

# A GUIDE FOR AFL CLUBS IMPACTED BY SUICIDE

2023



## Acknowledgment of Country:

The AFL acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians of this land. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and value their continuous connection to their country, waterways, kinship and community. We are committed to making a positive contribution to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.



# AFL'S COMMITMENT TO MENTAL HEALTH

In December 2020, the AFL released its Industry Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, with the vision to ensure all people within the industry have the skills and resources to be mentally fit and ready to thrive and support each other. The Strategy ensures mental health and wellbeing is everyone's responsibility.

The response to suicide is guided by these principles, ensuring that it is everyone's responsibility to support each other in the time of crisis. The impact of suicide is immediate; therefore, the AFL and Club response must be too.

Read more about the AFL Industry Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy <https://www.afl.com.au/mental-health-wellbeing/strategy>. Or read the Strategy [here](#)

**Trigger Warning:** Some people may find parts of this content confronting or distressing. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that information relating to Indigenous suicide and self-harm is included. Please carefully consider your needs when reading the following information about suicide and self-harm. If this material raises concerns for you contact Lifeline on **13 11 14**, your trusted health professional or see our navigator tools [click here](#) for other ways you can seek help





“Suicide does not discriminate, it can present in any industry and its impacts are felt far and wide. The AFL community is close knit, and when suicide of a member occurs, we come together and grieve collectively - but process and experience the stages of grief uniquely. With this in mind, the AFL Suicide Post-vention for Clubs is a comprehensive and critically important document to help Clubs navigate the immediate and longer term impacts of suicide, helping to inform trauma-informed responses that are appropriate across stakeholders.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve the devastation of suicide - but this important document provides a blueprint of actions to ensure families, teammates and Club stakeholders are cared for during what is an incredibly difficult time.”

**Alicia Eva**

AFLW Player GWS, AFL Industry Mental Health and Wellbeing Steering Committee member



“At Lifeline Australia, we believe that the whole community can play a role in helping to prevent suicide. Which is why we are so pleased to be partnering with the AFL. By weaving positive mental health initiatives and awareness programs into everything they do, they are effectively acknowledging that good mental health is as essential as good physical health for their athletes, staff and the broader community.

This Guide is a fantastic practical resource which outlines the benefits of creating a culture of help seeking behaviour and explains how working together in the community can make a tangible difference in reducing distress and suicidal behaviour”.

**Colin Seery**

CEO Lifeline Australia



“Suicide is the leading cause of death for young people in Australia. The loss of any life to suicide is a tragedy and an event that can have far-reaching impacts on a community.

We know that good postvention is vital to safeguarding the mental health of communities in the time following a suicide.

That’s why headspace is dedicated to supporting communities in the days, weeks, months and years that follow a suicide event.

With more than two million young Australians engaged in community sport every week, organisations like the AFL are another powerful part of the support network for communities in tough times.

This guide demonstrates the commitment shared by both headspace and the AFL to prevent and respond to youth mental health issues, including suicide, in our community”.

**Jason Trethowan**

Chief Executive Officer at headspace



“Navigating a best practice response during an emotionally tough time can further increase the distress of Club People. Therefore, having access to an informed, practical, guided response to a suicide is an important resource for Community, AFL and AFLW Clubs.”

**Emma Harris**

Sport and Exercise Psychologist  
AFLW Mental Health Practice Lead

# FOREWORD



Australian Football League Clubs are the heartbeat of many communities around Australia. When one of their members dies by suicide or is impacted by suicide, the whole Club suffers with them. This guide has come from the devastating necessity that has faced many football Clubs around Australia. They have been impacted by suicide and may need help in knowing how to respond. This guide is not intended to replace the role of professional assistance or spiritual guidance to support people with their immense grief when they lose a family member, friend, partner, or team mate to suicide. Though everyone is different, support during acute and ongoing grief can be provided by accredited grief counsellors, psychologists, spiritual leaders and family and friends. Instead, this guide offers steps to help Clubs respond in a compassionate and considered way in the aftermath of the suicide of one of their members. The information in this guide is intended to help Clubs to contribute to the support networks their members and families need after the loss of a member to suicide. It may also help Clubs respond in an informed way that will continue to contribute to the prevention of further suicides.

Similar to workplaces and schools, community sporting Clubs play a very important role in developing a mentally healthy and capable society. Footy is an effective physical, emotional, cultural, and social connector for many people who may never come into contact with formal mental health services. Therefore, supporting communities within the settings that connect them is part of a considered suicide prevention framework. The AFL Industry Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy states that Mental Health is everyone's responsibility. We all play a part in maintaining and managing our own mental health and we all have a role to play in helping others to seek help. The earlier the better. If you, or someone you know, needs help, find a service to help you [here](#). It's never too late.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Hall".

**Dr Kate Hall**

DPsychCLIN FAPS  
AFL Head of Mental  
Health and Wellbeing

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# INTRODUCTION

The research tells us that suicide is a complex public health issue, as there is no one reason why someone may attempt suicide.

Some factors such as a person's age, gender, sexual orientation, non-dominant social group status, socio economic status and cultural background may contribute to risk. Other contributors may include experiencing adversity in childhood (e.g., neglect, abuse, bullying) or having a family history of suicide or mental illness. Stressful life events, such as physical and mental health, racism and discrimination, unemployment, financial stress, or relationships problems can also contribute to risk.

What we do know, is that someone who has had a previous suicide attempt, is at greater risk. The historical challenges someone has faced cumulate over time and increase vulnerability. A recent stressful event in combination with this accumulated vulnerability, can increase the likelihood of suicide. (Black Dog Institute, 2020).

Australia has a comprehensive Suicide Prevention Policy to address the risk factors for suicide. If you are interested in learning how you can be part of suicide prevention, read <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/mental-health-and-suicide-prevention/what-were-doing-about-suicide-prevention>

## How to use this guide

This guide is for all Australian Football Clubs, whether they are professional, high-performance, or community. The impact of suicide is immediate and ongoing, and requires a calm, compassionate response to ensure the safety of others. Clubs may struggle to cope with the news of suicide, and find challenges in seeking the right resources to manage the experience post suicide.

This resource aims to help Clubs and Club leaders provide guidance and support to their members and minimize the risks of suicide exposure in the Club community. It outlines clear and practical steps in supporting its community, as well as information that can be extracted and adapted to fit the needs of the circumstance. This includes response plans, checklists, and examples of communication and support resources.

The timeframes for response act as a guide only and should be considered flexible in response to the suicide.

## WHAT IS IN THIS GUIDE?

This guide is divided into four parts. Each part steps the Club through recommended responses which are summarised in the Post Suicide Response Checklist.



### PART ONE: DEVELOPING A PLAN

Provides information on suicide and the events following that should be considered in managing the Club community. Part One outlines the response plan, response checklist, and any risk factors associated with a suicide or critical incident.

### PART TWO: THE RESPONSE

Outlines the response to the suicide or critical incident, including of what is recommended for the Club to consider managing at each stage. Part two takes into consideration containment and the Club's response to ensuring safety and wellbeing of members. The response of Clubs who have not been directly impacted by suicide but are still affected by a community suicide is also included in this part.

### THE TOOLKIT

Includes templates and resources that might be useful for Clubs when navigating post suicide interventions.

### PART THREE: OTHER CONSIDER- ATIONS

Outlines other information and considerations that should be reviewed after a suicide, such as media, communication, and acknowledgments. How to navigate different Club environments including AFL/AFLW Clubs, in and out of season considerations, cultural impact, individual and age differences, as well as managing suicide attempts.

The **Suicide Response Plan Checklist** on page 13 and can be used as a checklist when working through the response to an incident. The Checklist is not a “one-size” approach to responding to a death by suicide, and should be used as alongside any guidance by Mental Health Services or consultants.

It is recommended that the Checklist be used alongside any guidance by Mental Health Services and consultants involved in the response. Please consider also that some of the actions outlined in the checklist may not fit the Clubs specific situations, however the complete toolkit may allow for adaptations and flexibility in response, providing different perspectives. For example, guidance is provided on how a Club responds to suicide attempts, and how a Club responds to a suicide of a member from another Club.



## KEY DEFINITIONS

### Critical Incident

Any extraordinary and unexpected circumstances that may cause a traumatic reaction. Examples include, disasters, death (actual and threatened), vehicle accidents, and assaults.

For the AFL Critical Incident Response Guide for Community Clubs link [here](#).

### Suicide

The act of intentionally causing one's own death.

### Suicide Attempt

An act carried out by a person with the intention of ending their life.

### Self-Harm

When someone deliberately injures themselves, also referred to as self-injury, and is generally considered non-suicidal in intent.

### Suicide Contagion

The process whereby a suicide or suicidal act within an area increases the likelihood that others will attempt or die by suicide. Suicide contagion can lead to a suicide cluster, where a number of connected suicides occur following an initial death. Young people tend to identify strongly with the actions of their peers, and therefore, appear to be more vulnerable to suicide contagion than older people.

### Suicide Exposure

A person may be exposed to suicide directly (someone known to them), indirectly (through reports via media channels), or by being exposed to the event (finding the body for example).

### Suicide Ideation

The presence of any thoughts, plans, images and preoccupations a person may have about ending their own life. Suicidal thoughts can range from a vague thought about 'not wanting to be around', to specific thoughts and plans about ending their life. Individuals showing signs of suicide ideation need to be monitored, supported, and referred for a suicide risk assessment as soon as possible.

### Suicide Prevention

A collection of efforts to reduce the risk of suicide.

### Suicide Postvention

An intervention conducted after a suicide, largely taking the form of support for the bereaved family, friends, peers, and community. Strategies focus on evidence-informed activities that may reduce the impact in the short- and mid-term. They may also reduce further harm or risk and create opportunities to focus on longer-term recovery for individuals and groups.

### Response Team

A dedicated team within the football Club who manage the Club's response to suicide.

### Mental Health Professional

A person who has specific qualifications at a graduate or postgraduate level (accredited by the relevant authority to practice) in one of the following disciplines: nursing (mental health), psychology (registered psychologist), occupational therapy, social work (accredited in mental health), or medicine (GPs, Psychiatrists, and trainee psychiatrists). These people have specific training in psychopathology, assessment, and treatments for people with diagnosed mental health difficulties.

### Club Member

An individual who is associated with the functioning of the Club, including players, coaches, administration, and volunteers.

### Social Media

Websites that facilitate communication and networking between people. These include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok.

References: Deakin University 2019; Universities Australia 2021.

PART 1

# DEVELOPING A PLAN



## DEVELOPING A RESPONSE PLAN

Responding to a suicide or critical incident requires immediate action in a very complex situation. Therefore it is best to have a prepared Response Plan to call upon. Preparing a Critical Incident Response Plan within the Club may assist in the immediate actions and coordination when a suicide occurs. The Club Critical Incident Response Plan outlines:

1. **The Response Team**
2. **The Mental Health Services to assist in the response**
3. **Local contacts for counselling and referral**
4. **Key contact numbers and emails.**

It is recommended that the Response Plan is reviewed and amended at the beginning of each season at committee meetings, to allow for any update to be made.

## EXPOSURE TO SUICIDE

A best practice response to suicide should be guided by the general principle of minimising exposure to the community of information about the suicide. Minimising unnecessary exposure to information relating to the suicide, reduces a community's vulnerability for distress and collective trauma. Clubs should ensure that their communication about and response to a suicide is guided by this principle.

Publicly acknowledging the cause of death as suicide is a decision the family must make. However, avoiding all acknowledgment of the cause of death may increase stigma or discourage people from seeking help at critical times. Young people in particular may be susceptible to overidentifying with their peers or people they admire who have died by suicide. Overidentifying with someone else to an excessive degree can result in a young person losing perspective or objectivity and may create susceptibility to suicide contagion.

Suicide contagion refers to a situation where a suicide or suicidal act within a community increases the likelihood that others will attempt or die by suicide. Suicide contagion is a rare response to suicide, but young people seem to be more vulnerable to contagion than older people.

### When communicating about a suicide death, do include messages that:

- are clear and accurate
- are provided immediately
- do not include unnecessary details
- are age and culturally appropriate
- have strong calls to action for help-seeking
- have information to connect anyone to help
- list crisis support numbers.

### When communicating about a suicide death, do not include messages that:

- romanticise suicide
- make suicide seem reasonable, desirable, a way to solve problems, or relieve suffering
- present suicide as a positive outcome for the individual
- glamorise the circumstances around the death
- present over simplified reasons for suicide
- encourage young people to over-identify with the individual.

For more on Suicide exposure, via headspace, click <https://www.headspace.org.au/assets/School-Support/Suicide-contagion-web.pdf>



# THE RESPONSE PLAN

To assist in coordinating a planned response to any potential critical incident or suicide within the Club, a Critical Incident Response Plan is recommended to be developed and regularly updated by the Club's committee or operations team. 'The Response Plan' outlines the Response Team, any tasks, roles, and responsibilities assigned to that team if/when a death by suicide occurs. The Response Plan helps the Response Team to move into action, as soon as possible, because they are aware of what is expected of them.

The Critical Incident Response Plan aligns with the AFL's Critical Incident Policy and Guide for Community Clubs. See [The response on page 12](#).

**The Response Plan Template is found on page 30.**

## Assembling a Response Team

A Response Team is put in place to lead the Club's response in the case of suicide or critical incident. Responding to suicide should not fall on one individual, but instead bring together a team to work through the [The Suicide Response Plan Checklist on page 13](#).

However, in the initial stages, the Club President, Football Manager, or equivalent may have to take on the responsibility of starting the response process. The duties of the Response Team may vary in relation to the circumstance, including the support of the Club community, liaising with family members, ensuring appropriate management of information and resources, as well as linking support to those affected by the suicide. It is encouraged that the members of any potential Response Teams are confirmed at the beginning of the season, as a part of program planning. It is also encouraged that the team have links to existing community services with experience coordinating community responses and resources, e.g., Lifeline, headspace etc

## Who should be included in the Response Team?

Many people are involved in Clubs at both a paid and volunteer capacity. It is important to only include appropriate members in the Response Team to ensure best practice in supporting the Club, while remaining respectful to those directly affected by the suicide. Keeping the response team to 5-6 people

ensures an even load of responsibility, with effective lines of communication, people management, and resource sharing. It is recommended that a leader is nominated to assist in leadership of the Response Team.

The Response Team should be made up of appropriately skilled individuals who are able to work effectively under pressure, while possessing a high level of empathy and respect for the circumstance. Skills may include experience with critical incident management, a strong understanding of and experience with wellbeing, leadership and a knowledge of the football community. These may be individuals in specific roles within the Club, or members/volunteers that possess unique and relevant skill sets to be available throughout a critical incident. Due to the unpredictable nature of a critical incident, not all members of the planned Response Team may be appropriate. Members should have an opportunity to opt out if they are impacted by the death, or feel they are unable to undertake responsibilities.

**The Response Team should include the following members:**

- Senior manager or leader of the Club  
(e.g., Football Operations Manager, Community Club President, Club Coach)
- Senior staff member with the responsibility of player welfare  
(e.g., Player Development Manager, allied health staff, team chaplain)
- A mental health practitioner  
(e.g., Club psychologist, or external community support agency member).

**Other members of the Response Team may be made up of senior staff or volunteers associated with the team, such as:**

- Committee member
- Senior player or assistant coach
- Social media/Communications Lead
- Relevant cultural or Indigenous contact at the Club.

Community Clubs may not have access to psychologists or welfare managers, and therefore should look to engage in support from local community organisations, such as headspace or Lifeline. Community mental health organisations can provide resources to Clubs with counselling and support networks. There may be some individuals who are not suited to the Response Team, due to their relationship with the deceased, and this may require flexibility in forming the Response Team at the time of the incident.

**Example of Response Team for Community Club**

- Club President (recommended leader)
- Vice President
- Club Junior Coordinator
- Club Welfare Coordinator or external services representative
- Board Member
- Club volunteer with appropriate experience.

**Example of Response Team for High Performance Club/Academy**

- Football Operations Manager/High Performance Manager (recommended leader)
- Regional Manager
- Player Welfare Coordinator
- Media and Communications Lead
- Head of State Organisation
- AFL Mental Health and Wellbeing Team Member and/or contracted Club/state psychologist.

## WHAT DOES THE RESPONSE TEAM DO?

Following a suicide or critical incident, the Response Team have several responsibilities that contribute to the care and wellbeing of the Club community. The Response Team will ensure that resources and responsibilities are attended to efficiently and that consistent and accurate information is collated and shared with the Club community. Those involved in the Response Team may take on responsibilities such as:

- Liaising with family and confirming with them parameters for discussing the loss of life
- Preparing information to be shared to the community
- Identifying vulnerable individuals who may be at risk due to the suicide or critical incident
- Working with mental health professionals and organisations to provide guidance in terms of support and counselling
- Collating information to ensure that messaging is consistent and accurate
- Managing messaging and announcements, providing media contacts and information
- Linking in with AFL at both state and national levels
- Documentation of all actions and notification.



## EXAMPLE OF THE ROLES THAT THE RESPONSE TEAM PLAY

### Leadership Role:

- confirm the event/death
- activate the Response Team
- contact family and communicate sympathy on behalf of the Club
- gain consent from the family to acknowledge death by suicide and commit to ongoing involvement in all Club communications and responses (out of respect for the family's wishes)
- clarify facts
- make initial contact with or critical incident response services
- make contact with AFL Community/State League Manager and other Clubs
- monitor Suicide Response Checklist
- facilitate any appropriate gatherings or memorials
- review Plan.

### Communication Role:

- draft communication and key messages and set up a central point for sharing information
- prepare public statement
- liaise with relevant mental health agencies
- communicate information from Leadership to response team
- communicate changes to training and competition
- organise team/Club meetings to organise communications
- document actions and lead review.

### Club Member Liaison Role:

- outline services available to the Club
- put in place referral procedures
- address any immediate needs of Club members
- work between Club members and Leadership/Communication Role
- point of contact for enquiries e.g. other Clubs, Club members
- advocate ongoing support to vulnerable people
- support those monitoring groups most affected.

### Family Liaison Role :

- coordinate contact with the family (following first contact of leader)
- consult with family around involvement of Club in funeral services
- assist with all communication to any member affected by critical incident
- provide ongoing support to bereaved family
- involve as appropriate family in any Club memorials
- offer to link family with mental health services.

### Other Responsibilities:

- assisting in coordination of gatherings and/or memorials
- assisting other response roles to ensure burnout does not occur
- ongoing contact with players.

**Adapted from:** Athletics Ireland Critical Incident Response Guide

### Summary

- Assemble the Response Team as soon as suicide has been reported and/or confirmed
- Response Team should consist of 5-6 people, with specific skill sets in empathy, compassion and communication
- Response Team to work through the Post Suicide Response Checklist.



## LOCAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Establishing a relationship with a local mental health service can be of great assistance when a suicide occurs. Mental health services can provide additional guidance and support for the Club. In some cases, it may be appropriate to include a mental health service representative to the Response Team. Access to mental health professionals may differ depending on the service, but ultimately services provided to the Club may include:

- immediate counselling to support those affected by the suicide;
- assistance in identifying any at-risk or vulnerable individuals;
- providing information on grief and support;
- assistance in referrals for those requiring additional support;
- assistance in managing social media, communication, and messaging.

There are several local mental health services that provide support in the time of a crisis and/or suicide. As a part of the Response Plan, look to outline what service will be made available to the Club. For recommendations on what to look for in building relationships with mental health services, and services available, go to [Where to find help on page 34](#).

## CLUB MENTAL HEALTH REPRESENTATIVE

Clubs do not always have access to mental health professionals within their community. A Club may look to put in place a Mental Health Representative, who has completed a formal training certificate in Mental Health First Aid. The representative has the appropriate training to assist in a mental health crisis, providing emotional support and practical help, until professional treatment or intervention can occur.

The role of the Mental Health Representative is not to intervene or provide sole support to those involved, but to guide and facilitate help from mental health professionals, as well as provide guidance to action in a mental health crisis. The Mental Health Representative is not a mental health professional. They are the link between needing and finding help.

The representative should be someone within the Club that is willing and able to take on the training, as well as be called upon in the case of a mental health concern. They will understand mental health and wellbeing, especially the signs of mental ill health. The representative should also have confidence in being able to step in and support a person in distress and provide guidance to the support needed for the situation.



# THE RESPONSE

## THE SUICIDE RESPONSE PLAN CHECKLIST

The following checklist outlines the key actions for a Club to take in response to a death by suicide. It provides a quick call to action, with further information about the response found in the complete Club Postvention Toolkit.

The time frames outlined are a guide only, and some actions may need to be called upon at different times, depending on the management of exposure.

### Response Planning (optional, but recommended)

- Complete a Critical Incident/Suicide Response Plan
- Connect and build a relationship with a local Mental Health Service
- Build a Response Team of 5-6 people willing to be called to action when a suicide (or critical incident) presents itself
- Allocate a Mental Health Representative to complete Mental Health First Aid training
- Update Response Kit

### Response: First 24 Hours

- If the incident happened away from the Club, confirm the death, and find out as many facts as possible with family (or police). Investigate any rumours immediately
- If the incident happened at the Club, ensure the safety of the players, coaches, and volunteers, including administering first aid, calling emergency services (000). Ensure the scene is secure and any witnesses are moved to an area of support
- Ensure those affected are not left alone. Contact families if necessary
- Contact Response Team
- Contact the bereaved family
- Check suitability of team – have they been directly affected by the incident?

**Response: First 24 Hours continued**

- Identify anyone in the Response Team who have been impacted and need to change responsibilities or opt out of managing the response
- Contact relevant Mental Health Services
- Inform AFL, State Organisation and/or State League or Community Football Manager
- Ask how to refer to the death when informing the football community. If the family agree, use the term 'suicide'\*
- Response Team to meet
- Refer to Response Plan and AFL Postvention Guidelines
- Modify the plan as required for the circumstances
- Inform Coaches, Team Manager, and Committee/Board Members. Contact prior to training. Do not talk about or describe method of suicide
- Set up a meeting place at the Club
- Identify any 'at risk' individuals, in preparation for mental health services
- Inform the Club in their teams, via a script. Do not describe the method of suicide. Note any absent players/coaches and any who may be very distressed
- Individuals may already be aware of the situation due to family connections or social media, etc. It is important to still stick to a script in informing teams
- Set date and time for Club to come together at meeting place. Ask mental health services representative to be present (if available)
- It may also be appropriate to contact players and coaches individually to inform them before training occurs
- Inform the Club Community. Include information relating to help services, any group meeting opportunities. Do not describe the method of suicide
- Inform the greater football community, via Club presidents. Inform them of any group meetings for community to attend
- Ensure coaches have support within the Club and access to external professional advice where required.

**Ongoing Support Long Term**

- Continue to monitor players, coaches, and team staff
- Promote help seeking behaviours
- Work with family as to level of support and community needed moving forward
- Keep community informed
- Plan for anniversaries, birthdays and any other significant events
- Implement the recommendations of critical review
- Continue to document all activities and actions
- Considerations for start/end of season
- Consider mental health education and initiatives for the Club

\*NB: The family themselves may be unclear as to the underlying cause of death. e.g. Death by motor vehicle accident.



# THE FIRST 24 HOURS

## ACTIONS

- Gain confirmation and information about the incident
- Assemble Response team
- Act to reduce suicide exposure
- Inform State Organisation etc.

Information about a suicide may come from multiple sources; directly from the parents and/or family, via other Club members, a friend or relative, through social media posts or online messaging. For the Club to respond to a suicide, **it is important that factual information is gathered**, to ensure rumours are not ignored, and relevant information assists the support of the Club and its people.

At this initial stage, the acknowledgement of exposure is important. This refers to the exposure to, or news of a suicide increasing the likelihood of a vulnerable person to consider suicide as an option. Activating the Response Plan will assist in managing contagion.

## IF A SUICIDE REPORT IS CONFIRMED BY THE FAMILY

If a suicide is confirmed directly by the family, express sympathy, and compassion. Be mindful of your own reaction to the incident and remember that people process information and grief differently. Seek the family's feelings about informing the football community of the incident straight away, as you

wish to lower the impact of misinformation and provide others with the opportunity to manage their grief. Advise them that any response the Club has, will be guided by the AFL Suicide Response Guide. If the family are not ready to inform the Club, seek advice on how they wish to proceed.

Seek permission to name the person who has died, when ready to do so, as well as confirm how they would like to refer to the incident. Consider whether suicide will be named or described in another way until the family are ready to disclose. These are important ethical and legal considerations, as well as a sign of respect for the family of have experienced the loss of a loved one. **The family need to give permission as to how relevant information is shared with the football community, as some families may not wish for the death to be acknowledged as a suicide.**

Until the family has confirmed how they want to refer to the death, questions from the community can be answered in ways such as:

- A person has died suddenly or unexpectedly.
- The family have chosen to keep cause of death private at this stage.

- We are respecting the wishes of the family, and therefore ask that the football community does also.
- Other terms used might be “sad and tragic death” or “sudden death”.

Liaising with the family should be the responsibility of one member of the Response Team. There should be some consideration as to who is best to undertake this responsibility.

Access to the family and the capacity and willingness to communicate during this time may vary. Influential factors may include the by the family's involvement with the Club, any other family members playing/coaching at the Club, and any cultural or religious practices. It may be relevant that an extended family member speaks to the Response Team on behalf of the family.

The Toolkit outlines some information and questions that can be discussed with the family, and can be found on [page 29](#).

## IF A SUICIDE IS REPORTED THROUGH OTHER CHANNELS

Do not ignore the reports from other members within the Club, or any suicide posts, notes, emails, or letters. Follow up is needed in both circumstances. If a report is made, contact the individual's family (if appropriate) to confirm the death and establish any facts that may be relevant to the Club and its people.

If a Club member is supposed to be located at the Club, contact family immediately. If the family are unaware of the individual's whereabouts, call the police. If information is determined to be incorrect, then provide accurate information to contain and dispel any rumours.

## ENSURE SAFETY OF CLUB MEMBERS

If the incident has occurred at the Club, ensure the safety of other members of the community:

- Administer first aid where necessary and call emergency services (000)
- Move witnesses (if any) to a safe location, ensuring that they remain supported and supervised by someone – Do not leave them alone!
- Contact any family members and inform them of the situation
- Work with police and emergency services regarding statements and actions
- Isolate the location of the suicide and limit access to the site to ensure that the areas are not disturbed. Police will examine the space, and therefore things should be left to protect those around them
- Wait for Police/Emergency Services to provide further direction.



### TIP

**Pushing too hard for details at this time may cause potential challenges in the relationship with the family. Remember that they are grieving. Look to gain the facts needed to manage the information going out to the Clubs, acknowledge any further support that may be needed, and allow the family to direct the Club's involvement.**



## INFORM THE RESPONSE TEAM

Once a suicide has been confirmed, the Club's Response Team should be informed, to assist in the response. Remembering that the confirmation could come from different avenues, the Club President, or Football Operations Manager (equivalent) should contact members of the Response Team. Confirm a time for the Response Team to meet and coordinate responsibilities, as allocated on the Response Plan. If getting the Team together becomes problematic, suggest a video call rather than in person.

There may be some individuals on the Response Team that may not be appropriate in assisting due to their relationship with the deceased. Allow Response Team Members to opt out if they are uncomfortable or compromised in their role, this includes the Response Leader. Be mindful that everyone may be affected by the suicide differently. Remind the Response Team of the importance of confidentiality at this stage, and who is to be directly informed about the death. It is important for the Club to have a number of people trained in response, to allow for those affected by the death.

## INFORM THE AFL, STATE ORGANISATION, AND/OR STATE LEAGUE OR COMMUNITY MANAGER

Informing the governing body of the League can lead to further support offered to those working in the Response Team, along with guidance in informing other Clubs that might be associated with the deceased. Seek support where needed by the appropriate governing body, this could be in the way of media and communication, linking in with the AFL Mental Health and Wellbeing Team, or guidance to Mental Health Services. Information on how the State and Community Managers can support Club's response to suicide can be found in **Role of AFL State and/or Community Manager on page 39**.

**NB:** If a Club is within the AFL and AFLW, the AFL Players Association should also be informed to activate its Wellbeing Support Services to current and past players. For considerations in relation to **AFL and AFLW Clubs on page 54**.

## CONTACT MENTAL HEALTH AGENCY/ SERVICE

If a Club does not have access to mental health professionals internally, it is recommended that they reach out to a local mental health agency or service, that can provide resources and support to the football community. It is essential that the mental health agency or service can provide personnel within the first week, if not immediately. Having someone available at the Club and someone for the Response Team to work with will assist in responding and supporting the Club's people. The Response Plan encourages Clubs to identify and build a relationship with a local agency, suggestions for local agencies can be found in the **Response Plan on page 30**.



### TIP

**Coordinating a response to a suicide can be tiring, and at times stressful. Take the time to consider your own wellbeing and mental health as you navigate the actions and decisions that are involved in the Response Team. Share the load with others in the team, through briefing and debriefing with them. Look for signs of distress within the Response Team, and allow people to opt out, or take some time for themselves throughout the response.**



## ACTIONS

- Confirm responsibilities of Response Team
- Allow people to meet and be together
- Inform Club members with accurate and factual information
- Access to Mental Health Services.

## RESPONSE TEAM TO MEET

Meeting within the first 24 hours may not always be possible. The Response Team Leader should look to inform response team of information about the suicide that is relevant, provide role clarification for each member, and time of meetings and potential gatherings. Getting together quickly might be done face to face or can be activated via video calls. The aim of the meeting looks to clarify roles previously outlined on the Response Plan and inform the Team of any relevant or sensitive information gained from the family.

**Note:** It may not always be possible to hold a meeting before members of the community start to hear about the death of a Club member, due to word of mouth and/or social media posts. If this happens the Response Leader should first gain accurate information prior to holding a meeting. If there is speculation of a suicide, it is appropriate to acknowledge this and talk about suicide in general. However, it is the family that decides how they wish to disclose the cause of death, and therefore this information can be withheld until the family is consulted.

## KEEP COMMITTEE/ BOARD MEMBERS/ STAFF WELL INFORMED (COMMUNITY CLUB)

The Leader of the Response Team should keep board members and team staff involved in any updates, including facts about the situation and how the death will be/is being spoken about. If the family do not yet want to refer to the death as a suicide, this must be clearly communicated to those supporting players and teams. The board/committee may also receive updates on the Response Plan as it stands at that moment, focusing on any changes to responsibilities or actions, to support those coordinating the response.

The Club's response is to prevent any further harm to members of the Club, by identifying people at risk and managing the Club's response to suicide. Those in committee/board roles within the Club can be updated on the response but need to be aware that the Response Team take on the responsibility of leading the support for the Club.

Boundaries and role clarity are important to ensure there is no misinformation. The committee/board may play a role in promoting help seeking behaviour and observing/monitoring people of concern.

## INFORMING COACHES

A briefing for coaches and team managers should occur before the players are officially informed. The purpose should be to inform coaches of any relevant information regarding the suicide and those affected. Information given should be enough detail to enable coaches and team managers to contain rumours and support their squads. Avoiding the method of suicide is important in this process. There may be some coaches who are directly affected by the suicide and may need extra support. The step of informing team members may then fall on another individual in the Club, so not to distress the coach any further.

For more information on how to communicate information, click <https://mindframe.org.au/suicide/communicating-about-suicide/mindframe-guidelines>



## TIP

Sharing information with others must be accurate. In environments that have close communities, such as football Clubs, information can sometimes be shared more freely, and therefore it is important to reduce the impact of misinformed gossip or reporting of events.

### Updates to coaches and team managers may include:

- Introduction to the Response Team, which might include identifying Response Team members for coaches and managers to contact for information and questions.
- Information regarding the suicide (provided via a script and adjusted to reflect family's requests).
- Share the family's wishes about how this is communicated.
- Clubs' role, impact of exposure, and importance that suicide is not glamourised nor a topic that avoided.
- Advise that coaches and managers share any information with Response Team.
- Explanation of coming week:
  - training schedule
  - identify an available space to come together
  - monitor people within the squad (including unexplained absence from training to be reported and followed up)
  - access to mental health services
  - manage communication.
- Briefing on the concept of suicide contagion.
- Briefing on how to identify those who are distressed and may be at risk.

Ensure that you brief any coaches or team managers who are unable to make the meeting. Again, consider the impact that the death has on coaches and team managers. It may be appropriate to inform any staff or volunteers in small groups or individually rather than all together. You may also like to compile a list of any staff or volunteers that may have close contact with the deceased and assign a Response Team Member to check in. The Response team are responsible for monitoring the wellbeing of coaches and volunteers within the Club community.

### SET UP A MEETING PLACE FOR THE CLUB

Football Clubs survive through the closeness of community, so providing a space to come together where members can express their grief, gain information, respond, and be further monitored is an important component of response. Initially this space can be a place to meet that allows people to be briefed and have an opportunity to be together. Mental health services may also provide a representative that can be available to Club members at this space. Over the initial week, this may be a meeting place for people to come together, when they wish to not be alone, or meet prior to training or games. The space will only be available within the working hours of the Club, where there are Response Team members available.

The room should be small-medium sized, private, yet easy to access, and ideally be away from the high traffic of people involved at the Club. Ensure appropriate resources such as tissues, water, chairs, pens and paper are available, to support the reflective process. A sign in sheet may be available to assist mental health services to monitor if anyone needs any additional support. Information about support services can also be placed in this room for people to review and/or take home with them.

The Response Team can look to engage in wellbeing services at this space. If possible, there may be a separate space available where members can meet with a support worker from a mental health agency. Individuals or teams from other Clubs, school communities etc. may look to congregate at the Club as a way of paying their respects, grieving, and/or receiving updates on the information being provided by the family.

## INFORMING THE COMMUNITY

Be aware that information about the suicide may have already reached some members of the community, through word of mouth or direct conversations with family and/or friends of the deceased. The Club has a responsibility in providing the community consistent and accurate information about the death of a member, along with the support that is provided to the Club Community. Choose a member of the Response Team to deliver the message to teams within the squad unless the coach is willing to read the script.

Scripts allow for the Response Team and coaches to navigate their way through disclosing a difficult situation. They allow for accuracy and consistency in information being shared to the wider football community and help to clear up any misinformation being discussed. The script should be guided by the family's requests on disclosing the cause of death. Be clear on the terms to be used in the script. For examples of different scripts and emails that can be used to inform the Club community, see [page 35](#).

### The Script

**Ensure that the script used to inform Club members includes:**

- Clear and accurate information
- Acknowledgement that the situation will be distressing for the family, friends and the football community
- Information about the support within the Club, including the mental health services.
- Statements of supporting each other, and reaching out to those around them if they suspect that someone is struggling, or they have concerns
- Mention of the normal grief reaction, and the importance of self-care and self-management strategies during this time
- Statement about rumours being potentially hurtful towards the family of the deceased, along with the responsible use of social media.

### IF INCIDENT HAS OCCURRED ON A TRAINING NIGHT:

Provide coaches with a script that they can follow in talking about the suicide with their team – remembering that suicide can affect multiple squads, and that the statement provides consistency of message. Different scripts may be needed for different squads within the Club, depending on age, and potential risk, however messages remain the same.

Encourage coaches to invite parents along to training/session, especially any underage teams who may be directly affected.

Confirmation from family must be gained in allowing the community to be informed, along with how the death is referred to. Do not provide details of the method of suicide. The statement should also emphasise the need to lookout for each other at this time.

Once the team has been informed of the suicide, allow for them to process the information, and for questions to be asked. Only answer basic questions, directing the more complex ones to support services. Allow for players to decide whether they wish to participate in the training session or take time to be together. Training may be adapted to a lighter session, followed by an opportunity to come together to talk and reflect on the individual. Coaches should make note of any other members absent from training to inform separately if need be. Note any people who appeared very distressed to be followed up with by a member of the Response Team.

### INFORMING CLUB MEMBERS VIA EMAIL

As football is seasonal, there may not always be an opportunity to inform the Club and its people about a suicide. There may also be challenges in relation to getting the information out to people within the community away from training. For example, informing parents and families of those who are teammates with the deceased. Providing the Club with accurate information

as soon as possible (if not immediately) helps to widen the support for the squad directly affected by the suicide. It also gives confidence in the Club's response to the tragic incident.

Informing the Club in the initial disclosure should be done via email, and not through any social media channels. Messaging to Club members should be consistent, informing of the death. Availability of space to meet, when an informal time to meet has been organised, and any information that is to be provided to the wider community. **When informing the community via email, it is recommended that it is done so through an attached letter, informing those of the incident.** An attachment can provide warning to those receiving the email, alerting them of sad news needing to be shared. People are therefore forewarned and may opt to open the attachment when appropriate. It may be appropriate to contact some Club members directly to inform them of the death to help manage the impact it may have had on them.

Ask coaches of all teams to consider any vulnerable players/ members or anyone who might be of concern in terms of grief, for example, who may need to be contacted individually, or who might need extra monitoring. The message to the Club community should also reinforce the role of parents, family, partners of those at the Club, in supporting people away from the Club. **Page 57** of the Toolkit provides examples of messaging via email.

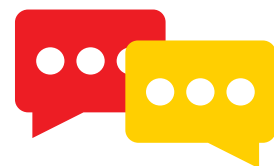
#### The information to the wider Club community should include:

- The same clear and accurate messaging that would be/has been provided to the teams in person
- The name and contact details of the Response Team member who they can contact, with any questions or concerns
- Details on how to support their Club community
- A list of resources available to the members to support
- A statement of intention for the Club's routine to remain normal as possible but include any upcoming events such as training that may be altered or cancelled (i.e., training)
- What they should do if they are worried about someone
- Information about the meeting space at the Club
- Common reactions to suicide and death
- Identify resources available to them.

In the initial statement, you may also like to include, the family's wishes in terms of privacy and/or support. For more information on how the Club can support the family at this time, see [page 27](#).

## LIAISING WITH OTHER SQUADS, CLUBS ETC.

In some circumstances, the Response Team may have to liaise with other Clubs within the league. This may include updating them on the death of a person within the Club and key information that has been confirmed by the family. Consent to share information to the wider football Clubs should be discussed with the family, to ensure accurate information is being distributed. Offering the space at the Club for others in the league may also provide an opportunity for people to share their grief and come together for support.



# THE FIRST WEEK

## ACTIONS

- Restore the Club to regular training and commitments, with flexibility to support those returning
- Monitor Club members, encourage help seeking behaviours
- Plan involvement in funeral – if applicable.

## CONTINUE WITH REGULAR TRAINING AND COMPETITION

A key part of the Club's response to a suicide, is to return back to its regular routine and schedule, while supporting those who are grieving. Continue to schedule training sessions and games, looking to return to normal after about 3 days. Individuals' grieving processes will vary but having the structure and regular routine can be a major support for people. The space that has been made available to meet will slowly reduce as training continues. Make it known to the community when this space will be stopped completely, and then encourage external engagement with counselling services for those who require more support.

### Recommendations for return:

- Continue to monitor behaviours and interactions.
- Encourage looking out for others, and help seeking behaviours to become part of the language around the Club – checking in, watching out.
- Mental Health Representative to act as a liaison with squads within the Club, to encourage help seeking behaviours.

## LIAISE WITH THE FAMILY

The first week in particular is likely to be a bewildering time for the family, but sensitive, emotional and hard times are likely to extend far longer of course. There should be 1-2 people from the Response Team that officially liaises with the family throughout this time, even though there will be several people reaching out to them to express their condolences and offer support. The role is to understand the best wishes of the family, and how people within the Club can support and respect them at this time.

How the Club interacts with the family can be influenced by the family's relationship with the Club, the cultural and religious practices regarding the death and suicide, level of support the family has away from the Club, and whether there are any other family members at the Club. The Club may or may not be the first point of call for the family. Some families may be connected to the Club in different ways, through playing, volunteering, etc, however, others may have smaller connections which can influence the Clubs engagement.

Early liaison from the Club allows for condolences on behalf of the Club to be shared, along with the offering of support and guidance through the Response Plans. It may also be relevant that the family be alerted of

any potential media coverage (depending on the league and local media outlets). A discussion may also be had in determining the Club's representation and wishes at the funeral, as well as the support for other family members at the Club (e.g., sibling playing in another team).

If it is difficult to speak directly to the family, look to connect with extended family, that may be liaising with them on their behalf. Connect them to the mental health services if it is appropriate to do so. Gain insight into whether there is anything that is needed and can be provided by the Club's community. Refer to [Supporting the Bereaved Family on page 37](#) to allow Club members to reach out to family in an appropriate way.

## INVOLVEMENT IN THE FUNERAL

Following discussion with the family, it is important to consider and plan how the Club will be involved with the funeral. Consult with the family to gauge their wishes of attendance and participation by the Club and then inform the Club community. Consider the support to those who may have a role in the proceedings, such as a guard of honour, eulogies, etc. For more information on how you might be able to support the funeral, see [Memorials and Acknowledgements on page 55](#).

# CLUB COMMUNITY SUPPORT

## ENCOURAGE REGULAR STAFF/COACH CONVERSATION/EMAIL

Update coaches within the Club on any information that is relevant. Encourage coaches to identify any players of concern, or other potential risks (see fact sheets on **Assessing who is at risk on page 42** for more information about risk). Discuss with the committee/board any Club events that may need to be adjusted – fundraisers, pub nights, functions. If these activities are to go ahead, consider any recognition or a statement that may be included to acknowledge the individual's death. Feedback on players and coach's capacity to train or compete in upcoming games may also need to be gained and discussed.

Coaches and volunteers should be provided with information on grief and how to offer support. Providing information on how to manage a safe discussion about suicide and what signs to watch out for if they suspect someone is at risk is also very important. Provide the opportunity for coaches and any other staff to be briefed and/or debriefed, in areas such as:

- Reviewing any training or competition challenges.
- Sharing experiences, expressing concerns or asking questions.
- Checking in with coaches to see how they are coping/managing situations.
- Providing any further information regarding the suicide and funeral arrangements.
- Plan for next training.
- Communicate the importance of self-care and lead by example.

## MONITORING CLUB MEMBERS

It is recommended that the monitoring of any Club members is done alongside a mental health agency. The Club, Mental Health Representative and its Response Team should not handle this alone. Looking out for each other within the community is important. Interventions are guided by mental health professionals, therefore keeping an eye out, checking in with others, and encouraging them to seek help is recommended.

**It is not the Response Team's role to be the psychologist or mental health professional, it is their role to connect them or encourage them to connect with any support that may be needed.** Risk assessments should not be done by the Response Team or coaches but be conducted by trained mental health professionals. To assist in this process, you may be able to assist by identifying people of risk, for example:

- Siblings of the deceased
- Those close to the deceased
- Those with a history of suicide attempts (if known)
- Those with a poor mental health history (if known)
- Those known to be struggling with other trauma related events (deaths, accidents, family breakdown etc)
- Anyone in a severe state of distress.

It might also be appropriate to monitor and reach out to those who may be profoundly affected, such as:

- Friends, boyfriends/girlfriends/partners of the deceased
- Friends and teammates in communication with the individual before the event

- Those expressing guilt about messages, or communication that they were given by the individual, but did not share or follow through with
- Anyone who has had a negative interaction with the deceased
- Anyone else of concern.

Everyone will experience grief differently. Some may not be ready to seek support, however being aware of those within the community who are experiencing grief encouraging help seeking behaviours, and checking in with one another will be important steps in the Club's response. For information on assessing risk, see **Assessing who is at risk on page 42**.

**NB:** Some information about Club Members may not be well known to the Response Team and/or those within the community, therefore it is important to continue to promote help seeking behaviours and ongoing check in points.

### Considerations for monitoring wellbeing:

- Split the team into groups and assign staff to check welfare regularly
- Acknowledge those who are new to the group and didn't know the deceased. Working with them to make sure they are compassionate, but not isolated by others grief
- Support the team to feel safe, so that information is shared to someone, and Response Team or Mental Health Services can step in or be recommended
- You do not have to be a psychologist to facilitate reaching out for professional help. Help seeking behaviours should be encouraged and modelled.
- Develop response and support plans for identified groups and individuals.

**TIP**

**Only mental health professionals should assess a person for suicide risk. Showing care and support for the community is encouraged, however, referring them to help is much more effective than taking on the responsibility of intervention/assessment.**

## DEVELOP RESPONSE AND SUPPORT PLANS FOR IDENTIFIED GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

In the process of keeping an eye on members of the group, it might be appropriate to touch base with family members of those concerned and discuss any observations or information with them. Encourage people to seek help, using Club resources or external mental health agencies, or recommend that they talk to their GP. There may also be a conversation with coaches around supporting players or staff members to help ease them back into the regular routine of training and competing. Some people may not wish to express their distress to others, and therefore discretion should be considered when adjusting the environment to support them.

## MONITOR STAFF AT THE CLUB

It is essential that staff and volunteer's wellbeing is monitored. Encourage them to put their mental health first and encourage respite and time away if needed. Small communities, like football Clubs, see close relationships throughout, and therefore some people may be affected in different ways. It is important that people also feel supported and cared for.

Everyone experiences things differently, especially when affected by suicide. Regular meetings and opportunities for debriefing should be available, but not overdone. Encourage services available to them. Provide information about the Club's activities moving forward and direct coaches to inform the nominated Response Team Member with the name of anyone they are concerned

about, or any concerns they might have. Provide them with any resources or information that may be helpful in supporting them in their roles.

## KEEP CLUB COMMUNITY INFORMED

During this time of grieving, the wider community will experience a range of different emotions, such as shock and sadness, along with expressing concern on how they can support those around them. Keeping the community up to date with information provided by the family helps to support the response of the great community. Areas of updated could include:

- Funeral arrangements and attendance expectations/ involvement.
- Changes to trainings and competitions (if any).
- Availability of resources and support networks/referrals.
- Any other information relevant to the community.

It might be appropriate to organise a community meeting to distribute information and provide an opportunity to ask questions and express any concerns, as well as seek support. This meeting differs to the initial meeting, where people come together to grieve. It is recommended that the meeting has a clear agenda and is chaired carefully, to allow information to be shared, and for any areas of concern to be addressed.

## CLUBROOM/ CHANGEROOM: PROTECTING THE DECEASED BELONGINGS

Protecting the belongings of the individual is an important and respectful gesture for the grieving family. It may also be critical for

police investigations into the death. If members take/distribute the individuals belongings, it may cause distress to the family, and compromise the work of police.

Those close to the individual may look for a keepsake, or a way of remembering the individual and naively take items or belongings associated to the deceased. If things are removed or taken, it may cause greater stress to those close to the individual. Therefore, it is important that belongings are kept together. Items may include playing jumpers, items from Club locker, awards or medals with the individuals name on them, etc. By bringing things together, may help protect the family, so they are not required to visit the Club until they are prepared to.

**An empty locker in the change rooms can be a distressing symbol to those close to the individual. It may be appropriate to forewarn that the locker will be emptied, and when it will happen. There may also be ways to acknowledge the deceased, for example, leaving the playing jumper in the locker/change rooms.**

## DOCUMENTATION

The Response Team should continue to document any actions they undertake, or support/suggestions made to those within the community. Documentation can be used to inform any mental health agency working with the Club, along with any further challenges or situations that may arise in the response to the suicide. Assigning a member of the Response Team to this responsibility allows for actions to be monitored, and information to be accessible if needed by other members of the Response Team, family or police.

# THE FIRST MONTH



## ACTIONS

- Continue to check in with the family
- Continue to check in with coaches and support staff
- Review the Response
- Consider mental health sessions.

## CONTINUE TO CHECK IN WITH COACHING STAFF AND PLAYERS ON WELLBEING

The welfare of the Club's people is crucial throughout this time. Continue to seek guidance from mental health agencies on the type of support that can be provided to people in the Club. Look to identify any warning signs or triggers of people within the Club that may require extra assistance. Not everyone will reach out for support, and not everyone will follow through with seeking help, pushing people too hard to seek help may cause some further distress.

## CONSIDER ANY UPCOMING EVENTS

Season functions and fundraisers are usually a part of the Clubs social calendar. Following a suicide in the community, the committee/board may consider any upcoming events and how they may be influenced by the death of a Club member. Awards, team photos, higher honours and representation may need management, as the Club Members achievements should be acknowledged. There may be concern associated with sensationalising the suicide, however it is recommended that the Club liaise often with the family, to ensure appropriate and respectful actions are taken. Any acknowledgement needs to consider not glamorising the act of suicide, and caution should be taken with any comments and celebration of life.

## CONSIDER A MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SESSION:

It might be appropriate to provide the Club with a group session that focuses on mental health and wellbeing of its members. This should be done in conjunction with the Mental Health Service, or a qualified provider. Attendance at the session can be optional, and age appropriate for the target audience. Areas of interest may include:

- understanding grief and loss
- ways to support people at this time
- ongoing wellbeing and self-care
- qualified, evidence based mental health services are recommended.

More information about what to look for in a mental health services can be found [here](#).



# LONG TERM SUPPORT

At this stage of the response, members within the Club community might start to settle back into a regular routine. Coaches and support staff can play a key role in reinforcing the different responses that people might experience, that Club members are allowed to take their time to remember the deceased and grieve accordingly. Individuals will move through different stages of grief at different times and it is important to educate and support each other through this process. If individuals appear to be struggling, they should be referred to seek further support with mental health professionals or the appropriate support service.

These events may occur at any time throughout the year and it is important to recognise that support processes are in place whether the Club is in or out of season. Considerations should be made for the long-term support of the Club community. It is hoped that any members considered at-risk have been identified, and adequate support has been offered to them.

## Start of Season

If the suicide has occurred during the off season, leading into the new season may present some challenges. The loss of a significant member of the squad may trigger strong emotions and it may be difficult to navigate how to acknowledge that individual's passing. Communicating with the family is crucial at this stage of the response to ensure appropriate and respectful acknowledgment

of the individual. Education about appropriate help-seeking actions may also be provided to the group. For more information, see **Memorials and Acknowledgements on page 55**.

## Planning Anniversaries

The anniversary of a death, or remembrance of a significant event of the life of the deceased can take family, fellow players, and friends back to the initial experience of mourning. Preparing for these times is important, by creating awareness of potential support networks. Club members may look to acknowledge these anniversaries in some way. It is recommended that these events are to be conducted in small groups, rather than a large memorial.

People will be affected in different ways by the death of someone in the community and working through the stages of grief is unique to every individual. Navigating what is appropriate, respectful, and compassionate can be discussed in conjunction with liaising with the family. Be aware, that people will acknowledge and appreciate anniversaries in different ways, and therefore family consultation is crucial. For more information about anniversaries and memorials, see Part Three: Considerations.

## End of Season

Off season may be a challenging time for some members, as the regular contact with the football community is put on hold, and everyone takes a break. It is recommended that any members who may be at-risk in the off-season are identified, and appropriate support is put in place as needed. Clarifying and identifying the Club's role in the off season is important in making sure that people feel connected and have a social outlet that supports their wellbeing.

## Keeping the community informed

Finding compassion, while not wanting to continually comment on the passing of one of its members can be difficult to navigate. It is important to keep the community informed of any potential events or publications that may provoke emotional responses as time moves forward.

Another area of careful consideration is the knowledge and proceedings of any police processes, inquests and legal proceedings, as they have the potential to increase stress and emotion. The Club should be aware of these proceedings and the potential effects on some members.

## CRITICAL INCIDENT REVIEW. RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

A critical incident review should have been completed within a month, as the Club returns to a regular routine or schedule. The review should take place after the response has begun, to ensure reflection on practice and action, and to ensure the implementation of learnings. The review should be addressed at any committee/board meeting, to ensure that areas are discussed and plans to implement any changes are put in place.

### The review should include:

- The opportunity for people to contribute their views on how the Club managed the response.
- Possible suggestions on how things may be improved if a suicide was to occur again within the community.
- Any considerations that were beneficial or overlooked in the process of response.
- A review of the mental health culture of the Club.

This may include reviewing the initial response plan, making any adjustments to the plan, as well as providing opportunity for the Response Team to be amended. It is also important to acknowledge the positive work done by those in the response, as well as check in with their level of coping and need for support.

Feedback can be gained from the Response Team, the Club Committee, or extended to other members, staff or volunteers, taking into consideration that some may be still feeling the effects of grief.

*NB: Consider when this review will take place, as it may not be appropriate to take place within this time frame. Vulnerabilities of the community, and the response to a tragic event may see this review take place at a different time.*



# TOOLKIT



# RESPONSE PLAN

**The Response Plan assists in acknowledging the incident, supporting those in the community, and returning the Club to a normal schedule as soon as possible.**

Critical incidents and suicide are unexpected and require a quick, organised response to support those affected. To help minimise the effects of a critical incident or suicide in the Club community, it is important to be prepared with a coordinated response to the event.

## IMPORTANT CONTACT NUMBERS



**Police/Ambulance/Fire..... 000**  
**Lifeline..... 131 144**  
**Suicide Call Back Service ..... 1300 659 467**  
**Beyond Blue Support Service..... 1300 22 46 36**

## THE RESPONSE TEAM

1.

Identify 5-6 people within the Club who are willing to share the responsibility in leading a response to a critical incident or suicide.

2.

The team is made up of appropriately skilled individuals who can work effectively under pressure, while possessing a high level of empathy and respect for the circumstance.

### Roles include:

- Leadership
- Communication
- Club Member Liaison
- Family Liaison
- Other.

3.

Postvention collaboration between a football Club and a mental health professional service is greatly enhanced by an existing relationship.

- a. Consider contacting local services for co-development of a postvention plan.

## INITIAL RESPONSE PLAN ACTION

1.

Find out the facts. Confirm the suicide with the family and seek guidance about how to refer to the death. Always seek permission from the family before referring to the death as suicide.

2.

Access the Club's Suicide Response Plan and The AFL Post Suicide Response Guide.

3.

Contact the Emergency Response Team for a meeting and contact state manager or community football manager (or equivalent).

4.

Enact the first 24 hours of Club Response Guide.



**RESPONSE TEAM (ROLE)**

**LEADERSHIP**

Name: ..... Contact number: .....

Email: .....

**COMMUNICATION**

Name: ..... Contact number: .....

Email: .....

**CLUB MEMBER LIAISON**

Name: ..... Contact number: .....

Email: .....

**FAMILY LIAISON**

Name: ..... Contact number: .....

Email: .....

**OTHER**

Name: ..... Contact number: .....

Email: .....

**OTHER**

Name: ..... Contact number: .....

Email: .....

**LOCAL headspace OR MENTAL HEALTH AGENCY**

.....

.....

.....

**RESOURCE KIT**

- Up to date training schedule, season fixture and any events for the year
- Up to date list of Club members
- Phone numbers of all Response Team Members
- Phone numbers of all Club coaches
- Contact details of external mental health professionals or services

## EXAMPLE OF RESPONSE TEAM ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Leadership Roles	Communication Role	Family Liaison Role
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Confirm the event/death</li> <li>○ Activate the Response Team</li> <li>○ Express sympathy to family</li> <li>○ Clarify facts</li> <li>○ Make initial contact with mental health agencies</li> <li>○ Make contact with AFL Community/State League Manager and other Clubs</li> <li>○ Monitor Suicide Response Checklist</li> <li>○ Facilitate any appropriate gatherings or memorials</li> <li>○ Review Plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Prepare scripts and information sharing</li> <li>○ Prepare public statement</li> <li>○ Liaise with relevant mental health agencies</li> <li>○ Communicate information from Leadership to response team</li> <li>○ Communicate changes to training and competition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Coordinate contact with the families (following first contact of leader)</li> <li>○ Consult with family around involvement of Club in funeral services</li> <li>○ Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any member affected by critical incident</li> <li>○ Provide ongoing support to bereaved family</li> <li>○ Involve as appropriate family in any Club memorials</li> <li>○ Offer to link family with mental health services.</li> </ul>
Club Member Liaison Role		Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Outline services available to the Club</li> <li>○ Put in place referral procedures</li> <li>○ Address any immediate needs of Club members</li> <li>○ Work between Club members and Leadership/Communication Role</li> <li>○ Advocate ongoing support to vulnerable people</li> <li>○ Support those monitoring groups most affected.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Assisting in coordination of gatherings and/or memorials</li> <li>○ Assisting other response roles to ensure burnout does not occur.</li> </ul>





## WHERE TO FIND HELP

Responding to a suicide or critical incident often requires immediate support to be made available from external mental health agencies and services. There are several options available to Clubs, and it is encouraged that Clubs build a link or relationship with these providers:

AFL Community Football Where to Seek Help Document see <https://www.afl.com.au/clubhelp>

### CRISIS SUPPORT AVAILABLE FOR CLUBS

#### BEYOND BLUE

If your Club is currently responding to, or recovering from a suicide or attempted suicide, contact your Beyond Blue state or territory manager on the numbers below. Beyond Blue Consultants can support your Club as you care for the affected members and families.

**ACT**..... 0475 838 049  
**NSW** ..... 0475 838 049  
**NT**..... 0447 926 799  
**QLD** ..... 0455 079 803  
**SA**..... 0448 381 280  
**TAS** .....0448 613 934  
**VIC**..... 0458 559 736  
**WA**.....0427 128 271

Beyond Blue Consultants are available during the hours of **9am–5pm, Monday to Friday.**

It is important for Clubs to undertake immediate risk management processes, follow emergency management protocols and contact your relevant AFL State Body prior to contacting Beyond Blue.

#### headspace

Your local headspace centre provides primary mental healthcare and counselling services for 12–25 years.

<https://headspace.org.au/headspace-centres/>

#### NATIONAL INDIGENOUS POSTVENTION SERVICE

Emotional and practical support to families impacted by a loss from suicide or another traumatic event. A Postvention Advocate can be contacted by calling **1800 805 801** or visiting the website <https://thirrii.com.au/postvention-support>.

#### STAND BY

An Australian Government initiative, to meet the need for a coordinated community response to suicide. Support individuals, families and communities who have been bereaved or impacted by suicide (<https://standbysupport.com.au/>).

#### SUPPORT AFTER SUICIDE

A program of Jesuit Social Services, funded by the Federal Government. They provide a range of services to support people bereaved by suicide across Melbourne and Geelong (<https://jss.org.au/what-we-do/mental-health-and-wellbeing/support-after-suicide/>).

#### SPORT CHAPLAINCY

Provide onsite counselling support post suicide, assisting in navigating grief and loss (<https://mysca.sportschaplaincy.com.au/Home/Default.aspx>).

#### LIFELINE

Provide crisis support 24/7, along with advice in navigating support services post suicide (<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>).



# SCRIPTS

The following Scripts can be adapted to suit the situation at the Club. Ensure that only information that is able to be shared is included in the script, and request that people don't start sharing this news before teams and others in the Club are informed. This is to protect the privacy of the family, and to not inform people unexpectedly, or in an unsafe environment.

## SCRIPTS FOR NOTIFYING COACHES, TEAM MANAGERS, AND ANY OTHER STAFF/VOLUNTEERS

Today/yesterday the Club was given the very sad news that (insert name and team) has died.

Their family has shared with us that (insert name) died by suicide. This understandably will be a very difficult time for (insert name) close family, teammates, friends, coaches, and all of us that knew them. It's likely to take us some time to process this information and (insert name) death will affect us all in different ways.

The Club's Suicide Response Team has been activated which is made up of the following Club members (insert names). They are currently working with (insert mental health agency) and the (insert league name) to ensure support is available to assist those who may need it. A notice will go out to Club members today to inform the community about this sad news and the affected teams will be informed via a script, to ensure consistency in messaging. Please let us know if you do or do not want to be involved in sharing this news with your team.

We have also made space available at the Club for people to come together. This will provide people with an opportunity to grieve together, along with support being made available. If you feel that you are unable to attend training, please speak to me, and we can make some arrangements for you to take some time away. I can also provide you with information about seeking help if you need. Suicide is complex, and sadly, it is not always known why someone has decided to end their life.

If you are approached by anyone outside the Club, asking about (insert name) death and wanting more information, please refer them to (insert response team member name). We encourage you to be sensitive and respectful to other people's feelings during

this difficult time. We also encourage you to look out for one another, and promote help seeking activities where possible.

The Response Team will be telling the close friends of (insert name) first, and then the Club teams more broadly. If you have any information about persons who could be vulnerable to this news, please speak with (insert response team member name).

We acknowledge that some members of the Club might be very distressed, including those who didn't necessarily appear close to (insert name). If you are worried or concerned about anyone, you can go to (insert response team name) for further support.

Some key messages that the Club would like you to use with your teams are:

- Don't glamourise suicide, inadvertently endorse or stigmatise suicide;
- Don't talk about the method of suicide;
- Talk about multiple factors causing suicide, not one factor;
- Don't ask people directly about what they know;
- Remind people that rumours are not helpful and try to contain or dispel them;
- Promote help seeking;
- Answer basic questions and redirect more complex questions to mental health professionals available.

More information will come via the Response team in regard to supporting (insert name) family, and the greater Club community. It is important to look after ourselves and each other, and use the support options available through the how to seek help document.

## SCRIPT FOR NOTIFYING THE AFFECTED TEAMS

Today/Yesterday/This Week the Club was given the sad news that (insert name) died by suicide (only use the term suicide if agreed to by the bereaved family). This will be a very difficult time for (insert names) family and close teammates and for all of us who knew him/her.

For a while, it might be difficult to think of anything else and you might find yourself very upset, regardless of how well you knew (insert name). For this reason, we have set aside some space at the Club to allow for people to come together if they feel that they are unable to train this week, or to meet after training. We will have someone available on (insert day and time) for you to talk to if you want to. Otherwise, it will be a quiet place for us to be together. There are a number of ways in which you can seek support, including reaching out to a friend or parent, through (insert response team member) or through (insert MH services). We have available also, how to seek help documents that can assist in supporting you.

An email will be sent to the greater Club community to inform people about the death, so that the people around you will understand if you want to talk with them today, or sometime in the future.

We will keep you informed as much as possible over the next week. This is a time to be especially sensitive to each other's feelings and look out for each other at the Club. **IF** you are approached by anyone outside the Club for information about death, please tell them they should speak to (insert response team members name). Please let a coach, team manager or parent know if you or your friends are worried about anything or anyone.



# LETTERS/EMAILS

## TIP

It is recommended that the email informing the community of a suicide has the information communicated in an attached letter. This ensures that those receiving the news have the option of opening the attachment in their own time.

### EMAIL TO CLUB COMMUNITY

**Dear (insert Club Name) Community,**

Today/Yesterday the Club was given the very sad news that (insert name and playing grade) has died by suicide (only use the term suicide if agreed by the bereaved family).

We extend our thoughts and heartfelt condolences to the (insert family name) at this very sad time. This understandably is a difficult time for the (insert family name) family, along with the teammates, coaches, close friends, and all that knew (insert name).

Members of our community are likely to be upset and it may take some time to process this information and (insert name)'s death will affect us all in different ways. For this reason, we have made available (insert room name) at the Club for people to come together (insert date and time). There will be representatives from (insert mental health services name) available to talk to the wider group, as well as provide guidance in connecting to further support over the coming days.

We encourage that you be sensitive to people's feelings about this death, look out for each other, and stay connected with people at the Club. We encourage that when you are talking about suicide with others, that you try to include discussion around positive ways of managing your own mental health and ways to seek support. Please also find attached information on how to seek help.

If you are concerned about someone, reach out to (insert Response Team members name, email and contact number) who is on hand to assist in navigating support available. Contacting the nominated Club staff is an important way of ensuring you receive consistent and accurate information.

Also provided in this email, is a list of helpful websites, services and supporting behaviours that may be useful in assisting those around you. Please contact me or (insert Response Team Members Name) if you have any questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely,  
**Club President/CEO**

### EMAIL TO OTHER CLUB PRESIDENTS/EMAIL FROM STATE OR COMMUNITY FOOTBALL MANAGER

**Dear Clubs,**

You and your Club leaders need to be aware that there may be some information circulating relating to a suicide today/yesterday of a member of (insert Club name). The Club has received the news that this information is true, and that (insert name) has died by suicide. This understandably will be a very difficult time for (insert name) close family, teammates, friends, coaches, and all of us that knew them.

The connections between Clubs in the community is widespread and rapid, and there is the chance that this incident may affect your community in some way. We encourage you to consider the impact of this death on vulnerable people within your own Club.

We have set up a formal time for our Club to come together, where there will be mental health professionals available, and we would like to extend the invitation to anyone who wishes to join us. This will occur at (insert place) at (insert time).

Also provided in this email, is a list of helpful websites, services and supporting behaviours that may be useful in assisting those around you. Please contact me or (insert Response Team Members Name) if you have any questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely,  
**Club President/State or Community Manager**

# SUPPORTING THE BEREAVED FAMILY

**Responding and supporting a family who have been affected by suicide can sometimes lead to nervousness around saying and doing the right thing. Those bereaved by suicide experience several different emotions. Be mindful, families may respond differently to you reaching out, and therefore it is important to act with respect and compassion to the family's wishes. It is important to acknowledge how hard it must be to talk to you and advise them that the Club would like to extend support to the team and the greater Club community.**

For information about the death and the Club's response, liaising with the family should be done by 1-2 members of the Response Team, (Leader and Family Liaison). Ask them if they can discuss several things with them, or who they can talk to if they are not ready. When reaching out, reassure them that they are not alone, and that help is available to them, knowing that asking can be sometimes the hardest part.



## Initial conversation with the Club:

- Offer condolences on behalf of the Club
- Offer support through the mental health services and resources
- Let them know that there will be a person from the Club who will be liaising with them on behalf of the Club, however friends and members of the Club may also reach out to share their condolences
- The purpose of the family liaison is to provide need to know information to the greater community, to reduce the risk of rumours and hearsay
- Seek permission on how they would like the death referred to, whether it is being discussed as a suicide. If they are unsure, or looking for advice in this space, you might like to mention the damaging impact of misinformation and the importance of being able to talk to people about suicide and its causes. This can keep the greater community safe at this time
- If they do not wish to refer to the death as a suicide, full respect needs to be granted. However, acknowledging any information that is already being discussed may allow them to reflect on a different approach to referencing the death.

# SUPPORTING THE BEREAVED FAMILY CONT.

A lot of information in one conversation may be distressing at the time of contact. Ask if it is appropriate that you get in touch again later, or compile information in an email for them to look at if required. Seek permission to recontact them and make a time to do so.

## Ongoing topics that may be covered off when supporting the family may include

- Funeral arrangements and attendance
- Support for any siblings or family members who are a part of the Club
- Returning any belongings at the Club (e.g., Locker)
- Impact of social media and Media
  - Some Clubs may acknowledge and reach out via social media channels
- How to seek help and any other local supports that the family may wish to seek support through, including grief counselling
- Updates on response plans and activities at the Club
- Information about any memorials and acknowledgements (e.g., Team photos, awards nights).

## RESOURCES

**headspace:**  
**Tips for contacting the bereaved family following a suicide.**

**LIFELINE**  
**Have you lost someone to suicide?**

## FOR CLUB MEMBERS: HOW CAN THE CLUB SUPPORT THE FAMILY?

When tragedy hits a community, it can be hard to find the words to express condolences or reach out to support the family directly affected by suicide. People may fear that what they say and do could potentially make things worse, however, there are ways to support the family, with compassion and respect, for example:

- Contacting the family, as you would with any other death, to let them know you acknowledge the situation and care. Acknowledge the death as soon as you can, and when appropriate.
- Share memories and talk about the deceased.
- When with them, engage in listening, and allowing them to express their feelings and cry.
- Refrain from asking them “Why”, and if there was anything that could have been done.
- Mention the deceased by name – It is important to acknowledge them as a person.
- Continue to include the family in Club activities and normal activities, encouraging them to attend, join in when they can.

Clubs that have already experienced a suicide in their community suggest the

following activities to share their condolences and offer their support:

- Leaving a book at the Club, where people can write memories and stories, as well as writing letters to the family to read when they are ready to.
- Cook meals for the family, but continue to do so for more than the initial weeks, as people head back into normal routine, the family continue to process and heal from the loss.
- Offer to provide outlets for siblings, by driving them to training, having them over at their house, or providing some respite to the parents.
- Donate to an organisation or charity in memory of the deceased.

## CONSIDERATION

- Working through grief can take years and the hurt is never forgotten.
- Once the Club returns to normal scheduled training and games, continue to check in with the family. Everyone else has returned to “normal”, but the family will continue to live with the loss.
- It is not a matter of “just moving on”, this should not be in your language when talking to the family.
- Don’t ask for details.
- Don’t avoid talking about the person who has died, or say things such as “they have gone to a better place”.

# ROLE OF AFL STATE AND/OR COMMUNITY MANAGER

## TIPS TO SUPPORTING CLUB LEADERS AND RESPONSE TEAMS

- **Acknowledge the loss**
- **Allow time to discuss what has happened**
- **Offer practical support**
- **Look out for signs that they are not coping and encourage self-care and revisit how to seek help if they need.**

The impact of suicide can influence the entire Club community, which may affect the Club's ability to respond immediately and effectively. Therefore, it may be appropriate throughout the response and that an AFL representative becomes involved in assisting the Club. The following highlights ways in which an AFL State or Community Manager may be able to assist Clubs dealing with grief and loss following a suicide.

Grief can affect people in different ways, and for some leaders within the Club, the death of one of their own may influence their ability to put in place the appropriate measures of response. Clubs may feel overwhelmed by all the things going on and needed throughout the initial stages, and therefore look for support or for someone to lead for them. This may be an effective strategy as they do not have the same level of emotional investment in the individual who has passed as Club members.

### Initial guidance and leadership

- Includes providing guidance to Suicide Response Checklist, How to Seek Help Document and navigating mental health services.
- Support in activating a response team.
- Assistance in communicating with Clubs in regard to the death and information confirmed with the family.

### Outlet of support for those leading the response

- People need time to step back from the responsibilities and care for their own mental health and wellbeing. As a community and state manager, you may play a role in checking in with Club response teams to see how they are coping, and where they might need additional support for themselves.

### Mediate some choices and ideas

- Responding to a suicide should put the minimising of risk of suicide exposure at the forefront. Providing council and mediating the approach and response may assist in risk management, providing Clubs with support around what is and is not appropriate.

### Provide Guidance and Support

- Some Clubs may need a hand on approach to guiding the response, which may include meeting with members of the Club and response team and providing some support and action planning for them to navigate their way through the process.
- For some Clubs, someone stepping and guiding them to what they need at that time may eliminate some distress and uncertainty while they are starting the grieving process together.
- It may be that the person who has died by suicide is a significant leader of the Club, leaving the Club without leadership. Stepping in to assist the organised response may be appropriate.
- If this is the case, following the AFL Suicide Response Checklist is recommended, apply what is needed to the Club's circumstances.

## SELF-CARE

When caring for your football community, it is important to be aware of your own needs and emotional wellbeing. Investing in self-care practices will assist in reducing the risk of burning out emotionally and socially. There are a number of things that you can do to ensure that your own wellbeing is looked after, while responding and caring for others.



Take time out – give yourself a break from what you are coordinating, managing, or experiencing. Engage in something else, taking the time to step back from the duties you are responsible for.



Do not be afraid to ask for help and support. Many will welcome the opportunity.



Try to reduce the demands placed on you, even if this is temporary. Be prepared to say no to additional requests.



Set boundaries on what support you can provide and how long for. If you burn out, who will provide support to those in your care?



Identify who your own support team is - Stay connected with friends, family and other support networks.



Stay healthy – eat well, hydrate, exercise and get quality sleep.



Write down something you are grateful for and reflect on those as you move through difficult circumstances throughout the response.



Say thank you to someone who has helped you.



Implement time management skills, setting out tasks and looking to meet them, but with flexibility and patience.



Go for a walk or make time for yourself, engaging in things you enjoy (e.g., Reading, sewing, etc).



Seek support from the Response Team.



Keep an eye on how you react, if you are noticing changes in yourself, look after your own needs.



Maintain Structure and routine at training.

## ASSESSING WHO IS AT RISK

Being aware of people who may be vulnerable or at risk is important to the duty of care provided by the Club. Risk assessments should be completed by mental health professionals, however you can learn to notice particular signs that may identify vulnerable people. It is important to note that the Response Team may not know or need to know the mental health history of every Club member, however promoting the signs of concern and where to seek help may reduce the risk of vulnerability.

**There are several groups within the general population that can be considered to have elevated risks of suicide. These include culturally and linguistically diverse populations, Indigenous populations, rural and remote populations, and the LGBTIQ+ population. Other groups to also consider when assessing risk are those experiencing mental illness, substance related disorders, and those who have previously engaged in suicide-related behaviours in the past.**

### Those potentially at risk may include:

- Siblings of the deceased
- Those close to the deceased
- Those with a history of suicide attempts (if known)
- Those with a mental illness history (if known)
- Family history of mental illness (if known)
- Those known to be struggling with other trauma related events (deaths, accidents, family breakdown etc)
- Anyone in a severe state of distress
- Those who have experienced the loss of someone in their life to suicide
- Friends, boyfriends/ girlfriends/partners of the deceased
- Anyone who witnessed the death or found the deceased
- Friends and teammates in communication with the individual before the event
- Those expressing guilt about messages, or communication that they were given by the individual, but did not share or follow through with
- Anyone who has had a negative interaction with the deceased
- Anyone else of concern.

It is normal to experience intense emotional pain, and people will grieve differently. Some people may look to avoid the pain of grieving, while others may not know how to cope with the experience. Be aware that there is such a thing as delayed grief, that emerges weeks and even months after the death of a loved one. Seek professional help when you see someone experiencing overwhelming, severe, and persistent grief symptoms, suicidal thoughts, or they are not coping, despite using common coping strategies.



## SUICIDE RISK ASSESSMENTS

Suicide Risk Assessments should not be undertaken by a Club unless it is led by a mental health professional or doctor. Risk assessments aim to understand the likelihood and severity of an individual's suicidal intentions and to find out the full extent of an individual's intent to take their own life and identify any plans they may have. This includes access and means, along with safety plans to help guide. This can also be done in conjunction with any external mental health services that the individual may be engaged with.

If someone has indicated that they are feeling suicidal, or you believe they are at risk of suicide, ensure that the individual is kept safe and supported. Remove any means of suicide available to them in the immediate vicinity (for example, medications or weapons). Follow the steps to asking the individual if they are suicidal (see the next section **Asking someone if they are suicidal**) with the aim to connect them with support or someone who is trained in mental health first aid.

## ASKING SOMEONE IF THEY ARE SUICIDAL

- Reach out to them, asking them how they are doing, do they feel safe, and that you are there to help.
- Ask them if they are thinking about suicide and if they have any plans. Talking about suicide will not make them act. By asking them, you are showing you care and encouraging them to talk about their feeling and plans.
  - Be direct, do not be afraid to ask, as asking decreases the risk.
  - Try not to express judgment about suicidal thoughts when asking them about their plans, e.g. "you're not thinking of doing anything stupid, are you, like killing yourself?"
  - Avoid expressing relief if they are not suicidal, eg "Oh, thank god! I'm so glad you don't feel that way"
  - Include follow up comments such as: "if you were ever feeling like life was not worth living, who would you tell?" or "if that changes, you can ALWAYS talk to me, anytime, and we can work together to get support."
- Listen to them and take action to get help. Explain to them that they have other options than suicide. Plan disclosure should not be kept a secret, and therefore explain to them that you need to tell someone to assist with help;
  - Do not leave them alone.
- If they have made a plan (which includes a time, place and method) and if you suspect immediate risk, ring 000, Lifeline (13 11 14) or the Suicide Call Back Service (1300 659 467). Remove access to any objects they may use to hurt themselves.
- If there is no immediate risk, encourage them to seek help, and offer to assist them in navigating where to find it. This may be making an appointment with a GP, contacting a counsellor or psychologist, or reaching out to a specialist hotline such as Beyond Blue, headspace or Lifeline.
- Take care of yourself, caring for others at risk can be emotionally draining. Look for support through family and social networks, or external mental health professionals.
- Follow up, showing that you care can make a difference in their lives.

**Reference:** SANE Australia and Beyond Blue.

# RESPONDING TO A SUICIDE ATTEMPT

The approach outlined here should be used as a guide to responding to a suicide attempt, and not be considered the only way.

**Responding to a suicide attempt and the events that follow may require an alternative approach and further considerations in comparison to the response needed for a death by suicide.**

This resource provides assistance for a Club, who has been informed, or suspects that one of its members has attempted to take their own life. It outlines areas that may be useful in the Club's response,

and how the Club may support its members to minimise risk within its community. The document may be considered alongside the AFL Suicide Response Guide and the AFL Critical Response Guide.

## KEY TERMS

### Suicide

The act of intentionally causing one's own death.

### Suicide Attempt

An act carried out by a person with the intention of ending their life.

### Self-Harm

When someone deliberately injures themselves, also referred to as self-injury, and is generally considered non-suicidal in intent. It can sometimes be hard to clearly define with some young people.

### Suicide Ideation

The presence of any thoughts, plans, images, imaginings or preoccupations a person may have about ending their own life.

### Suicide Exposure

A person may be exposed to suicide directly (someone known to them) or indirectly (through reports via media channels).



# RESPONDING TO A SUICIDE ATTEMPT CHECKLIST

## LIAISE WITH INDIVIDUAL AND/OR FAMILY

- Confirm the health and wellbeing of the individual.
- Confirm information that can and cannot be shared with those connected to the individual at the Club.
- If individual (or family) is not ready to discuss the attempted suicide, then confirm an appropriate time to touch base.
- Extend offers of support through Club external mental health service or How to Seek Help.

## CONSIDER THE IMPACT ON CLUB COMMUNITY

### If consent has been granted:

- Inform the Response Team and any appropriate committee or support members.
- Inform coach and staff associated with the individual.
- Via a script, inform the individuals team and close contacts.
- Provide information in regard to mental health services and How to Seek Help.
- Allow flexibility in teams training, but maintain regularly scheduled.

### If consent has not been granted:

- Be aware of rumours and hearsay in relation to the individual and discuss further with individual and family how they wish to manage information.
- Continue with Club's regular program.
- Continue to promote mental health and wellbeing within the Club.

If the Club appears to be impacted by the attempt, reach out the external mental health services for advice and potential resourcing and education on how to support someone experiencing mental ill health.

## SUPPORT THE INDIVIDUAL'S RETURN TO THE CLUB

- Put into place a safety plan for individual returning.
- Ensure boundaries of support for individual and coaches/staff assisting in individuals return to Club.

**NB: Regardless of whether it can be acknowledged or not, support can still be offered to those who might believe it was a suicide attempt – e.g.,** “I hear that you’ve been wondering if XXX’s hospitalisation (for instance) was the result of a suicide attempt. At this time, we are supporting XXX and XXX’s family, and respecting their wishes that the details of what has happened is private for them. And, it would be really helpful for XXX if we can work together to prevent rumours or gossip. You are always welcome to come to XXX (safe, trusted adult) to talk about this, and anything that might be worrying or concerning you about it, and XXX will do their best to provide you with information able to be shared, etc. I am also wondering if it might be helpful to talk about suicide, as it is something that you have brought up...”

### Key considerations when responding to a suicide attempt:

- Remain calm, non-judgemental and caring when responding, reporting, and communicating with the individual, family and Club members.
- Respect the confidentiality of the individual and consider their wishes and their family when communicating about the suicide attempt.
- Consider that impact on others. Check in with coach or any wellbeing staff at the Club in relation to the potential impact the news may have on some people.
- Provide information on how to seek help, along with information to any local mental health and support agencies.
- Consider the impact of social media on members – whether information is being shared or is potentially impacting on the wider Club community.

Supporting an individual who has attempted to take their own life requires a high level of care and respect. The individual may be experiencing a range of emotions and this may continue into the days and weeks following the attempt, as they are at a high risk of attempting again. For those supporting the individual, there may be just as many feelings towards the situation, as they look to understand, empathise, and process the incident.

### WHAT IS THE CLUB'S RESPONSIBILITY IN RESPONDING TO ONE OF ITS PEOPLE FOLLOWING A SUICIDE ATTEMPT?

Research suggests that the first 100 days, on average, are when someone is at their most vulnerable, and is a critical time for coordinating support and providing care. The impact a suicide attempt has on the Club community will differ, depending on a range of factors, such as the relationship with the individual, the amount of information shared about the incident, as well as the individual and families need for support. It may be appropriate to acknowledge the attempt on their own life to those directly engaged with the individual (e.g., Teammates). However, permission may not be granted to share any news or information about the incident by the individual or their family.

If the suicide attempt is to be acknowledged, the Clubs response may be aimed at ensuring the immediate and ongoing safety of its people, looking to reduce the risk of suicide, and supporting those who may be affected by the incident. The Club may also be a part of the support process providing a network and connection for individuals, and navigating the individuals return to the Club environment.

If the family chooses to not engage with the Club for support, the role of the Club may be to promote the importance of mental health and wellbeing. Actions may include engaging in healthy behaviours within the Club, creating a culture that supports mental health and wellbeing, providing resources and presentations from

external providers, engaging in fundraising or charity events, and ensuring that the Club's people have access to How to Seek Help information.

### PRIVACY AND COMMUNICATION FOLLOWING THE ATTEMPTED SUICIDE

The Club may be made aware of an attempt on an individual's own life, and feel that they need to do something. However, some individuals may not wish to share their experience with the greater community. Everyone is entitled to their own privacy, especially in relation to their overall wellbeing. Support for the individual as well as the Club's people is a priority.

Information about the attempted suicide may come from the individual, the individual's family, or via another person at the Club. It may also be delivered directly to the head coach or member of the support staff, and not to the executive leaders of the Club, who are usually leading any emergency response. Encourage coaches and support staff to reach out to Club leaders if information of a critical incident, such as an attempt of own life, is disclosed. Respecting the individual's privacy, and in some cases, confidentiality, is required to ensure safety and respect.

Club members can support potentially vulnerable people at the Club, through the promotion of help seeking behaviours and other mental health services. Remember, that the Club does not have the right to know information about an individual's mental wellbeing, but they have a duty of care to provide a positive, safe environment for their people.

# RESPONSE TO A SUICIDE ATTEMPT

## LIAISE WITH THE INDIVIDUAL OR FAMILY

Effective communication is important to gain the facts, and to minimise hearsay and rumours, that may have an impact on the greater Club community. Therefore, it may be appropriate to gain an understanding of the individual's situation through speaking with the individual themselves (if suitable), the individual's parents, partner, or family member.

Liaising with the individual or family should be the responsibility of one of the members of the Response Team. However due to the nature of football clubs and team connectedness, the liaison may fall on the coach or wellbeing coordinator. It is encouraged that those individuals seek support through the Response Team when communicating with the family, with confidentiality in mind.

**When gaining facts and information about the situation, respect for the individual's privacy is crucial. Information to respond appropriately to the incident may include:**

- The health and wellbeing of the individual
- The individual's current location – e.g., Hospital or home care
- The families wishes in relation to information provided to others in the Club community, keeping in mind that some individuals/families may not wish to share this information with those directly associated to the individual.

**The individual and/or family may not be ready to discuss information with the Club, if so, extend your offer of support, and ask whether it is appropriate to reconnect later.**

## CONSIDER THE IMPACT ON THE CLUB COMMUNITY

Clubs must assess the impact that the suicide attempt may have on the Club community. News of a suicide attempt within the Club may put those who are potentially vulnerable at risk, and therefore it is important to encourage communication in relation to identifying and supporting those in the Club. This can be done through coaches checking in with players wellbeing or engaging in any wellbeing staff or volunteers. Consider also, the impact of social media in relation to the incident.

The consideration for the Club community must take on board the wishes of the individual and family, in relation to what information is shared. If the family does not wish to share any information, the Club should look to reduce the risk of hearsay and rumours, by implementing help-seeking promotion and looking to monitor teams' behaviours and moods around training. If rumours and questions exist, liaise with the family to gain an understanding and insight into whether they wish to address the hearsay through providing minor details.

The individual or family may choose to provide information about the incident and are willing to allow facts to be shared to support the individual. The information is not required to be dispersed throughout the whole Club unless other teams and staff may be impacted. Instead identify the primary group of people who should be informed and any information that can be communicated via script, in person, and/or via email to players and parents if getting people together is limited.

Liaising with external mental health services may be appropriate for guidance about how to support vulnerable people within the Club. These services may be able to provide resources, conduct an information session about mental health literacy, or link people with information on how to seek help for themselves and those around them. There are several mental health services available to Clubs to educate and promote mental health, and it is important to engage with programs that are supported and backed by best practice and information. To find out how to select the right mental health education program, click [here](#).

## SAFETY PLAN FOR RETURNING TO THE CLUB

For an individual who has attempted to take their own life, transitioning back into regular routine and activities may cause some added stress to their recovery. People may find that their suicidal thoughts can return when they are under stress or experiencing tension. Therefore, the Club can assist in making their return to the Club as safe as possible. The individual is encouraged to work with their mental health professional in building an approach to returning to the Club.

### The safety plan may include:

- Signs that the person is getting stressed or overwhelmed, and potentially experiencing suicidal thoughts
- Strategies that assist the individual through these experiences
- People that the individual can connect with when they are feeling overwhelmed or suicidal
- Contacts for services in case of an emergency.

### How the Club can assist it's community:

- Reach out to the individual before their return
- Acknowledge and express sympathy and concern for their experience
- Make clear that they are welcome back, whenever they feel ready, and that people are really looking forward to their return
- Clarify who knows what, and what has been said
- Ask what sort of support might be helpful in coming back. You could prompt for information like:
  - What might you find good about being back?
  - Anything you might find stressful or worrying (and plan for how to manage that, plus what is helpful for others to provide)
  - What sorts of things would tell us you were wanting a break / help / check-in etc.
  - Who is your 'go to' person at the Club for help / support (2 names, if possible)
  - Who would we contact if we were worried or concerned about you.

For coaches and support staff working with the individual, an understanding of the signs and signals is an important line of support. They can connect with the individual and help them navigate their return to the Club alongside their experience and support away from the Club. The plan also allows clear communication for both parties to discuss what to do if the individual is feeling unsafe within themselves and how the Club can connect them to help.

## RETURN TO CLUB CONSIDERATIONS

Following a suicide attempt, the individual may return to the Club soon after, or they may choose to have a period away to support their wellbeing. Regardless of the time away, the Club may look to assist in the individuals return, by providing them with support where necessary. The individual, or the individual's family (or medical providers), may provide an update on the level of risk, or any risk factors, that are relevant, along with any advice or guidance for caring for that individual. No matter how much the support the Club offers, it is important

that the individual has clear expectations about what the Club can offer. The resources at the Club can be stretched. Support for those in caring roles are crucial, especially in high risk and crisis situations. Individuals may look to lean on particular people, so try to be ready ease the load, or step in where support may be needed. Remember that there are 24-hour crisis services available.

In some circumstances, supporting the individual may stretch resources to a point where others within the Club are impacted. Individuals may end up missing out on opportunities, unable to seek help themselves. Those helping the individual are encouraged to regularly check in with themselves, and monitor those around them. It is important to remember that every member of the Club has the appropriate support that they need to ensure they are not being stretched or negatively impacted by another's behaviours.

#### **Ways of showing support:**

- Let the person know that they can talk to you about things when they are ready
- Be prepared to listen without interrupting, allowing them to share their story and feel heard
- Assist the person to establish a routine with sleeping, meals and exercise to gain control over their life. This may include returning to training once or twice a week
- Support the person in keeping up with appointments and staying in contact with counsellors and other health professionals
- Monitor their use of alcohol at the Club – if you are concerned about their intake, speak to the individual or a family member
- Offer resources to family and friends
- Reassure them they are not alone and that there is support around them
- Offer to take the individual to training or pick them up to take them out for a social gathering. Offer to cook meals to assist around the house.

# CONSIDERATIONS



## WHEN A SUICIDE OCCURS AT ANOTHER CLUB: INDIRECT CLUB RESPONSE

The football community can be indirectly impacted by the suicide of someone from another Club. The affected Club's executive team member, or response team leader should confirm the death of an individual by suicide with the league's manager (or equivalent). The other Clubs should acknowledge the death of the individual similar to if it occurred within the Club, with a script that provides information about the passing of a player within the league. If cause of death is unreported or not disclosed, it is important not to assume, and stick to the facts that have been reported by the affected Club.

It is recommended that the Club maintains regular training where possible, allowing for people to opt out if they are showing signs of distress or do not feel up to attending. Some players within the Club may need to take some time away from training and competition. It is important that Clubs are flexible with the initial stages of grief.

Reassure and remind players that everyone processes grief differently. Assess the impact of the suicide on the squad and contact a mental health agency if you feel that it is needed.

Talk to the affected Club about any possible attendance at their meeting place. Some people within the Club may wish to pass on their condolences or be a part of the grief process. Be mindful of any formal acknowledgement of the passing of the individual via social media and encourage compassion and respect for the family and friends of the individual. Identify any members who may be at risk within the Club community and work through ways to provide support to these members with the Club Mental Health Representative, using the Response Guide as a reference.

## SUICIDE DURING THE OFF-SEASON

A Club's response to a suicide should remain the same, whether the death occurs in or out of season. Bringing the group together is an important option to consider if a suicide does occur in the off-season.

Coming together allows people to meet and talk through options for services available to them. Outlining options that are available through the mental health services associated with the Club may be communicated

to families via email. It may also be relevant to contact families and Club members of those potentially at risk either by phone or in-person.

## CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

**Trigger Warning:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that information relating to suicide and self-harm is included. If this content causes you distress and you would like to talk or be supported contact Lifeline on 13 11 14.

Cultural practices after the death of a community member are highly variable and therefore the cultural needs should be understood and considered in the Club's response. Respectfully seek guidance from the family, Elders, community leaders or religious groups about cultural and spiritual practices in order for the Club's response to be culturally sensitive. If a Club is not confident in managing its response in relation to cultural or religious diversity, it is recommended that they look for guidance from a representative from the cultural or religious group or through a mental health agency who has experience in culturally sensitive responses to suicide. Cultural sensitivity and awareness acknowledges that honouring the many diverse beliefs and customs surrounding death may assist in the grieving process for those affected by a suicide.

For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities impacted by suicide, it is strongly encouraged that the Club consult with community Elders and the family to seek guidance and understanding about how to support culturally sensitive practices. Suicide disproportionately impacts First Nations Peoples for many reasons, including transgenerational trauma, structural racism and cumulative impacts of social disadvantage, therefore it is vital that the Club is guided by representatives from the impacted community after a suicide. Organisations such as **Thirrili (<https://thirrili.com.au>)**, can assist with a critical response to individuals and families who may be affected by suicide. Social support, practical assistance, and resourcing can be provided through their programs, connecting with communities, local Elders, and

other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations to ensure community response is in place to support the individuals and families. To contact Thirrili for a Postvention Advocate, call **1800 805 801**.

Further information about supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities, in relation to suicide exposure can be found <https://www.headspace.org.au/assets/School-Support/Suicide-contagion-for-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-young-people-web.pdf>

## AGE CONSIDERATIONS

Children at various ages and stages of development will have different understandings of what death means. In some cases where younger Club members are needing to be informed, it might be appropriate for families to inform their children of the death, with guidance and resources provided to support that. Inviting parents along to any information sessions is important in the support of the younger players.

Some children and adolescents who have previously experienced loss in their life may find it harder to cope. Experiences such as separated parents, loss of relatives or moving may influence their coping ability and may become upset or express their feelings in other ways. Young people may also have more questions about the incident and may want to know exactly what happened to help understand the situation. Details about the suicide should not be provided to young people, as it is generally considered to be harmful to wellbeing.

When talking to children and adolescents who have been impacted by suicide, consider the following:

- Talk with them in a safe place, where there are no distractions
- Be honest with them about what has happened, but without providing detail on the suicide
- Reassure them that it is not their fault
- Steer discussion towards positive, help seeking actions that they can take, like talking to a trusted adult or friend
- Connect them with an appropriate person to talk to, such as a psychologist
- If they are not coping, or you are concerned about them, get professional help via a GP or psychologist
- Monitor the communication tools and social media interactions, as children may also be affected by possible media responses to the event
- Be aware of a delayed response in adolescents, looking out for changes in behaviour, socialising and training engagement.

## LGBTIQ+ COMMUNITIES

The LGBTIQ+ community has the highest rates of suicidality of any population in the country. The cause of suicide is complex, and can be influenced by factors such as psychological distress because of stigma, discrimination, violence and exclusion, past experiences of

trauma and abuse, and stressful life events. It is important to consider the diversity of the LGBTIQ+ community and ensure that the Club is guided by representatives from the impacted community after a suicide.

Organisations such as **QLife** <https://qlife.org.au/> can provide peer to peer support. While headspace provides support for young members impacted by suicide.

## AFL AND AFLW CLUBS

Support for AFL and AFLW Clubs may appear more accessible and immediate than Clubs in the community, due to the resources available in-house and through the AFL Players Association. All Clubs have access to Mental Health and Wellbeing Staff internally, through their Club Doctors, Psychologists and Player Development Managers. These staff members will actively be

involved in the response to a suicide, and liaise with players, staff and any external providers involved in the response.

Due to the nature of the AFL, the risk of suicide contagion needs to be a consideration when communicating to supporters and fans. Therefore, support from the AFL is available via the AFL Health and Wellbeing Team.

Players and Staff have access to the support of the AFL Employee Assist Program (EAP) and Mental Health and Wellbeing Network of Psychologists and Psychiatrists. The Players of AFL and AFLW Clubs also have access to the AFL Players Association's Mental Health and Wellbeing Network <https://www.aflplayers.com.au/players-home/get-support/wellbeing-support>

## MEMORIALS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**After the death, there may be requests from players or members to organise an event, award or physical memorial in memory of the individual's place at the Club. This can be beneficial for those grieving, however, there are aspects that need to be considered to avoid glamourising the suicide.**

The term glamourising suicide is about actions or messages that may make suicide an option to other people, increasing a risk amongst other vulnerable people within the community. Some ways to avoid the glamourisation of suicide and encourages respectful acknowledgement may include:

- Treating the death as any other, sending a message that any death is tragic, and worthy of acknowledgement.
- Connecting suicide with mental illness, opening up discussions around help seeking behaviours and other strategies that may help prevent suicide.
- Avoid prohibiting a memorial all together, as it may stigmatise the way the person has died, and cause further distress.
- Set limits around the material and content of the memorial, along with the location and timing. This may assist in reducing the risk for vulnerable people.
- Ensure family and friends have been involved in the planning, to make sure that those closest to the deceased are not left feeling distressed or isolated.
- Following the wishes of the family.
- Direct messages, flowers, photos or any other items that people may want to leave out of respect, to a designated space, or compile them so that they can be provided to the family.
- Monitor any online memorials.
- Ensure messages are not delivered in a way that glamourise suicide (e.g., "They are in a better place").
- Consider the location of the memorial, ensuring they are away from common areas or locations with high amounts of foot traffic, to ensure that there is a choice in visiting and acknowledging the persons passing.
- Consider alternatives to permanent memorials, such as small private "reflection gardens", or bench seat, that allows for people to sit quietly and remember the person they have lost.

Considerations must be taken around any games, awards or events that acknowledge the death of a person by suicide. The first questions that should be asked is whether the event and its activities, are going to glamourise suicide, and whether they may cause potential distress or risk to vulnerable people in the community. Suggestions for memorial games and anniversary of deaths may be put forward for consideration. These dates may serve as reminders to people close to the deceased, and should be managed appropriately, so as not to cause any further distress, or any disrespect to the family.

It is highly recommended that any games, or rounds, named after or in reference to the deceased (from suicide) are associated with the awareness and promotion of help seeking behaviours related to mental health. Organising memorials can help provide a focus and acknowledgement and should not be disregarded altogether. Ideas are great, but important considerations should be made in relation to the impact on the family and the greater community of potentially vulnerable people. The Response Team is in place to assist the Club returning to normal schedule and routine and this may include guidance in acknowledgements.

For end of season awards, team photos or Club year books, acknowledging any death of a Club member should be treated the same, regardless of the cause. If there is a history of dedicating space to Club members who have died, it is acceptable to acknowledge the death of the individual.

Some Clubs may also look to establish a permanent memorial at the Club. This could be a physical item such as a tree, seat, or plaque that acknowledges the individual. Considerations of the distress that the permanent memorial may cause to some members of the Club, as well as the sustainability of any further deaths receiving the same acknowledgment should be discussed.

It is important to liaise with the family and members of the Club community in relation to memorials. Suggestions may be put forward, with the best intentions, however, may have the potential to cause distress. Education on appropriateness in reducing the risk of suicide exposure, along with reducing any potential distress can be helpful in this process. Consultation on what is considered appropriate is encouraged.

#### **Examples of appropriate memorials, acknowledgements and events include:**

- A minute silence to remember the deceased, followed by the promotion of crisis support or mental health services.
- A black arm band for the first game following the death of an individual by suicide.
- Providing the Club with a book where members can write messages and memories which can be shared with the family.

More information about what is an appropriate way to remember someone's life can be found [here](#).

#### **Funerals**

The Club's involvement at the funeral may vary depending on the family's wishes. Some families may look for a private funeral, that limits attendees, while other families may acknowledge all social connections and open the funeral to all those wishing to pay their respects.

- Discuss with the family (or family representative) plans for the funeral and the family's wishes regarding team and Club attendance.
  - If there are no plans set at this initial conversation, which may often be the case, enquire about getting the information from them later
  - If plans have been made, ask permission to share the arrangements with the football community, as an option for attendance.
- Large attendance at a funeral may be overwhelming for some families, therefore where possible, and respectfully, look to manage the Club's representation at the funeral.
- Discuss with them how the Club may be involved in any proceedings at the funeral. Be mindful that some families may not want the Club involved at all, while others may need full support of the Club in organisation and involvement.
- Involvement may include:
  - Providing a Club jumper for the funeral.
  - Organising a guard of honour for the proceedings.
  - Inviting a Club representative to speak at the funeral.
  - Providing space for the funeral or after service function, for people to mingle and be together.

# SOCIAL MEDIA, WEBSITES, AND THE MEDIA

**The AFL supports the use of the Mindframe guidelines on responsible, accurate and safe suicide and self-harm reporting. Please consider these guidelines when responding to any media about suicide and self-harm.**

## Media

Local media may show interest in the suicide, especially if the Club, or region, has experienced more than one. Reporting suicide should be done with care, as the coverage of suicide in the media may increase the risk of suicide contagion. In the case of media interest, the Club President, or a member of the Response Team should be allocated the responsibility of liaising with the media. The following considerations should be made in relation to talking to the media:

- Do not glamourise the victim or the suicide itself.
- Do not oversimplify the cause of suicide.
- Do not give details of the method of suicide.
- Do not give information or photos of the death scene (if known or have access to) or information about distressed mourners.
- Always include information about crisis support services and local mental health services.

For more information about communicating about suicide in the media, <https://mindframe.org.au/suicide/communicating-about-suicide> (Mindframe).

## Social Media

Managing the Club's social media is an important part of safe response to suicide. An effective response plays a part in the impact of risk in suicide exposure on the community, due to the vast number of people a social media post can reach. People may turn to social media for a few different reasons, including sending out news of a death, posting online messages, creating online memorials, and expressing memories of the deceased.

Social media posts and interactions can cause anxiety and distress for the family and friends of the deceased, and it is hard to manage the interactions of the greater community in relation to the death. However, this may be outside of the Club's control, as people use different platforms for communicating. Ways in which the Club may be able to be proactive in minimising risk, and creating help seeking behaviours by promoting where to go for help, including external mental health services, crisis services, positive mental health, and wellbeing services (such as headspace), and resources about mental health. Along with these resources, the Club can provide a safe memorial for the deceased person, acknowledging their involvement at the Club, and condolences to the family. The

Club may like to use their own social media pages to promote services, to which members can actively be involved in for the promotion of help seeking and navigating help channels.

Encourage the Club to speak up if there are any concerns about messages and posts regarding the suicide. This may include rumours or false statements, concerns for others welfare, bullying or inappropriate comments, or any indications that a member of the Club community may be at risk. If any concerns are raised, it is important to speak directly to the Response Team. Contacting the Community Football Manager may also assist in managing social media.

For more information about social media management, visit <https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/Corporate/Managing-social-media-following-a-suicide-web.pdf>.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following documents and people assisted in building the Response Checklist, Considerations and Toolkit.

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