

LGBTIQA+ SUICIDE LOSS

“Queer grief” is a term used to describe the emotional, relational, and situational experiences LGBTIQA+ people can face when grieving a suicide of a LGBTIQA+ person. There is very little information available about LGBTIQA+ suicide loss, yet LGBTIQA+ people often speak about the complexities in grieving a LGBTIQA+ suicide death and needing our experiences to be understood.

This fact sheet has been written to raise your awareness about queer grief and guide you through helpful ways to support LGBTIQA+ people who are bereaved by suicide.



WHO FEELS AFFECTED BY AN LGBTIQA+ SUICIDE?

Chosen Family and Family

Those who are close to a person who has ended their life will feel intense emotional reactions. Often police and coronial enquiries recognise biological or family-of-origin as ‘next of kin’ and close relations. In LGBTIQA+ communities, we often have families of choice as well – they could be friends, partners, LGBTIQA+ community members, housemates. As LGBTIQA+ people, even our relationships may not be recognised by some others as valid partnerships. Sometimes our partnerships may not be disclosed if we’re not out to our families. Chosen families do not always receive visible recognition that might validate their grief. They may not be known to family of origin, but they can still be profoundly affected.

Friends and peers

Friends and communities surrounding an LGBTIQA+ person will also feel greatly affected. For LGBTIQA+

people, friends and peers may play a vital role for us in terms of providing comfort, knowledge, experience and supports that many of us rely on each other for. These relationships can often hold significant meaning in our lives, and the loss of friends and peers can have profound impact. Many LGBTIQA+ people describe feeling uncertainty about the validity of our grief, wondering if the strength of our relationship or connection to the deceased warrants our feelings.

Communities

Communities are central to LGBTIQA+ wellbeing. Our communities are sites where we hold a collective care for one another. The loss of a LGBTIQA+ person through suicide in a community may affect the ways we feel belonging in our LGBTIQA+ communities and our supportive relationships that have been sources of strength and connection may be disrupted and changed.



Switchboard Victoria acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

charlee.org.au

Charlee is a project of Switchboard Victoria, which is based on the lands of the Yaluk-ut Weelam clan of the Boon Wurrung peoples.

We acknowledge that our work takes place on lands that are under colonial occupation and that sovereignty has never been ceded. We hope to pay our deepest respects to Boon Wurrung elders, past and present, and wish to extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People across this Country we know as Australia

Sometimes communities may hold memorials or create tributes to reflect on the contributions the person who has died made, and to honour their collective loss. These rituals can be extraordinarily powerful ways for LGBTIQ+ people to connect with our communities, validate our experiences of loss, and celebrate our resilience.

LGBTIQ+ Kin

LGBTIQ+ people who may be distantly connected, or never have known the deceased when they were alive, may still be impacted greatly. We call this LGBTIQ+ kinship – feeling connected to a person because we're part of the broader LGBTIQ+ communities. You can feel a kinship with someone who you never met, and you can feel an acute sense of loss of their life.

It may be that we share an identity with them, such as also being trans and gender diverse, and we recognise ourselves in aspects of a person's story. You might feel that you shared similar experiences of social, emotional and material pressures; that you can identify with or relate to the struggles they faced. Grief and loss can have a big impact – especially when we share that identity.

The closer to the deceased's identity the stronger the personal impact may be (e.g. a trans death can impact across all trans lives in our communities). For some parts of queer communities that have suffered multiple losses, such as older gay men who lived through the AIDS epidemic, any new death can add to the cumulative grief of multiple losses from earlier in their lives.

WHAT MIGHT AN LGBTIQ+ PERSON BE GOING THROUGH?

LGBTIQ+ people describe questioning the experiences an LGBTIQ+ person who has passed went through – what was the experience like for that particular person to be LGBTIQ+? Did they feel accepted by family? Did they feel accepted by the communities surrounding them? What other issues might have been challenging for them?

Grief is an active process that involves finding new ways to navigate communities and relationships that have changed significantly. Some LGBTIQ+ people describe pulling away from communities after loss, wondering how their new reality can fit in with the old. Other LGBTIQ+ people describe needing to come closer to LGBTIQ+ communities.

There can also be considerable complexities for LGBTIQ+ people from diverse cultures. They may encounter challenges around heightened stigma and discrimination. In many cultures suicide is considered taboo and some countries still criminalise suicide. Some LGBTIQ+ people describe it as challenging to find language to talk about suicide loss. Grief can be explored in infinite ways – through yarning, healing ceremonies or expressive art like dance, singing or painting.

Sometimes, culturally significant ways of recognising death may be challenging for LGBTIQ+ individuals to participate in. Some LGBTIQ+ people do not experience cohesion amongst their family of origin due to religious beliefs. This may mean that LGBTIQ+ people are excluded from cultural practices of mourning. They may feel a part of those aspects of their culture spiritually, but not feel able to participate openly as an LGBTIQ+ person.



WHAT DO LGBTIQ+ PEOPLE FEEL AFTER AN LGBTIQ+ SUICIDE?

Grieving an LGBTIQ+ suicide can be complex, intensely painful, and enduring. Everyone is different in how we grieve; many LGBTIQ+ people describing feelings of pain, sadness, regret, futility, guilt and often anger. Most people describe that over time their feelings of pain lessen, though their loss may never go away entirely, they find ways to build a life around their loss.

DISCRIMINATION AND STIGMA

Some LGBTIQ+ people experience discrimination during their grief, including hearing that their loved one has ended their life *because* of their non-heterosexual or non-cisgender identity. We know this isn't the case – LGBTIQ+ people don't die by suicide because they are LGBTIQ+, the reasons are far more complex and individual.

A few other examples of discrimination:

- Being excluded from participating in funerals or memorials
- Erasure of the LGBTIQ+ person's identity such as during coronial enquiry or in eulogies
- Support services not understanding chosen family or queer relationships
- Feeling their close relationships with the deceased are erased or not recognised by others

These forms of discrimination can impact an LGBTIQ+ person's view of their self, heighten feelings of worthlessness and increase isolation. None of us should have the legitimacy of our grief questioned, denied or erased. It can be incredibly challenging for us as LGBTIQ+ people grieving loss through suicide to begin toward healing.

LIVED EXPERIENCE AND PEER-LED SUPPORT

Having support from people who have a lived experience of suicide bereavement and are LGBTIQ+ peers can make a huge difference for LGBTIQ+ people in accessing support. Some LGBTIQ+ people report that getting support from LGBTIQ+ peers can be helpful in feeling safe that the person providing support understands their context of relationship, the meaning that might be attached to the relationship, and their lived experience, as an LGBTIQ+ person, of grief and loss.

RESOURCES

Explore CHARLEE – www.charlee.com/i-am-seeking-help-bereavement

Listen to [How to Talk About Suicide](#) produced by JOY Media, Switchboard Victoria and Jesuit Social Services Support After Suicide – <https://lets-talk-about-suicide.com/>

Read LGBTIQ+ Suicide Postvention [Response Plan](#)

Connect join [Switchboard suicide prevention mailing list](#)

Need support

QLIFE

Phone: 1800 184 527

Website: www.qlife.org.au

Hours: 3pm-Midnight (AEST), 365 days a year

QLIFE is an anonymous, free, national peer-support telephone and web-chat service for LGBTIQ+ and questioning people, their families and communities.

Rainbow Door (Victoria)

Phone: 1800 729 367

Text: 0480 017 246 sofa

Email: support@rainbowdoor.org.au

Website: www.rainbowdoor.org.au

Opening hours: 10am-5pm, 7 days a week

Rainbow Door is a Victorian-based, free LGBTIQ+ helpline. Rainbow Door provides information, support, and referral by trained counsellors and can speak to people about suicidal thoughts, concern for others, or bereavement by suicide.