

The suicide note

Many people believe that suicide notes are common. However, it is estimated that only 25-30% of suicides are accompanied by a note. Most people do not leave a note because they believe that:

- Nothing in the note will ever be an adequate explanation for their loved ones.
- Nothing in the note will bring any real measure of peace for their family, friends, or loved ones.
- An attempt to clarify things will simply generate a hundred more questions which can now never be answered by the deceased person.
- The note will not serve to relieve your family of their feeling responsible for the death.

A suicide message can be a written note, social media post, audio message, or video. The most common reasons that people choose to write a suicide note may include:

- To ease the pain of those known to the victim by attempting to dissipate guilt.
- To express emotional themes such as depression, guilt, shame, hurt and anger.
- To express concern about being a burden.
- To increase the pain of people left behind by attempting to create guilt.
- To set out the reason(s) for suicide.
- To express thoughts and feelings that the person felt unable to express in life.
- To give instructions for disposal of the remains.
- Occasionally, to confess acts of murder or some other offence.

What happens to the note?

When the police find a suicide note it is given with the person's body and other personal effects to the Coroner. The Coroner reviews the note and eventually it is passed back to the Next of Kin. This can take some time as the Coroner may wish to use the note as a basis for further investigation into the person's death. At other times the note may be returned to the family when the person's body is released for the funeral or soon after.

Who should read the note?

The Next of Kin has the decision about whether or not to read the note and with whom to share the note. When making these decisions, it might be helpful to discuss both of these issues or read the note with someone you trust and feel comfortable talking with. This could be a close family member, a friend, your GP or other professional. Remember that the note is unlikely to provide all of the answers that you may be looking for. It is helpful to remember that the note only represents your loved one's state of mind at the time the note was written. In deciding whether or not to share the note you may like to consider what impact the note may have on the person who is reading it.

What can I do with the suicide note?

What to do with the note can be a very difficult and emotional decision depending on many factors including changing emotions, personal beliefs and family pressure. Other people have:

Saved the note

- Place in scrapbook with photos etc.
- Keep in an envelope in the back of the cupboard until you are ready to read it.
- Keep with legal documents such as death certificate.
- Give to someone else to look after.

Not kept the note

- Burn the note – some people do this as part of a ritual to say goodbye to their loved one.
- Give the note to a trusted person to dispose of.
- Tear it up and let it float down a stream.
- Shred the note and add it to your garden.