19.
- Look up Suicide Bereavement Support Groups to find a peer support group in your area.

Skylight

www.skylight.org.nz

0800 299 100

Waves is an eight-week programme run by Skylight that supports adults bereaved by suicide.

Vaka Tautua - 0800 OLA LELEI

www.vakatautua.co.nz/0800-ola-lelei

0800 652 535

Vaka Tautua is a national “by Pacific, for Pacific” health, disability and social services provider. Ola Lelei is their free national Pacific helpline for anyone who needs someone to talk to, help and support. Available in Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islands Māori and English.

Other agencies or groups to contact may include:

- local whānau and community support agencies
 - churches or faith groups
 - marae
 - cultural centres
 - community centres, community workers
 - counsellors, school guidance counsellors or counselling agencies
 - social workers
 - doctors, community health centres, or primary health organisations
 - community mental health teams or hauora Māori mental health teams
-

Finding a counsellor

To find a counsellor, check out these online listings:

- Aoake te Rā - www.aoketera.org.nz
- The New Zealand Association of Counsellors - www.nzac.org.nz
- Talkingworks - www.talkingworks.co.nz
- New Zealand Psychological Society - www.psychology.org.nz
- New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists - www.nzccp.co.nz
- The Grief Centre (Auckland) - www.griefcentre.org.nz
- Grief Support Services (Tauranga) - www.griefsupport.org.nz
- Loss and Grief Centre (Invercargill) - www.lossandgriefcentre.com



Free helplines

Below is a list of free, 24/7 services that offer support, information and help:

1737, need to talk?

www.1737.org.nz

Call or text **1737** for support from a trained counsellor.

Lifeline

www.lifeline.org.nz

Call **0800 543 354** for counselling and support.

Youthline

www.youthline.co.nz

Call **0800 376 633**, text **234**, email talk@youthline.co.nz or go to website for an online chat.

Healthline

www.health.govt.nz

Call **0800 611 116** for advice from trained registered nurses.

Depression Helpline

www.depression.org.nz

Call **0800 111 757** to talk to a trained counsellor about how you are feeling or to ask any questions.

Samaritans

www.samaritans.org.nz

Call **0800 726 666** for confidential support to anyone who is lonely or in emotional distress.

Ngā Mihi

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