

Guidance note: Perspectives on Suicide in Sikhism



UK Sikh Healthcare Chaplaincy Group

Introduction

This guidance note is aimed at chaplains who may be dealing with vulnerable patients. The majority of who are likely to be in a mental health setting. It can be used alongside our other guides on the use of the kirpan in mental health settings, and our protocols on dealing with death in a Sikh family. These can be found at www.sikhchaplaincy.org.uk. The guide is not meant to be prescriptive; it is to provide information and understanding on this sensitive topic.

How would you or another faith leader within your religion respond to somebody who came to you for help and was experiencing suicidal thoughts and intentions, including your own theologically informed thoughts and judgments?

If someone I know is considering suicide and came for help, I would listen calmly, ask the person to try and focus their mind on what is bothering them and why, and ask them to seek help from Waheguru.

Also re-enforce the 3 pillars of Sikhism – **Naam Japna, Kirat Karni and Wand Chakna**

- Naam Japna ie
 - o Simran (repetition of God's Name – Waheguru); and
 - o Sewa (reciting God's name is also sewa – other types of sewa are helping the poor, in the temple, at home looking after the elderly, disabled and children, are the two wings which will take you to your lord).
- Kirat karni - is to honestly earn by ones physical and mental effort while accepting both pains & pleasures as GOD's gifts and blessings
- Wand Chakna – “Share and consume together”. The community or Sadh Sangat is an important part of Sikhism. This spirit of **Sharing** and **Giving** is an important message from Guru Nanak.

I would ensure that I give the following info to the person/family:

- call a crisis telephone support line
- draw on the support of family and friends
- talk to your family doctor; he/she can refer you to services in the community, including counselling and hospital services
- set up frequent appointments with a mental health professional, and request telephone support between appointments

- get involved in self-help groups
- talk every day to at least one person you trust about how you are feeling
- think about seeking help from the emergency department of a local hospital
- talk to someone who has 'been there' about what it was like and how he/she coped
- avoid making major decisions which you may later regret.

The 'Sikh Helpline' (0845 644 0704) or (0799900 4363) is a professional and confidential telephone counselling and email inquiry service where you can get help, advice, counselling and information on Sikhism and cultural issues.

- Call our Helpline number: **0845 644 0704**
- Helpline Mobile number : **0799900 4363**
- Email: info@sikhhelpline.com

Samaritans

24-hour helpline: 08457 90 90 90

email: jo@samaritans.org

web: samaritans.org

Emotional support for anyone feeling down or struggling to cope.

How would a person who had survived a suicide attempt be viewed and treated within your own faith community?

A **person who has survived** a suicide attempt will definitely be taking medical help and support from the family. The family will also need to help from the family therapists and will need to re-enforce with the Gurus teachings to gain confidence, console and trust from their religion:

The Gurus rejected suicide, as we haven't the right to give or take life. Birth and death are the mercy of our dear creator. Death can be of just not the body but also of the mind and the soul.

The following bullet points are quotes from the Guru Granth Sahib Ji – the Living Scriptures of the Sikhs.

- The soul and body are all at your (God's) mercy. You yourself take and rejuvenate. You forgive and merge us into yourself.
Guru Nanak, Raag Gauree, Page 154
- The Lord does whatever the lord wishes; it is not up to me at all.
Bhagat Kabeer, Salok Kabeer Jee, Page 1376

- My Guru is always with me, near at hand.
Guru Arjan Dev, Raag Aasaa, 394
- That Beloved True Guru is always with me; wherever I may be, He will save me.
Guru Amar Daas, Raag Vadhans, 588
- The Perfect True Guru is always with me.
Guru Arjan Dev, Raag Sorath, 618
- He does not die, and is not born; He is always with me. Through the Word of the True Guru's Shabad, I know Him.
Guru Arjan Dev, Raag Dhanaasree, 670
- O Supreme Lord God, Divine Guru, You are always with me, ever-present.
Guru Arjan Dev, Raag Jaithsree, 709
- Wherever I look, there the Guru has shown me that God is always with me.
Guru Nanak, Raag Soohee, 752
- The most sublime Word of the Guru's Teachings is always with us.
Guru Nanak, Raag Basant, 1170
- The Guru has shown me that the Lord is always with me; He is permeating and pervading all places.
Guru Amar Daas, Raag Saarang, 1248

As for the faith community viewing the person: depends on how educated their minds are and how true they are at putting themselves in the shoes of the family whose person survived the suicide attempt. If the community at large is God fearing they will pray for the family & support the person who has tried to commit suicide to gain greater understanding from the Holy Scriptures. Sikhs would not judge a person who has attempted to commit suicide. Rather, they would help show them how they can live an enriched life and how through prayer and learning, they can support a shift in their mind-set. Alongside this, Sikhs would support psychotherapy and any other forms of support for the healing of the person in question.

How would the family of a person who succeeded in a suicide attempt be treated, and would there be any difference between the funeral/death rites of that individual and a person who had died a natural death?

The family would be treated with caution as they, too will need help and support. Talking to counselling services, talking to elders/priest at the Gurudwara would be the next steps for the family to get their strength and understanding of how to cope with their loss from their religion.

This link was used to get the information below on deceased through suicide:

<http://www.staffspasttrack.org.uk/exhibit/ilm/Mourning%20and%20Remembrance/Types%20of%20funerals/Sikh%20Funerals.htm>:

The deceased through suicide would be viewed as a death similar to natural death. The death rites would be conducted as for the death of a person with natural causes since Sikhs view death as a separation of the soul from the body and is considered part of God's will.

Cremation is the accepted form of disposal of the body.

Hymns that induce a feeling of detachment are sometimes sung on the way to the crematorium to aid the family in not showing their grief.

At the crematorium the prayer known as the 'Kirtan Sohila' is often recited. Ardas, or 'general prayers' are often said before cremation as well. These seek a blessing for the departing soul.

A member of the family will then light the funeral pyre but in Britain it is more usual for a family member to push the button for the coffin to disappear.

Men & women cover their heads. Women wear pale coloured or white headscarves.

Ashes are collected and scattered in running water or on the sea.

After the cremation guests return to the family home and readings are given and hymns sung.

Neighbours and families make a substantial meal for the bereaved family.

The mourning period lasts between two and five weeks.

Please also see our guidance notes on our website, www.sikhchaplaincy.org.uk that deal with the protocols around death and dying.