

sane **Bereavement and Mental Illness**
AUSTRALIA **Workshop**



Bereavement and Mental Illness Workshop

Exploring how to better support the family and friends of people with mental illness who have died by suicide or who are missing.

Suicide is a leading cause of premature death amongst people with a mental illness – and studies indicate that family and friends left behind are at a higher risk of mental health problems and of suicide themselves.

Support for bereaved families and friends is an important, yet often overlooked, suicide prevention strategy.

SANE is continuing its work to improve supports for this group. By encouraging mental health organisations to offer appropriate and timely support, we aim to improve bereaved family and friends' ability to cope.

The workshop draws on the personal experiences of people bereaved by suicide. It encourages staff and managers to think about the importance of supporting bereaved family and friends of clients and to explore issues that may arise during this process. The workshop also includes:

- a discussion of the grief associated with the diagnosis of mental illness
- information about how the suicide of someone with mental illness can affect bereavement
- a review of new models of grief
- viewing of a DVD with personal stories of people who are bereaved
- an introduction to the *SANE Best Practice Bereavement Guidelines*
- discussion of issues that may arise for organisations when supporting friends and family.

The workshop runs for ½ day (9.00-12.30 approx)

For further information or to discuss booking a workshop contact:

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About the presenters

Sarah Coker, BA Social Science (Hons)

Suicide Prevention Coordinator at SANE Australia. Sarah's background is in Social Science, she has worked in the mental health sector for ten years and is an experienced trainer and mental health telephone advisor.

Garrett O'Dowd, BSS, BSW, and Grad Dip Bereavement Counselling

A social worker who has combined his long experience in the mental health sector with his interest in bereavement and support after suicide. Garrett currently works as the Coordinator of the Mercy Western Grief Services in Victoria.

About SANE Australia

SANE Australia is a national charity helping all Australians affected by mental illness lead a better life – through education, research and campaigning.

Education

SANE promotes understanding of mental illness through a range of education resources for those affected, family and friends, health professionals and the general community. See www.sane.org for details of the SANE bookshop.

Research

SANE conducts and supports applied research that aims to make a real difference to the lives of people living with mental illness, their family and friends.

Campaigning

SANE Australia campaigns for-

- ▶ Access to all effective treatments
- ▶ Support in the community, such as supported accommodation
- ▶ Help for family and friends, including education and training
- ▶ Action to end discrimination

Telephone Support

The SANE Helpline is a national Freecall mental illness information and referral service.

- ▶ 1800 18 SANE (7263)
- ▶ www.sane.org



Bereavement and Mental Illness Workshop evaluation

Since development the bereavement workshop has been delivered to over 500 people from more than 50 government and non-government mental health organisations around Australia.

An initial evaluation of 10 workshops (123 participants) revealed:

- ▶ 89-96% reported an increase in their understanding of mental illness and suicide, grief and loss.
- ▶ 91% reported an increase in their confidence in their ability to support family and friends of someone with a mental illness who had died by suicide or gone missing.
- ▶ Participants found the DVD and written resources to be highly valuable tools to help guide them in supporting the family and friends of people who have died by suicide and to foster organisation change.

What participants say

Did you learn anything unexpected from our workshop?

Yes, I wasn't aware as a clinician how much we could help the family during their grief. The importance of communication and connection.

How service providers could help support 'clients' find closure or develop coping strategies by offering a debriefing/ feedback appointment.

New models of grief – moving with rather than moving on.

What was the most valuable part of the workshop?

Having the opportunity to be together and hear from facilitators who are experienced, interested, knowledgeable and skilled.

An awareness of the need for flexibility, openness and understanding in each grief experience. Also the absolute importance to network and info sharing with organisations.

Additional knowledge to complement and expand on prior suicide prevention training and mental health first aid.

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