

Memorials After a Suicide Death

While memorials can be held for any type of loss, they are especially common after a suicide death. Suicide often leaves loved ones and communities with deep grief and strong emotions, and careful planning is important to support those who may be vulnerable. When done thoughtfully, memorials can honor a life, promote healing, and help turn grief into hope for the community.

Understanding Risk: Contagion and Clusters

- Suicide contagion occurs when exposure to suicide or suicidal behavior influences others to consider or attempt suicide. While rare, it is important to be aware of, especially among adolescents and young adults, who are more vulnerable to imitative behavior. All communities can benefit from careful planning to reduce potential risk.¹
- A suicide cluster happens when multiple suicides occur close together in time or within the same community, peer group, or family. Clusters are uncommon but highlight the importance of thoughtful postvention.²
- Memorials are not inherently harmful. When planned thoughtfully, they can honor a life, promote healing, and support hope, while minimizing potential risk.

The Value of Policies

Having a memorialization policy in place before a loss occurs helps communities respond thoughtfully rather than reactively. Proactive policies provide organizations with a clear framework for transforming grief into safe, meaningful remembrance.

Strong policies help organizations:³

- Ensure consistency and fairness for all deaths, reducing stigma and avoiding hurtful comparisons.
- Establish expectations for safe, time-bound memorials, both online and in person.
- Clarify roles and boundaries for staff, students, or colleagues.
- Promote hope-focused memorials that honor life and foster connection, healing, and access to resources.
- Encourage collaboration with families and community partners to respect cultural traditions and personal preferences.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Does this memorial honor the person's life in a safe and meaningful way?

Could this memorial unintentionally affect someone who may be at risk?

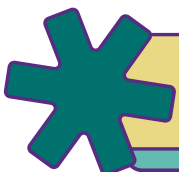
What are the family's preferences and cultural considerations?

Is this the right time for a memorial?

Could the memorial incorporate hope, connection, or prevention?

Are there safer alternatives to physical or permanent memorials, such as service projects or temporary memory books?

Understanding how to honor someone safely is key to supporting healing and reducing potential harm.



Open communication is key in postvention, supporting healing after a loss and laying a foundation for prevention.

Safe Memorial Best Practices⁴

Memorials can be meaningful and healing when thoughtfully planned. Following these principles helps honor a life while supporting hope, healing, and connection in the community.

Consider the following principles:

- Focus on life, not death. Highlight the person's strengths, relationships, and impact rather than the details of their death.
- Include resources and support. Provide information about 988 and local mental health or postvention services.
- Use safe, hopeful language. Avoid romanticizing or glamorizing death in any messaging, online or in person.
- Make memorials time-bound. For online tributes, consider a temporary window of 30–60 days to honor the person safely.
- Engage the family. Collaborate with loved ones to ensure memorials are meaningful, culturally appropriate, and respectful.

Suggested activities:

- Community service day in the person's honor
- Mental health awareness events or walks
- Volunteering with local mental health agencies
- Fundraising for 988 or other crisis/support resources
- Temporary memory books or an online platform for condolences and messages, which can later be shared with the family

Considerations by Setting

Schools: Adolescents are more susceptible to imitative behavior, so memorials require extra care. Students may want to leave temporary items, such as notes or flowers, in a locker or collection box. These items can later be shared with the family. Students must be heard, supported, and given space to grieve while doing this safely. Communication and collaboration with school staff and families help ensure memorials are meaningful and culturally appropriate.⁵

Workplaces: Memorials should balance remembrance with workplace responsibilities. Digital memory books or shared platforms allow colleagues to post messages that can later be shared with the family safely. Clear policies support life-affirming actions for any workplace loss, such as volunteering, awareness events, or fundraising, while guiding respectful and hope-focused memorials.

References

1. Walling MA. Suicide Contagion. *Current Trauma Reports*. 2021;7(4):103-114. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40719-021-00219-9>
2. CDC. Suicide Clusters. Suicide Prevention. Published May 30, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/prevention/cluster.html>
3. Stubbe DE. When Prevention Is Not Enough: The Importance of Postvention After Patient Suicide. *FOCUS*. 2023;21(2):168-172. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1176/aipi.focus.20230003>
4. Workshop 1 Handout Memorials: Special Considerations When Memorializing an Incident. Accessed March 4, 2026. <https://nmvrc.org/media/sonljkww/special-considerations-when-memorializing-an-incident-nasp.pdf>
5. *After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools*. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Published December 24, 2019. <https://afsp.org/after-a-suicide-a-toolkit-for-schools/>

ABOUT

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF) educates, advocates for, and builds connections and support for individuals, families, and communities to prevent suicide.



(614) 429-1528 / OhioSPF.org

