



# Aboriginal people bereaved by suicide

## Tribal Way

When someone died our people had the infrastructure in place. Sorrow Camps took place, this is where Aboriginal people all came together and sit in a location away from the area where the person had lived and conducted ceremony. People would, mostly, sit quietly at Sorrow Camps paying respect to the close kinship of the family structure. Long term ongoing support was also provided to the bereaved by the extended families like Sisters, Brothers, Uncles and Aunts. These were mostly classed as Mums and Dads the Aboriginal way. Even the burial had its own structure of respect to comfort the family.

It is important to understand that our people had this structure to help you through this process, we call it nowadays, Sorry Business. This is still practiced out bush by many today. All tribes are diverse and they each had their specific ways but Sorry Business was most important to the healing process for all families and others who were close.

## Nowadays

When we grieve, when someone commits suicide, or, has died the first response is mainly tremendous shock. We struggle to believe that the person has died. This usually effects our concentration about what is going on around you and could affect how your body reacts: you may feel tingling, faintness, feeling of helplessness, lack of appetite and even anger. Other things that used to be important may no longer be important.

The Aboriginal way is that other Aboriginal people will come far and wide, even non Aboriginal people, to see you to show their respect, like shaking hands, and sitting down. This is similar to what happened before colonization but more often nowadays it happens in a house or dwelling rather than out bush.

You also may wish to go back to the country where the person was born, not just for the funeral but for the healing process. While waiting for the funeral there is sometimes a lot of anger and with large families there may be disputes. It is important to respect your Elders and ask them, or let them decide, not just funeral arrangements but the healing process and who should help you through this.

You should never lose focus on what you are grieving for and never let anger or other feelings cloud your judgment on how you respect or judge the person who has taken

their life. You will find that many not just you will ask questions why. You must always remember that this was our Aboriginal way back in the old days where everyone would come together just to cry and that they too are close to the deceased person and hurting too.

Just like the old days it is rude to mention the person's name that has died. Use a nickname of the person that has died. If you have other family members around who have the same name refer to them as another name as this is necessary for the healing process.

Our people were always spiritual and believed not just in religion but in spirits the Aboriginal way. This also plays an important role on how we view death. This could also include thoughts of Aboriginal Payback, thinking someone has done something wrong, that he or she, did not commit suicide but was actually killed. If you have concerns about this you may need to talk to an Elder or even the police. This is not very common but could just be a thought like many others that flow through your mind leading up to and even after the funeral. Do not feel ashamed this is our tribal way and culture.

At the funeral you will see a lot of Aboriginal people showing their respect and who want to show you they also love and care for you. Especially those who know what you are going through their own experiences. It is important that you listen to what they have to say to help you get through this first initial stage. Grief itself is a humanely function and it is part of the process of your healing. Don't be ashamed to show this.

You might even have thoughts of suicide and/or taking others' lives. If you ever feel like this you need to speak to an Aboriginal Healer, General Practitioner, Counsellor or another trusted person about these thoughts.

You always must remember the old ways and how we dealt with this important issue-it has been lost to some extent and we need to fill in the gaps with what our community services offer us today – this includes psychologists, counsellors, doctors, grieving forum/support groups.

It's important to be truthful that when you lose someone your life will change dramatically forever. You will feel that emptiness that will affect us all at some point in our lives. If you follow the right process and use our culture to guide you that feeling of emptiness does and will get better, but you need to understand that there now is a gap in your life and it will be there forever.

The only way to treat this gap is to make yourself feel better in doing these living skills like:

- Going back to country
- Talking To Elders
- Going to where the loved one was born
- Counselling
- Talking to a Doctor
- Family Support
- Follow your Aboriginal Group Culture or your spiritual beliefs

You will find that it may be harder when the funeral is over – this is when you may feel truly alone as it may seem everyone else's life is still going on.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve, everyone grieves differently, it is important that you do what is right for you, and it is important to keep talking to others.

Some Warning signs that you are not coping are:

- Excessive amounts of alcohol and drugs
- Not wanting to get out of bed
- Believing the person is still alive
- Serious thoughts of self-harm or suicide

Be honest to yourself about your true thoughts and feelings and get help if you need it. You will get through this.

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