



The facts

Suicide does not discriminate. It crosses social, cultural and religious boundaries. Differences may occur however, in how a particular culture experiences grief and bereavement as a result of their loss.

Approximately 24% of Australians were born overseas, giving this country the diversity that it is both proud of and renowned for. This diversity must be recognised when it comes to respecting and understanding the needs of suicide survivors.



This fact sheet provides information about the importance of recognising Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) populations within Australia and the impact this has on grief, loss and the bereavement process.

How does cultural difference influence grief and loss?

According to Santrock (2007), different cultures grieve in different ways, but all have ways that are vital in healthily coping with the death of a loved one. Culture informs the meaning of death for each person and, therefore, the feelings each person has when they are faced with the death of a loved one. Beliefs about the meaning of death help people make sense of death and cope with the mystery and fear surrounding dying. Rituals and customs are especially important in some cultures in helping to provide structure and direction during the time immediately after the death.

Suicide as a method of death is viewed differently in many cultures and sub-cultures and this has an impact on the bereavement experience of survivors. For example, a family who experiences death by suicide, due to their cultural heritage, may receive little or no social support. In a different culture, however, suicide may be regarded with little or no social stigma and may even be regarded as noble (Range, et.al. 1999; cited in Pomery and Garcia, 2009).

Rituals and customs

Cultural customs and rituals help the bereaved to deal with the following issues (adapted from <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Coping/Grief+and+Bereavement/Grief+Among+Cultures>):

- How the body should be handled after death, including how the body should be cleansed and dressed, who should handle the body, and whether the body should be buried or cremated;
- Whether grief should be expressed quietly and privately, or loudly and publicly, such as with public crying, keening, or wailing;
- Whether there are expectations on how men, women and children should grieve differently to each other;
- What ceremonies and rituals should be performed and who should participate, such as children, community members, and friends;
- How long family members are expected to grieve and how they are expected to dress and behave during the mourning period;
- How the deceased should be remembered over the lifetime of the family, such as through ongoing rituals to celebrate or communicate with the deceased;
- What new roles family members are expected to take on, such as whether a widow is expected to remarry or whether an oldest son is expected to become the family leader.

How to respect cultural differences

- Let the survivors and their family educate you about their culture and their customs.
- Help the survivors to connect with local community groups who can assist them in undertaking the required customs/rituals/ceremonies required by their culture.
- Never make assumptions based on what you think you may know about the survivors or a particular culture. Always check your knowledge with them and ask questions when appropriate. Good questions to ask include:
 - What are the bereaved family's beliefs surrounding death?
 - Who is expected to attend mourning ceremonies, and how are attendees expected to dress and act?
 - Are gifts, flowers, or other offerings expected?
 - What special days or dates will be significant for the bereaved family?
 - What types of verbal or written condolence are considered appropriate?
- Always maintain confidentiality.
- Educate yourself about different cultures and their grief customs by reading books/articles and speaking with people from different cultures.



Useful resources and websites

- Grieving the Aboriginal Way booklet - <http://www.gtp.com.au/ips/inewsfiles/Grieving%20Aboriginal%20Way.pdf>
- Living is for Everyone Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Fact Sheets - <http://www.livingisforeveryone.com.au/Fact-Sheets.html#c48>
- Grief; A Muslim Perspective by Shukria Alimi Raad - <http://www.hospicefoundation.org/uploads/1998raad.pdf>
- Islamic Funeral Rights - <http://islam.about.com/cs/elderly/a/funerals.htm>
- Tangihanga; Maori grieving - <http://www.korero.maori.nz/forlearners/protocols/tangi.html>

Contact Us:

W www.suicideprevention.salvos.org.au

E admin.hopeforlife@aue.salvationarmy.org

P 02 9356 2120

