FAQs for Responding to Grief, Trauma, and Distress After a Suicide:
U.S. National Guidelines

Q: Why are these National Guidelines important to survivors of suicide loss?

A: These National Guidelines pave the way for decisive, effective advances in comprehensive care after a suicide occurs—and a strengthened partnership between the fields of suicide prevention and suicide grief support. It has long been understood that the suicide of a family member, friend, or other emotionally close person can have a powerful and sometimes devastating impact on the people who are left behind. It is well established that exposure to death by suicide can be a significant risk factor for the development of many negative consequences in the bereaved, including an increased risk of suicide.

The guidelines are a call to action to all professionals engaged in supporting those bereaved by suicide loss to strengthen and expand their response to every fatality. Doing so will potentially reduce the risk of suicide and meet the needs of the bereaved and others who may suffer from a range of negative effects related to exposure to suicide.

Q: Why is it important for professions providing care to adopt the National Guidelines?

A: The National Guidelines are essential for those who wish to establish or strengthen services and support for people after a suicide, including suicide prevention, public health, and mental health service delivery leaders. Appendices to the document include an outline of the overarching principles for developing and implementing postvention programs and services, a directory of key resources and contacts for survivors of suicide loss and those who care for them, and a list of action steps that can be taken by officials at the local, tribal, state, and national levels to advance wide implementation of the guidelines.

Q: Why is it important that suicide prevention programs increase the attention they give to those affected when a suicide does occur?

A: The important connections between the suicide of an individual and the subsequent risk to people exposed to that suicide loom large in taking the full measure of the personal and societal damage suicide leaves in its wake. Despite this fact, the field of suicide prevention is only beginning to comprehensively include the most pervasive and long-term after-effects of suicide in its planning, funding, and implementation of responses to a death by suicide.
Q: What are the National Guidelines top recommendations?

A: The overarching goals of the National Guidelines are to ensure that all postvention accomplishes these three tasks in an integrated, balanced, and effective way:

- Facilitate the healing of individuals from the grief and distress of suicide loss
- Mitigate other negative effects of exposure to suicide, such as depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Prevent suicide among people who are at high risk after exposure to suicide

Q: What can communities and states do to implement the National Guidelines?

A: Communities and states can begin to immediately adopt the National Guidelines by:

- Integrating and coordinating effective suicide postvention activities across jurisdictions, organizations, and systems through increased communication, collaboration, and capacity building.
- Communicating accurate and useful information about the impact of suicide on individuals, organizations, and communities; about the availability of services for people affected by suicide; and about the nature and importance of suicide postvention.
- Working to ensure that media, entertainment, and online communications about suicide and its aftermath do not contribute to the distress of people bereaved by suicide.
- Creating the infrastructure and delivery systems for training a wide array of service providers in suicide bereavement support and treatment, and in minimizing the adverse effects of exposure to a suicide.
- Developing and implementing effective postvention practices in organizational, workplace, and school settings.
- Working with lead agencies that are coordinating postvention efforts in each county or region.
- Working through official channels and agencies, such as coroner’s offices, fire departments, emergency medical services, and others:
  - To provide support through outreach to survivors at the death scene and immediately after a suicide.
  - To ensure that basic information and referral resources are available to survivors as soon as possible after a fatality.
- Helping suicide prevention coalitions and other umbrella groups develop policies, principles, and protocols to strengthen suicide bereavement and other postvention practices among their stakeholders and constituents.