

# Healing Your Spirit

Surviving After The Suicide Of A Loved One



calgary health region



## A Note About The Artwork

The artwork throughout this publication has been created especially for 'Healing Your Spirit'. We hope it will have significant meaning for you as you walk through your grief journey.

The eagle is a symbol found in many cultures and belief systems throughout history. Many Plains Aboriginals associate the eagle with courage, vision and wisdom. They are gifts given to all of us—gifts you will need while on your journey.

The strong wings of the eagle represent the characteristics within your spirit that lift you up giving strength to cope during this difficult time. As you travel on your journey, we sincerely hope that you will allow yourself to reach for the healing your heart desires.

The medicine wheel recognizes life as a circle that connects us all. The hands let us know that we are not alone. The wheel reminds us to live in harmony—balancing our spiritual, physical, emotional and mental needs.



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## **For further information or to get additional copies, contact:**

Calgary Health Region Aboriginal Health Program (403) 943-0221

The complete booklet can be downloaded from the Calgary Health Region web site. Go to:

[www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/hecomm/aboriginal/aboriginal.htm](http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/hecomm/aboriginal/aboriginal.htm) or

[www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/hecomm/mental/SuicidePostvention.htm](http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/hecomm/mental/SuicidePostvention.htm)



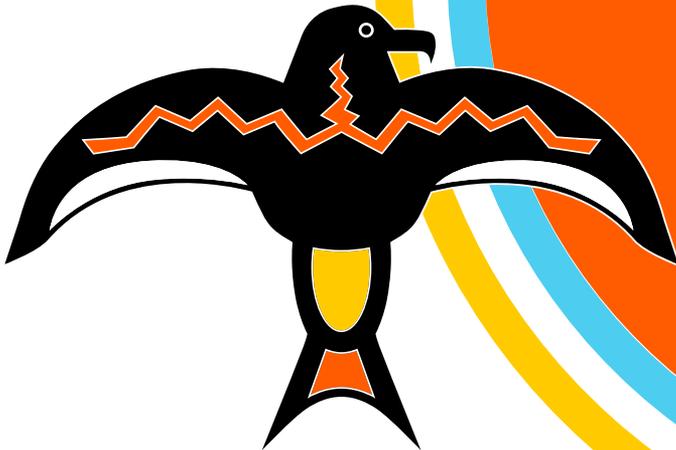
# Introduction



This booklet is offered to guide you through the first few moments...the first few days...the first few years... To help you honour the person you lost...and to honour yourself...after the suicide of someone you love.

We are humble in our offerings here and do not see the booklet as the answer on your healing path. We hope simply that our words bring a spirit of hopefulness that may provide you with some comfort and some supportive ways to cope with your loss.

Throughout this booklet we use the term 'Aboriginal' as we feel it is more inclusive of all Indigenous peoples and peoples with Indigenous ancestry. The only time other terms are used is when proper names, such as 'Indian Status' and 'Indian and Northern Affairs Canada' are referred.





Words Of  
Hope From  
Our Elders





## Words Of Hope From Our Elders



- “We pray for life, not death. We need to let nature take its course.”
- “Suicide hurts your heart. It breaks life tradition. Indian people are here to honour life.”
- “Seek advice from your Elders when you are troubled.”
- “We need silence, a time for reflection to think about the life lost. We celebrate the person’s life, and remember the good times.”
- “We should look at our stories. My grandmother would tell me stories in Blackfoot, and I would find the message in the story. Gathering information is done through storytelling, accept what is spoken.
- “We remember the person, we hold a wake. There is lots of laughter because we celebrate their life. We celebrate what we hold in our hearts. We talk about the things they did when they were here. We tell stories about that person...We do not exclude them from ceremonies.”
- “For some of us, we grieve for four days. For the wake, for three nights someone has to stay awake all night, to feed the fire, to always have food, tobacco, tea, coffee, for those coming. In the day, you feast. In the night, you do the singing and prayers. The burial takes place when the sun rises. The spirit will rise with the sun. It encourages the family to keep moving on. Continue with silent mourning for one year. Have a memorial every year, an honour feast. This is a way of celebrating their life.”



# How to Approach an Elder



An Elder is a person who is recognized and respected by his or her people.  
Aboriginal people look to their Elders for guidance and hope.



You may not know how to approach an Elder. Some Elders will accept an offering from someone asking for guidance. Many times this is an offering of tobacco; sometimes cigarettes are acceptable. Elders use this tobacco to pray for you or the person or thing for which you have come to see them. It is important to listen and to hear what your Elder tells you. Sometimes your Elder will share a story with you to help you search for the answer in yourself.

Sometimes you may not be able to afford tobacco, an Elder offers this advice: "If a person is in need of something from an Elder, and all they have is two cigarettes, then that will do...A gift with a story is good. Everyone has a different meaning to what is valuable and a different way to look at things." A gift that is given to an Elder is usually something that has personal value and meaning to you.

Not all Aboriginal people have the same traditions or customs and you may want to ask somebody who is considered a leader in your community for guidance on what to do.





When  
Someone  
You Love  
Dies by  
Suicide



# What Helps In The Short Term



*You will survive. Yes, your grief is overwhelming. It is hard to believe that this has really happened. But believe in yourself, your family and your community who share in your sorrow. With just one hour... just one day, as time goes on, your pain will get smaller. Know that you can learn to cope and to live with your loss.*

## **What Helps You In The Short Term**

You feel as if your world is crumbling around you. An Elder offers this guidance "You are here...only you decide what you are going to do now." We offer these words to help you through the emotions you may be feeling.

## **Knowing What to Expect**

You may be having a hard time thinking clearly, as if your brain is numb. You keep forgetting things. You may be going over your loved one's passing repeatedly in your head, and keep asking why.

At this time it is not unusual to feel sick, angry, and overcome by sadness. It is normal to feel guilty. But if you are having thoughts about harming yourself, visit with your Elder, family member, friend, counsellor, clergy, or health nurse...anyone. Keep yourself safe.



Remember, you are not to blame for your  
loved one's choices.



## **Let Others Help You**

It is okay to ask for help. It may be better to allow your family, friends, Elders and community to support you at this time. It is okay to let them guide you in making decisions and to help you remember what you need to know. Let them be there to offer comfort and to listen.



# Telling Others



## What To Say

You might be finding it hard to tell others about how your loved one died. But if you can share your feelings and thoughts with those close to you, you may give comfort to both yourself and them. If someone asks you for more than you can share, it is okay to say things like “I cannot talk about it yet” or “they’ve gone on their journey.”

Other people may also need to be told of his or her passing. This may include an employer, co-workers, school, landlord, or other friends outside the community. If you feel uncomfortable doing this, it is okay to ask someone else to make those phone calls for you.

## Talking To Children

Share with your children what has happened. Our children draw strength from us. If they are told by someone else, they may feel as if they are alone, and become frightened or anxious. Children can tell when your heart is sad or distressed, and may ask you why. It is okay to say things like “they were so sad and confused that they forgot they could get help.”

Show your children your feelings of sadness, helplessness or anger. They may be feeling the same emotions. Share with them so they do not feel responsible for what has happened. Comfort them by letting them know that someone will always be able to care for them.



“There are different ways of reaching your children...go about it with love in your heart. It is very important that your children see you have time for them, and that you are trying to speak to them from your heart.”



## Listen And Reassure

Your children may be confused and ask you questions like “didn't he love us?” or “where did she go?” You may not have all the answers but you can comfort them by letting them know you still love them and are always there to listen. Sometimes children may feel better talking with another child or another family member, and this is okay.



### **Share The Sacredness Of Life**

This may be the time to share the sacredness of the gift of life. An Elder may help with this process. Elders tell us that when we talk to our children about the sacredness of life, especially at a young age, it may help them to make good choices. Let them know there are other ways to deal with problems and that they can always ask you for help.

### **Seek Support**

If you feel you cannot cope with all the questions your children have, invite someone you trust to talk with them for you. In time, you will become stronger and be able to share with your children again.



Working  
Through  
The Grief



## Your Grief Is Unique

*Your grief and shock hurt more when your loved one suddenly passes. Our entire community suffers. You had no chance to say goodbye, and you may feel sad and angry at the same time or guilty. You may never know the answer to why but you can still honour your loved one's spirit and celebrate the times you shared.*

### Your Grief Is Unique

Every person will grieve in their own way. There is no right or wrong way to mourn. Grieving does not happen in neat orderly stages. It can be emotional, chaotic and long lasting. However there are some things that you can expect, or that you may already be experiencing.

### Numbness And Shock

When you first found out about your loved one's passing, most likely you felt numb as if you were in shock. One Aboriginal woman said she felt "heavy" and not ready to believe it really happened. Perhaps you feel as if you go through the motions of living but nothing seems real. It is your spirit helping you get to a place where you can cope with your loss in a good way. Over time, your numbness will fade.

■ ■ ■  
"Sometimes it takes time for events to catch up to what you  
are already aware of."  
■ ■ ■

### Loss And Disorganization

You may be feeling as if you are always disorganized or have trouble eating and sleeping. Sometimes you may feel like you are completely alone or angry with your loved one for leaving the way they did. Others have said they felt as if their loved one was still around, or as if the death never really happened. There may be times, or you may already have thought, that somehow you could have stopped him or her from leaving.



## Acceptance

As your heart begins to heal and accept, your feelings will start to change. This is part of the healing process. A spirit of hopefulness will begin to grow, and you can honour your loved one by remembering the good things and the life you shared with them. Honour them by sharing these good things with others.

## Grieving Takes Time

Grieving takes time and the amount of time needed is different for each person. If you feel “stuck” and not sure you can come to terms with your loss, it may help you to visit with someone close to you or someone you trust to share your feelings. Sometimes they can see things you cannot, and help you find your way.



“Call upon the grandparents, the Elders, the ancestors, to help us when we are the ones in pain.”



## When Children Grieve

Our children do not always show their feelings the same way we do. They may cry or feel sad for a little while, then go back to what they were doing. Sometimes they might “act out” their grief while playing. At other times children may behave in challenging ways and not listen. This behaviour can be overwhelming to parents or caregivers. It is okay to ask for help and assistance with child care.

You may think your child is not affected by your loved one's passing. But as they grow older, they may start to have feelings and questions they did not have when the death actually happened. For now, comfort them and assure them you are available any time they want to talk about it. If the pain is still too great for you, an Elder or another family or community member may help.



# What Helps Healing In The Long Term



## What Helps Healing In The Long Term

*Know that, with time, you will begin to heal and your pain will get smaller. You will find ways to cope and to live with your loss.*

Healing does not mean forgetting about your loved one. You do not dishonour his or her spirit when you begin to heal. Elders tell us to use ceremonies to honour the time he or she spent among family, friends and community. Use offerings and prayers, at gatherings, or any other time you need to talk about them.



*"We remember the person...there is lots of laughter because we celebrate their life. We celebrate what we hold in our hearts. We talk about the things they did when they were here. We tell stories about that person...we do not exclude them from ceremonies."*



## Keep Sharing

Sometimes many of us feel the need to talk about what happened, to share our feelings or to find out as much as we can. Others find comfort in dealing privately with the passing. Yet others who have gone through the same thing say they "talked their way through their grief."

You might feel uncomfortable talking openly about your loss. As you go through your healing, take comfort with your family, friends, and people you trust. Let people know they can help by simply listening while you talk. This may help you work through your grief and to let out any bad spirits you may feel.

When your heartache becomes too much, do not feel guilty about losing yourself in something else for a short time. Things like visiting or going to a gathering may help settle your spirit.



## **Cherish Your Memories**

Keep certain items that belonged to your loved one as symbols of strength or remembrance. Our Elders remind us to find the balance in all things. Hold these items close to you but try not to let yourself become obsessed with them.

Soothe yourself with “alone times” to remember your loved one. Just remembering the small things can sometimes give you the most comfort.



“We need silence, a time for reflection to think about the life lost. We celebrate the person’s life, and remember the good times.”



## **Do What Works For You**

Some families remember their loved one by leaving an empty chair at the dinner table, or by calling them by name in ceremony or prayer. Others talk with their loved one’s spirit simply to share what is going on in day to day life. You may choose to give something up, like cutting your hair. Whatever your personal beliefs are, traditional and spiritual faith may help you through.

Remember to do things that feel right for you, in your heart, and not just to please other people.

## **Later Reactions**

Months after your loved one’s passing, you may feel more alone than ever. People may think you no longer need their support. Be prepared to face these times when you are on your own. It is good to reach out and our Aboriginal community is a great source of strength. Try to keep your family, friends and Elders close.



### **Difficult Days**

You may find it harder to manage at certain times, such as your loved one's birthday, or during holidays and gatherings, or on the anniversary of their passing. You might even have those feelings you had in the beginning. Share with your family or friends, or go over in your mind how you will cope with these times.

### **Finding The Answers**

You will probably never know why. Many times, we try to figure out what may have been the cause. In most cases your loved one was in a lot of emotional pain for a long time. As you heal, you will learn to live with questions that may not be answered. An Elder offers these words "Try to live your regular routine in looking after yourself, like doing household chores, giving yourself personal care. I have life in me to keep going, getting some rest, spending time with nature, talking about how I feel..."



Seek out what gives you the most strength and comfort, and allow yourself the time to heal.

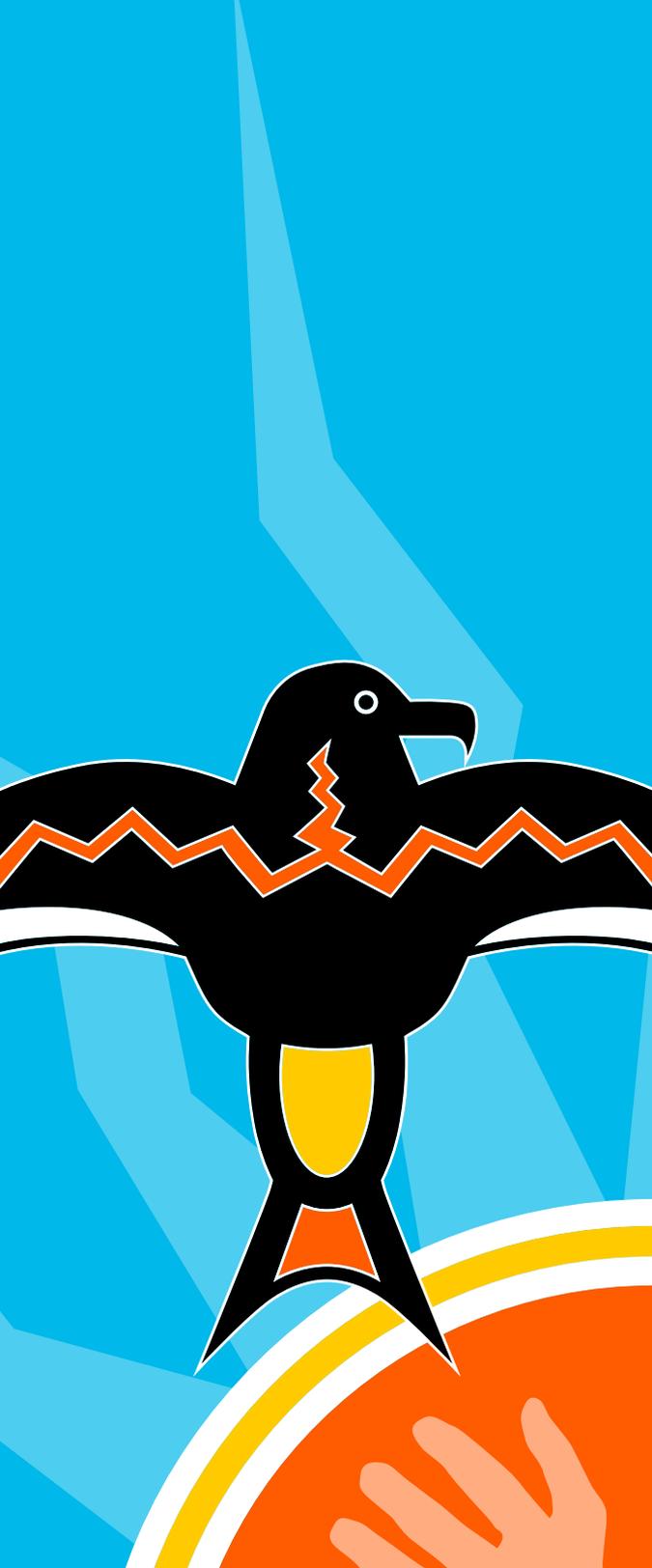


### **Talking Circles And Support Groups**

You may find it easier to talk to other people who have gone through the same loss as you. One Aboriginal woman explained "I understand because I have walked in those shoes."

If you live in a First Nations Community (reserve), call your health centre, healing lodge or crisis unit to find out if they have any talking or healing circles you could attend. Some people choose to go to a Sweat Lodge or other Ceremony to cope. If you live in the city, sometimes the local friendship centre or other gathering place has programs you can take part in.

If you are not comfortable with talking circles, or not ready to share in such a public way, you may ask a counsellor, clergy or health nurse to find out what might be available. You can also call the local health region for ideas.



Practical  
Matters



# Making Arrangements For A Funeral



*Saying goodbye to your loved one is never easy. We offer these words of support and advice from those who have gone through the same loss, to matters that are both practical and personal.*

## **Making Arrangements For A Funeral**

Each of our communities has its own traditions, customs and ceremonies. What is acceptable in one may not be in another. Some families may combine traditional Aboriginal beliefs and customs with Christian or other spiritual practices and faiths.

## **Wake Or Funeral Service**

You may decide, or have decided, to hold a wake and/or funeral service. Generally, community members gather at the family's home to remember, share, and support one another. If you live in the city, wakes or memorials are most often held at a local centre or gathering area.

You may choose to have or you had an Elder conduct a traditional ceremony and burial rather than a conventional funeral service. You may have held, or choose to hold a memorial instead of a funeral service. At a memorial, the body of your loved one is not present. How you say goodbye is decided by you and the family depending on your personal beliefs.

If you choose not to have a wake, memorial or funeral service, you may ask a funeral home to care for the body of your loved one.

If your loved one was a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, he or she may be given military honours in a military service. You will need to contact the Canadian Armed Forces to arrange this.

At the wake, funeral or memorial, it is acceptable to share with others how your loved one passed on. Celebrate the life of your loved one and talk about good memories. Some families have opened a notebook on a table so others may write down their memories.



*Allow yourself the time to grieve your loss and the relationship you shared.*





## Funeral Costs

Funeral costs can be difficult. If you are a Status Indian, some financial assistance may be available to you from your band or from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). Call your band manager or INAC (1 780-495-2773) for help with this.

If you are a Non-status, Métis or Inuit person, talk to your individual communities or organizations to see if they can help with costs.

If your loved one was on Social Assistance, and you are unable to cover expenses, you may be able to get some financial help from Alberta Family and Social Services (1 780-427-2734). If they had life insurance, their funeral and burial costs may be covered. Contact their life insurance company for help. Other sources include Canada Pension Plan (1-800-277-9914) or Veterans Affairs Canada (1-800-866-1240).

If you are unsure of how to make these arrangements, ask a family member, friend, Elder, band or council member for help. Another source of assistance or advice is the Office of the Public Trustee (a lawyer with the Alberta government). You will find the number in the blue pages of your phone book or call 310-0000 for more information on how to contact this person.



# Taking Care Of Legal And Financial Matters



## **Taking Care Of Legal And Financial Matters**

*Taking care of your loved one's legal and financial matters may be very hard for you at this time. Managing these things may help you take care of yourself, your children and other people in the future.*

If you are unsure about banking or legal affairs, let your family know or call your band office to see if they have legal counsel to help you. You also may be able to get assistance from the Alberta Law Line (1-866-845-3425) or if your loved one belonged to a First Nation's Community (reserve) you may also contact Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) (1-800-667-3355). There may be financial eligibility requirements.

If you are a Status Indian living in a First Nation's Community (reserve), some services and expenses may be covered by Indian Affairs. If you are Non-status, Métis, or Inuit, talk to your local organization or community to find out if they can help you work through legal or financial matters.

## **Taking Care Of Your Loved One's Assets Or Belongings**

Your loved one may have left a will saying how they want their assets to be given out. They may have let it be known who would be their "executor," that is the person who is responsible for making sure your loved one's wishes are carried out. The executor should be called as soon as possible.

## **If There Is A Will**

The will may have to be probated. Probating a will means that it is proven valid in a court of law. If the estate is small or if your loved one shared assets (held jointly) with a spouse, partner, or someone else, there may be no need for probate. Examples of assets that may be held jointly include bank accounts, houses, or cars. These assets may be transferred to the surviving spouse or partner. That person must also take on the financial responsibility of the assets.



### **If There Is A Handwritten Note**

Sometimes a signed, handwritten note written by your loved one may be used as a will. This can include suicide notes. Suicide notes may be challenged in court; on the grounds your loved one was not mentally well when it was written.

In Alberta, any will that does not provide enough for the surviving family can be challenged under the Family Relief Act. You will need to contact a family law centre or a lawyer, or you can call the Government of Alberta for more information.

### **If There Is No Will Or If Your Situation Is Complicated**

If there is no will, or one is not found, then your loved one has died 'intestate' and you may need advice from the Public Trustee to settle the estate.

If your situation is complicated (such as marital separation or common law relationship), you may need legal help to settle your loved one's estate.

If your loved one lived in a First Nation's Community (reserve), you can contact your local Indian and Northern Affairs Canada office for assistance.

If your loved one lived in the city and you are unable to call your band or cannot afford a lawyer, you may be able to get assistance from the Alberta Law Line (1 866-845-3425). There may be financial eligibility requirements.

### **Insurance**

If your loved one had any insurance (such as house, life, or car), you will have to let the insurance company(s) know of their passing. In Canada, life insurance policies generally must have been held for at least 24 months to be valid when the death was by suicide. If you find the insurance policy confusing, you may want to ask a lawyer or legal counsel to help you.



## Financial Matters

A number of financial matters need to be dealt with after any death. You may want to ask other family or close friends to help you deal with some of these.

### FIRST: Gather Documents

*To make things easier for you, collect all the documents of your loved one. You will have to give these to the executor, legal counsel or financial advisor to be able to settle the estate. Documents may include (remember, your loved may not have all of these):*

#### Personal Documents

- **Death Certificate—you MUST have the death certificate before you can cancel, transfer and apply for benefits and obligations**
- Birth certificate
- Indian Status Card
- Driver's license
- Marriage certificate
- Passport
- Personal will
- Social insurance number

#### Banking and Financial Documents

- Bank account numbers, passbooks, statements (chequing and savings)
- Bank and/or credit cards
- Any bank investments (RRSP, GICs, stocks/bonds)
- Lease and/or rental contracts (apartment, truck, appliances, furniture)
- Loan agreements (bank, finance companies, or personal loans)
- Any mortgage papers (CMHC, bank mortgage)
- Safety deposit box number

#### Health Documents

- Alberta Health Care Number
- Indian Status Card



## Property Documents

- Any land property
- Personal possessions (art work, jewellery)
- Vehicle registrations

## Other Documents

- Any child support or alimony payments
- Any insurance policies (life, medical, home, car, business, mortgage)
- Any pension or veterans information
- Previous tax returns
- Utility account numbers (phone, gas, water, electricity)

## SECOND: Cancel, Transfer And Apply For Benefits And Obligations

*After you have gathered all the documents, you will have to decide which services to cancel (phone, gas, water, electricity), or which ones to transfer into another name. Some services have regulations around cancelling and transferring. If you are unsure, ask a family member or friend to help you go through them:*

### Items To Cancel

- **Alberta Health Care** (call toll-free 310-0000)—you will need the Health Care number of your loved one, along with their name and address.
- **Alberta Blue Cross** (call 1-800-661-6995)—Alberta Health Care usually lets Alberta Blue Cross know of a death but you may contact them directly. You will need your loved one's health care number, the name and address of the executor of their will (if there was one), and the name and address of the person providing the information (yourself, family member or friend).
- **Indian and Northern Affairs Canada**, Status Card, Indian Registrations—(call toll-free 1-800-667-3355) for help.
- **Social Services** (income support or welfare cheques)—if your loved one lived in a First Nations Community (reserve), your band office may take care of these payments. If your loved one lived in the city and received provincial benefits, you will need to let the local office know of their passing.



## Items To Cancel (continued)

- **Alberta Senior's Benefit** (call toll-free 1-800-642-3853)—if your loved one received this benefit, you will need to provide their Alberta Health Care number and name.
- **Bank cards and credit cards** issued in the name of your loved one. You may need to provide a certified copy (not a photocopy) of the death certificate to do this.
- **Canada Pension Plan** (call toll-free 1-800-277-9914)—any CPP cheques your loved one received can be cancelled over the phone. You will need to provide their name, address and social insurance number. Their estate is entitled to the pension cheque for the month in which they passed away.
- **Employment Insurance or EI**  
(call toll-free 1-800-667-3355 or 1-800-206-7218).
- **Disability Benefits** (call toll-free 1-800-277-9914)—you will need to cancel any disability payments they received, both provincially (this includes AISH) and federally.
- **Insurance Policies**—you will have to notify any insurance companies with whom your loved one had policies (car, home, business, life). Also let their employer know in case your loved one had workplace insurance.
- **Leases/rentals**—you will need to cancel any lease or rental contracts that had been made in the name of your loved one or transfer them to another name (including cars, apartments).
- **Passport**—if your loved one had a Canadian passport, you need to return it to the nearest passport centre or mail it in (call toll-free 1-800-567-6868). You will have to include a copy of the death certificate or a letter stating why you are returning it.
- **Veterans Benefits** for Aboriginal Veterans (call toll-free 1-800-866-1240)—if your loved one was a veteran, you will need to let Veterans Affairs Canada know of their passing. Veterans Affairs may be able to help with the funeral and/or burial costs or provide continued pension and compensation benefits for up one year after your loved one's passing.



## Items To Transfer Into Someone Else's Name

- Any **joint** bank accounts, credit cards or investments—you can transfer any accounts that are in both your names or shared with another person. You will need to call the bank where your loved one had their account to get help.
- **Land titles** (call toll-free 310-0000)—if your loved one owned any property or land, this must be transferred to another person's name or they could eventually lose it. You may call Alberta Registries for help in doing this.
- **Any utility bills** (phone, gas, water and electricity)—if your household utility accounts were in your loved one's name, you will need to transfer them to yours or to another person's name. You will need to call each company separately to do this.
- **Vehicle Registration**—if your loved one had any vehicles registered in their name, ownership of these vehicles will need to be transferred. A registry office can help you do this.

**Items To Apply For**—If you or your loved one belonged to a First Nation's Community (reserve) contact INAC for more information.

- **Allowance for the Survivor** (call toll-free 1-800-277-9914)—this benefit is for the surviving husband or wife and is based on your income. You will need to show a marriage certificate but common-law relationships will be considered. Apply for this benefit as soon as possible.
- **Children's Benefit** (call toll-free 1-800-277-9914)—you may be able to get benefits for any children who are under the age of 18, or for children between 18 and 25 who are full-time students. If children are living with another caregiver (family member, guardian), and are under 18, that person should apply for this benefit for them. Any children between 18 and 25 living on their own can apply on their own.
- **CPP Lump Sum Death Benefit** (call toll-free 1-800-277-9914)—if your loved one paid into the Canada Pension Plan through their work (and you are the surviving spouse), you may be able to receive this payment. You will need to send in a copy of the death certificate, your own birth certificate, and social insurance number.



## Items To Apply For (continued)

- **CPP Survivor's Benefit** (call toll-free 1-800-277-9914)—if your loved one paid into CPP at their work (and you are their spouse), you may be able to receive this benefit. The actual amount will depend on your age and other factors. Benefits for any children you have may also be available.
- **Guaranteed Income Supplement**—if you are a spouse (husband or wife) over 65, you may be able to get this benefit.
- **Mortgage Life Insurance** (mortgage life insurance is not the same as mortgage insurance)—if your loved one had a mortgage, they may have had mortgage life insurance; this means their mortgage may be paid in full when they pass on. You will need to give a copy of their death certificate. Call the bank or company where they had their mortgage to see if they are covered.
- **Veterans Benefits** or Aboriginal Veterans (call toll-free 1-800-866-1240)—if your loved one was a war veteran or member of Canada's Armed Forces, you may be able to get benefits. Call Veterans Affairs for information.

## Other Financial And Legal Matters

Other financial matters you will need to take care of include loans and personal debts, income taxes, GST credit, monies owed to collection agencies and/or lawsuits.

### Loans And Personal Debt

- If your loved one had any loans to a bank or lending company, you must notify the bank or lending company of their passing.



## **Income Taxes And GST Credit—This is important; ask for help if you are unsure how to do this.**

- A final tax return for your loved one has to be filed with the government. If they passed away between January 1 and October 31, their final tax return is due by April 30 of the next year. If they passed away between November 1 and December 31, the final return is due six months after the death.

After you have filed their final taxes, you should get a “clearance certificate” from Canada Revenue Agency saying that any money your loved one may have owed to them is cleared up. If you do not get a certificate, Canada Revenue Agency may try to collect from you (if you are a spouse). You can call Canada Revenue Agency for help (1-800-959-8281).

## **Employer**

- Contact your loved one's employer to collect the final paycheque and to let them know where to send the T4 slip. If your loved one worked for the band, you may contact the Chief Financial Officer or finance department to take care of any final pay, benefits and/or T-4s.

## **Collection Agencies Or Lawsuits**

- Keep in mind that any collection agencies, alimony or child support, or lawsuits, may have a claim against your loved one's estate. This is why it is a good idea to get legal counsel or a lawyer to help you with financial matters.

## **Any Child Support Payments Or Alimony Payments**

- If your loved one was paying child support, the Maintenance Enforcement Program (MEP), Government of Alberta may try to collect from the estate.





Emergency  
Response  
And  
Investigation



# Emergency Response And Investigation



After any sudden or unexplained death, there are many procedures that must happen. You may remember, even years later, being upset or anxious about what was happening when your loved one passed. You may find it easier to deal with these memories if you have information on why and how these things were done.

## Emergency Response And Investigation

It is the Emergency Medical Services (EMS), the police or RCMP, and the fire department who would have responded to the emergency call for your loved one.

If you don't live in a First Nations Community (reserve), emergency personnel may have requested that a "victim assistance support team" be made available to help you. If you live in a First Nations Community (reserve), your community may have a "crisis response team" or "victim services" that may help you through this time.

## Emergency Medical Services

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) would have given emergency medical assistance to your loved one to try to save them. If something could have been done EMS would have transported them to a hospital for further medical care. If not, once EMS confirmed your loved one has passed away, the police or RCMP must call the Medical Examiner's Office.

## Police or RCMP

The job of the police (or RCMP) is to make sure everyone is safe and to investigate your loved one's death so that foul play (homicide) can be ruled out as a cause of death. Guided by Alberta's Fatality Inquires Act, they try to learn when, where and how your loved one died.

At the scene, if you or another family member wish to see the body, the police or RCMP may have allowed this, but only if they are certain of how your loved one passed. If they were unsure, the police or RCMP may have collected items/valuables or they may have taken pictures for the investigation. These are usually given to the Medical Examiner. The police or RCMP will also notify the immediate family.

## Fire Department

The Fire Department helps the Emergency Medical Services (EMS), police or RCMP in whatever area is needed.



## **Medical Examiner's Office**

With the help of police or RCMP, the Medical Examiner (ME) investigates all unexplained and sudden deaths and looks after the medical part of the investigation. All MEs are doctors. The investigation may include questions about the medical history of your loved one.

Only the ME can order and, if necessary, do an autopsy. An autopsy may be as simple as a basic examination. Your permission is not needed; however, if you have any concerns about an autopsy, tell them as soon as possible. The ME will explain everything that is involved. You may get a copy of this report.

It may help you to attend a ceremony or services to help you deal with this.

Only the Chief Medical Examiner's Office can sign and issue an official death certificate when the death is a suicide. You will need to get at least one of two certificates (below) to take care of your loved one's estate:

### **■ Certificate of Death**

This is an official government document accepted by most organizations as proof of death. It includes the name of the person who died, when and where the death occurred, where the person lived, gender, marital status, and age. It does not say how your loved one died. You may get this certificate from an Alberta Licensing and Registry Services office for a small fee. You may need several copies.

## **AND/OR**

### **■ Certificate of the Medical Examiner**

This is issued by the Medical Examiner's Office upon written request by yourself or other next of kin. It includes your loved one's official cause of death and a brief description of how it happened. Insurance companies usually want this type of certificate. You will need to pay a small fee.

The MEs office may return any items/valuables or suicide notes written by your loved one but you must make a written request for them. Notes will be returned only to the person addressed in the note. The police or RCMP will normally contact you to ask if you want any valuables returned. If not, they will be destroyed after a certain amount of time. Any items or notes not



claimed will be stored in the investigation reports at the Provincial Archives. To contact the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Calgary or Edmonton:

### **Calgary**

Office of the  
Chief Medical Examiner  
4070 Bowness Road NW  
Calgary, AB Canada T3B 3R7  
Tel: (403) 297-8123  
Fax: (403) 297-3429

### **Edmonton**

Office of the  
Chief Medical Examiner  
7007 116 Street NW  
Edmonton, AB Canada T6H 5R8  
Tel: (780) 427-4987  
Fax: (780) 422-1265

You may also contact the office nearest to where you live or visit their web site at [www.justice.gov.ab.ca/ocme/default.aspx](http://www.justice.gov.ab.ca/ocme/default.aspx) Your local police or RCMP will be able to help you find this information.

### **After The Investigation Is Completed**

If your loved one passed away at home, the family is responsible for cleaning the area. If you are unsure or have some concerns, you may call your health centre or local health authority for direction. Besides the physical cleanup, smudging, prayers and other ceremonies may help you cleanse and settle the spiritual and emotional spaces left.

If you feel you cannot do this task yourself, there are certified cleaning companies you can call. Talk with your health centre or health authority for information about this.

- If you live in a First Nations Community (reserve), your band may help cover costs. If not, the next of kin may be the one responsible for paying for this service.
- If you own your own home, your household insurance may cover this. Call your insurance provider to find out if there is coverage.
- If you rent your accommodation, the next of kin may be responsible for making sure the area is cleaned.



## Tissue and Organ Donations

You may not be comfortable with the thought of donating the organs of your loved one. Many Aboriginal people feel we must return to the Creator whole. However, you may find comfort in donating to help another person. This is a very personal decision, and only the legal next of kin will be able to make the decision. Talk with family members if you are uncertain of what to do.

Be aware that if your loved one has an organ donor card on them, the police or RCMP will let the Medical Examiner or hospital know. If you have concerns with organ or tissue donations being done, you may contact the hospital to discuss your options.

## Fatality Inquiry

If your loved one or family member was a ward of the courts or in police custody when they died, then a Fatality Inquiry must be done. A provincial court judge will conduct the inquiry to determine their identity, date, time and place of their passing. The inquiry will not assign legal responsibility for the death.

If you are unsure what a Fatality Inquiry is all about, you may ask the police or RCMP to explain the process.





Other  
Resources



## Other Resources

### Some Places You Might Go To Look For Help:

#### Crisis/Help Lines

Emergency	911
Information and Referral to Community and Social Services	211
Health Link Alberta	Toll Free 1-866-408 LINK (5465)
Alberta Mental Health Board Helpline	Toll Free 1-877-303-2642
Kids' Help Phone	Toll Free 1-800-668-6868
Residential School Survivors' Line	Toll Free 1-866-925-4419 (24 hr)
Native Youth Crisis Hotline	Toll Free 1-877-209-1266 (accepts collect calls from Canada and USA)

#### Organizations

Native Counselling Services of Alberta	Calgary: (403) 237-7850 Edmonton: (780) 451-4002
Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association	(780) 423-3138
National Association of Friendship Centres	Toll Free 1-877-563-4844
Centre for Suicide Prevention	www.suicideinfo.ca (403) 245-3900

#### Websites

##### **Anunniginiq Centre "Inuusiqaatsiarniq** - National Aboriginal Health Centre

The Anunniginiq Centre has compiled information on suicide rates in Inuit regions, causes of suicide, and places Inuit can call if they are seeking help. [www.naho.ca/inuit/english/suicide\\_prevention.php](http://www.naho.ca/inuit/english/suicide_prevention.php)

##### **Acting on What We Know: Preventing Youth Suicide in First Nations**

- First Nations Inuit Health, Health Canada.

This report picks up the dialogue on First Nations youth suicide by sounding out the depths of the problem from the various perspectives of the field of research in examining the role of government programs, community responses and individual choices. The Advisory Group has attempted to look at First Nations youth suicide through many different lenses, applying its best thinking in considering what concrete solutions will be most helpful to First Nations communities.

[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnih-spni/pubs/suicide/prev\\_youth-jeunes/index\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnih-spni/pubs/suicide/prev_youth-jeunes/index_e.html)  
OR [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnih-spni/index\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnih-spni/index_e.html)



**Indian and Northern Affairs Canada** – Contain links to many resources available to Aboriginal and First Nations people.

[www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/index\\_e.html](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/index_e.html)

**Native Counselling Services of Alberta**

NCSA is an Aboriginal-based agency focused on the healing and harmony of the entire community and provides a great number of programs and services committed to family wellness, addictions, parole, probation and prison liaison services, resource, media and research, residential correctional and healing centres, and development of community wellness.

[www.ncsa.ca](http://www.ncsa.ca)

**Information Centre on Aboriginal Health (ICAH)**

ICAH is a central database of Aboriginal health information on bibliographic and Web-based resources, programs and services, health careers, and scholarships and bursaries. It is a 'virtual' library that provides, wherever possible, links to information that is free on the Internet.

[www.icaah.ca](http://www.icaah.ca)

**Nechi Training, Research and Health Promotions Institute**

Nechi is an Aboriginal Movement committed to holistic healing and healthy addictions-free lifestyles. The web site contains information on the services provided.

[www.nechi.com](http://www.nechi.com)

**Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)**

Links to a number of RCMP resources and offices in Alberta.

[www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ab/index\\_e.htm](http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ab/index_e.htm)

**Turtle Island Native Network Healing and Wellness**

Includes a number of resources and links to other web sites related to Aboriginal suicide and suicide in general.

[www.turtleisland.org/healing/healing-suicide.htm](http://www.turtleisland.org/healing/healing-suicide.htm)



## BOOKS

Evans, Al. **Chee Chee: A Study of Aboriginal Suicide.** Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004.

- Benjamin Chee Chee was an Ojibway artist who killed himself just as he was beginning to get international success. He lived with anger and frustration for more than 30 years before committing suicide. Author Al Evans, noted suicidologist and former RCMP officer, explores Chee Chee's wild, reckless, creative life to reveal how the clash between Aboriginal and White society has affected the suicide rate of young Aboriginal men and women, now among the highest in the world.

Culleton, Beatrice. **In Search of April Raintree.** Pemmican Press, 1983.

- This story explores the underlying racism in the foster care system and in Canadian society, and how it affects those caught up in it. This book tells the story of Métis sisters, April and Cheryl Raintree, who are removed from their family, and are raised in several foster homes. It follows their lives leading to the eventual suicide of Cheryl.

Sanderson, Steve. **Darkness Calls.** Vancouver: Healthy Aboriginal Network, 2006.

- An age-old Cree figure is adapted to the 21st century as a superhero who fights teen suicide in this new comic book. Presented in a format youth are more inclined to read, *Darkness Calls* addresses the epidemic of Aboriginal youth suicide.

Nishnawbe-Aski Nation Youth Forum on Suicide. **"Horizons of Hope: An Empowering Journey."** Nishnawbe-Aski Nation, Thunder Bay ON, 1996.



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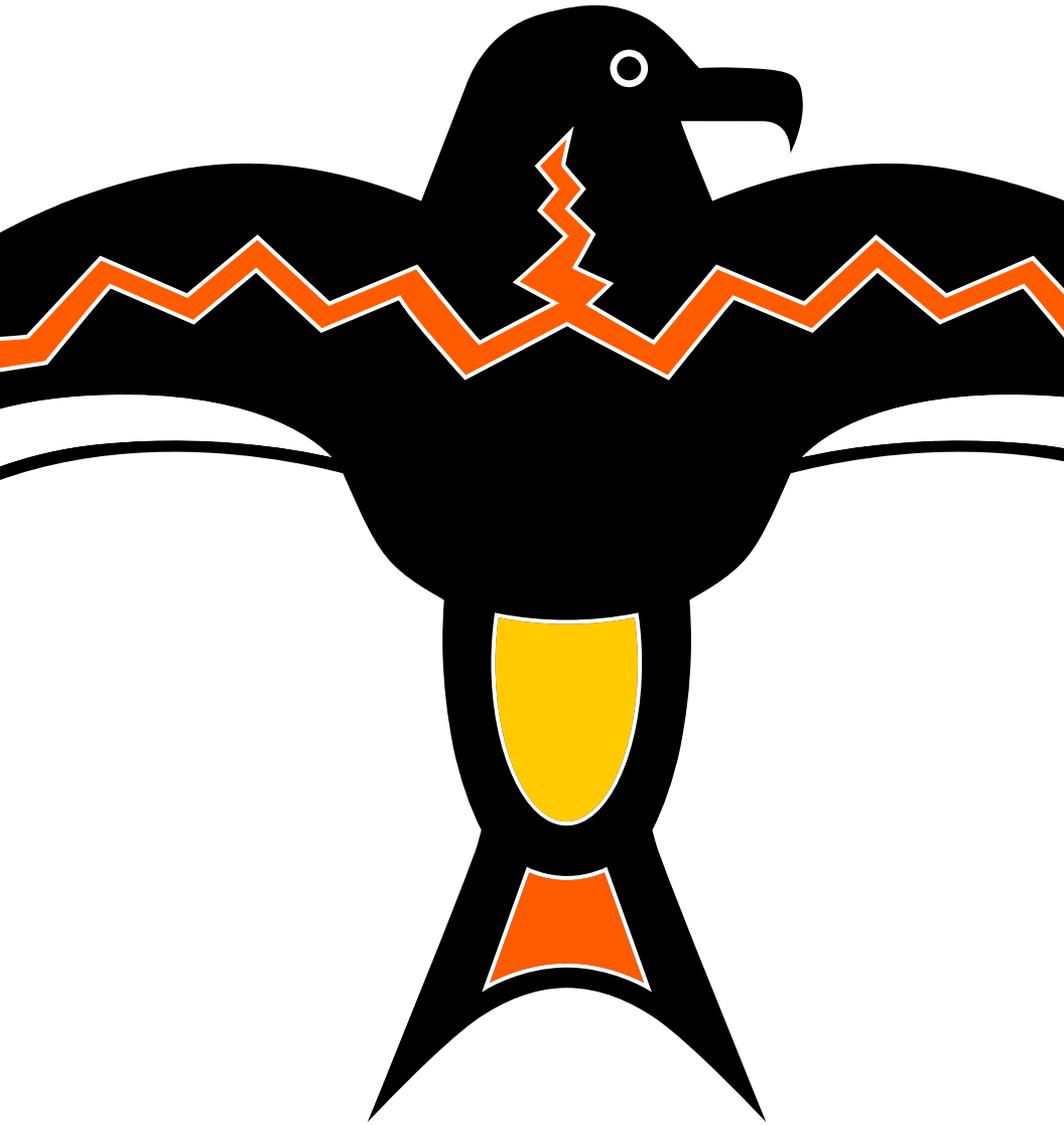
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Jodin, Nadine and Jennifer White. Aboriginal Youth: A Manual of Promising Suicide Prevention Strategies. Canadian Mental Health Association, Centre for Suicide Prevention: 2003.

National Aboriginal Health Organization. [www.naho.ca](http://www.naho.ca)

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Choosing Life: Special Report on Suicide Among Aboriginal People. Government of Canada, 1995.

Brighter Futures Initiative, Health Canada MSB. "Discussion Notes from the [Aboriginal] Suicide Prevention Workshop: Framework for Living." London, 1995.





## More Words Of Hope From Our Elders



- “We are all created equally, there is good in every human being. Pray for the good things.”
- “We need prayers to release our grief. The prayers for their spirit are to be received by the Creator. It is not an end. We pray that they are surrounded by life, that they go through light.”
- “Call upon the grandparents, the Elders, the ancestors, to help us when we are the ones in pain.”
- “Our Indian language is encouraging. Use your language to ease the pain of your loss.”
- “Pray for the spirit of your loved one. Visit each other. Just listen.”
- “Humour is a big part of healing and life. We do practical jokes and tell funny stories to overcome things that we are going through. Laughter is important to help the family to heal.”
- “Our past journeys will help us into the future.”



# Prayer

## Prayer For Strtength, Healing & Hope

Oh, Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the winds  
Whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me.  
I come before you, one of your many children.  
I am weak and small.  
I need your strength and wisdom.

May I walk in beauty  
Make my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset.  
Make my hands respect the things you have made  
And my ears sharp to your voice.  
Make me wise, so I may learn the things you have taught your children.

The lessons you have written in every leaf and rock.  
Make me strong—!  
Not to be superior to my brothers, but to fight my greatest enemy—myself.

Make me ever ready to come to you with straight eyes,  
So that when life fades as the fading sunset,  
May my spirit come to you without shame.

*Translated by Chief Yellow Lark, 1887*  
*Retrieved from*  
*[www.firstpeople.us/html/A-Sioux-Prayer.html](http://www.firstpeople.us/html/A-Sioux-Prayer.html)*  
*on August 30, 2006*



**By using Healing Our Spirit: Surviving After the Suicide of a Loved One** (herein referred to as "Booklet") you acknowledge and agree that any information contained in or provided through the Booklet is provided on an "as is" basis. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, we do not provide any express or implied warranties on the accuracy of the information. By using this Booklet you acknowledge that there may be errors, and that such errors, once known, will only be corrected through later editions of the Booklet.

By using this Booklet you acknowledge that you understand and agree that the information contained in or provided through this Booklet is intended for general understanding and education only, and that this Booklet is not intended to be and is not a substitute for professional medical or legal advice. Always seek the advice of your physician, psychiatrist, psychologist, nurse or other qualified health care provider before you undergo any treatment or for answers to any questions you may have regarding any medical condition that may result from your grieving after losing a loved one to suicide.

Nothing contained in this Booklet is intended to be or is to be used for medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Nothing contained in this Booklet is intended to be or is to be used for legal advice.



We dedicate *Healing Your Spirit: Surviving After the Suicide of a Loved One* to Aboriginal people everywhere who have suffered through many losses to suicide. We honour all those who shared their experiences, and offer our respect to everyone who helped make this booklet a reality. Your wisdom, courage and insights can be found throughout these pages.



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