

How to support an autistic person who has been bereaved by suicide

It can be incredibly difficult for autistic people to understand their feelings following bereavement, including when bereaved by suicide. This guide provides some Dos and Don'ts, so that you can be confident in the support you are providing.

Dos:

- Use clear and age-appropriate language such as 'die by suicide' or 'took their own life'
- Provide simple, straightforward details such as where the individual died, when they died.
- Give the autistic person space to process the information provided
- Show that you are there to support them however they need without putting pressure on them.
- Ensure the autistic person knows they are not responsible for the suicide
- Try to maintain routines and a sense of normalcy where possible
- Listen to what they need and try to meet these needs.

Don't:

- Use phrases such as 'gone to a better place' as they may encourage the autistic person to romanticise death and see death as a solution
- Lie to the autistic person, even if you think you are protecting them, as they may get confused if they hear a different story later down the line.
- Don't use ambiguous phrases such as 'no longer with us' as the autistic individual may not understand that the person isn't coming back
- Get annoyed with someone for asking questions which may be perceived as unusual or very specific, this may be someone's way of processing what has happened.
- Focus on the means of suicide.

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- Punish someone for responding emotionally to the news
- Expect all autistic people to have the same reactions, or presume they will be unable to feel empathy
- Expect a particular reaction- grief is very individual.

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