



Be Connected[®] Community Guide to Postvention

*A community guide for
healing and support after a
military, veteran, or family
member suicide loss in Arizona*



This guide is dedicated to the memory of our friend & colleague Dr. Adam McCray. He cared for veterans through their darkest hours and had an immeasurable impact on our community. Through his years of brilliant training, mentoring, and support, he provided encouragement and wisdom to numerous clinicians who will continue to serve our nation's veterans into the future. We honor his memory and thank his family, Bailey, Marlowe and Collin, for sharing him with us.



How to Use This Guide

This community guide is for people, organizations, and communities throughout Arizona. The purpose of postvention is to provide support after a suicide loss of a service member, veteran, or family member. The goal is to reduce the risk of suicide for survivors and to reduce further harm coming to anyone in the community as a result of the loss.

This guide can be used by organizations and communities so they are better equipped to respond in the event of a loss. Additionally, this guide provides information to help organizations and communities after an attempt has been made, or when someone is experiencing suicidal ideation. This guide is organized to ensure necessary information can be easily accessed.

Be Connected and our partners are here to assist anyone in the community who needs support. Please call 866-4AZ-VETS (429-8387) to learn more or to reach out for help.

To reach our postvention team, email:
prevention@arizonacoalition.org

Note: Be Connected is not an emergency or crisis response program. At any time, call 911 for an emergency or 988, option 1 for crisis response.



At any time, if there are concerns about your or another person's safety, call:



For Crisis Support



For Emergencies

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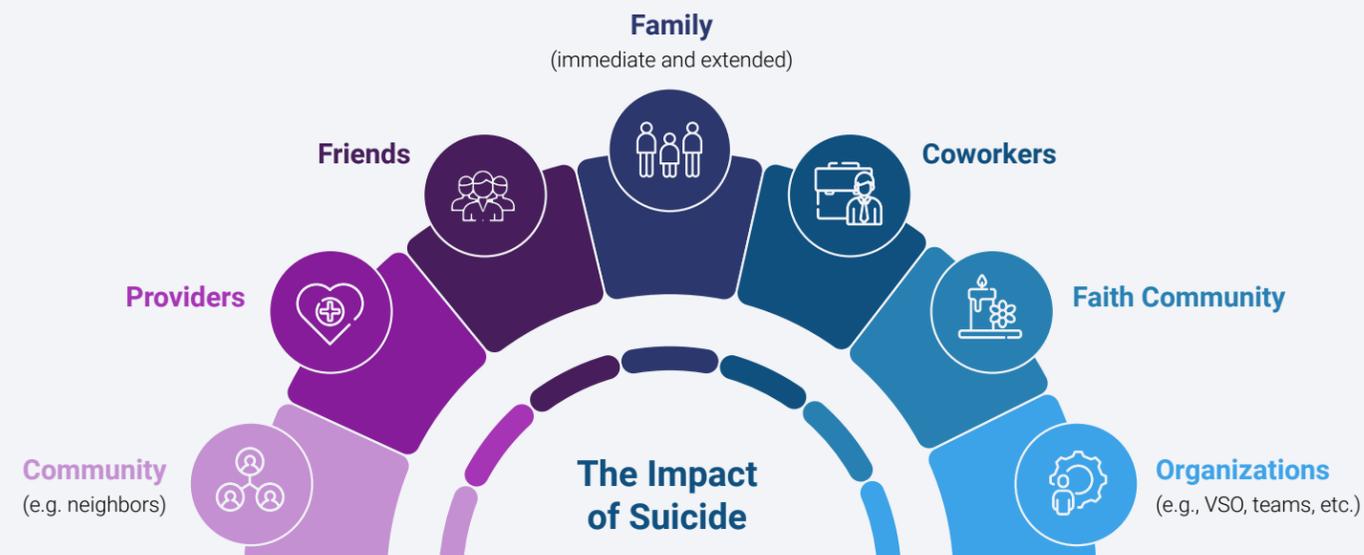


Be Connected Postvention

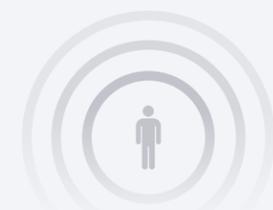


You Are Not Alone - The Impact of Suicide

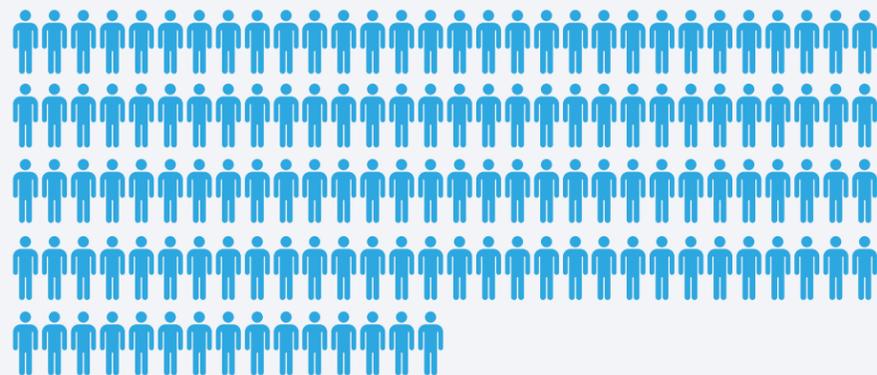
Many people in our community have been impacted by suicide. When there is a loss, the impact can include (but is not limited to) the following:



Research has shown that for every suicide, there is an impact on an estimated 135 people who were connected to the person lost to suicide.¹ Service members and veterans also tend to have higher exposure rates to suicide loss than civilians. Even knowing someone who has died by suicide can put you at greater suicide risk.²



For every suicide, there is an impact on an estimated 135 people



The impact of a suicide loss can be felt right away and for many years after.

Postvention is caring for and supporting those who have experienced a loss by suicide. It is even more important for our military and veteran community now and in the future.

The Be Connected Postvention Plan

Postvention is an organized immediate, short-term, and long-term response in the aftermath of a suicide to promote healing and mitigate the negative effects of exposure to suicide (AHCCCS, n.d.³).

Be Connected is a statewide effort to support Arizona’s 500,000+ service members, veterans, family members, and those helping them. Be Connected includes federal, state, and community partners working together to strengthen support for all who serve and their families.

Our collective goal is to connect people and families to the right resources at the right time to address all social determinants of health. Be Connected focuses on and engages people, helpers, organizations, communities, and systems.

The Be Connected Postvention Plan is here to extend support to individuals, organizations, and communities statewide who have experienced the loss of a service member, veteran, or family member by suicide. This support is available to all who need it at any time after the loss. See the section, *How Be Connected Can Help* on page 25 for how to connect to our team.



www.ConnectVeterans.org/postvention

866-4AZ-VETS (429-8387)



Postvention Focus Points



Safety

A loss by suicide is a traumatic experience and will affect people in different ways. It is always important to prioritize and maintain safety for anyone impacted by the loss. *At any time, if there are concerns about your or another person's safety, call 911 for emergencies or 988, option 1 for crisis support.*

These are areas of safety that may be important to pay attention to for some people after a loss:

- Where will they stay immediately and going forward?
- Do they have in-person support so they are not alone?
- Do they have access to essentials like clothing, hygiene items, medications, etc?
- Is substance use or disposal of collateral substances owned by the deceased a concern?
- Are there any firearm or weapon storage needs?
- Are specialized cleaning services required?

Each of the areas identified above are known to be common needs that can have a significant impact. It is important to keep these areas of safety in mind to prevent further harm to those impacted by the loss. Not everyone will have each of these needs and the amount of assistance needed will vary by person.

Comfort vs. Support⁴

It can be easy to use the terms “comfort” and “support” interchangeably, but they have very different meanings:



Comfort (without expectation)

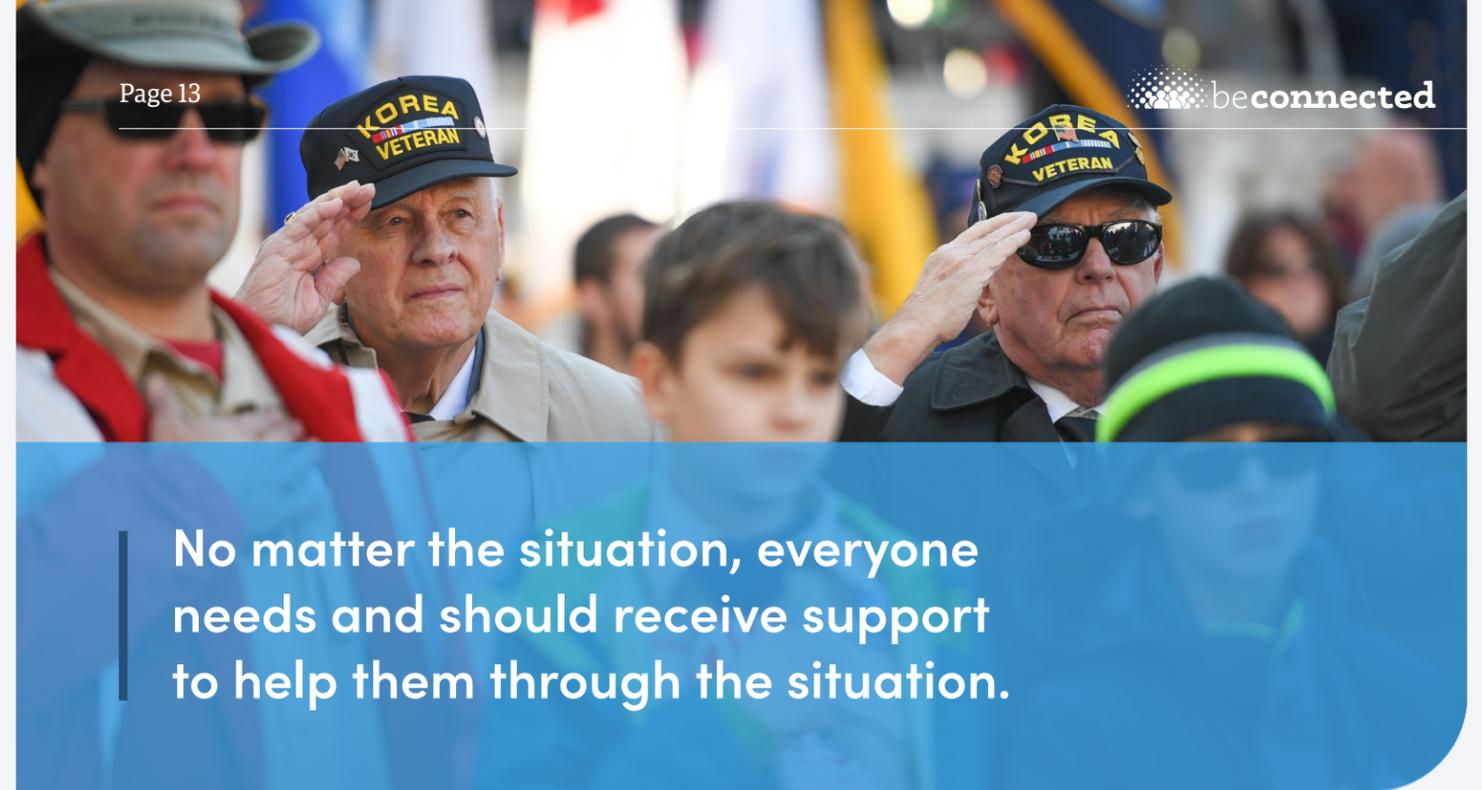
To ease or alleviate a person's feelings of grief or distress.



Support

To bear or hold up (a load, structure, part, etc.); serve as a foundation for.

It's human nature to want to alleviate someone else's pain, but grief does not work that way. There is nothing we can do to take away the pain. Instead, we can acknowledge the pain and help to hold them up. Supporters can be part of their foundation as the surviving family member learns how to carry their grief forward.



No matter the situation, everyone needs and should receive support to help them through the situation.

Everyone Needs (and Could Benefit From) Support

People will be affected in different ways by a loss. Some of the factors can include their proximity to the person lost, background or experience with trauma, coping mechanisms, life circumstances, etc. For instance, two co-workers of a person lost to suicide may experience the loss very differently and not be impacted the same. No matter the situation, everyone needs and should have access to support to help them through the situation. The type of help that may be helpful can differ from person to person and should be tailored to the individual and family.

It's vital to normalize both needing and receiving support. This can:

- Promote help-seeking behaviors.
 - *To encourage people to access support when needed, whether immediately or in the future.*
- Reduce stigma associated with needing and receiving support.
 - *Perceived social support has been shown to have the same positive outcomes as actually receiving the support.⁵*
- Help alleviate the grief and loneliness that accompany suicide by offering social support.
 - *This helps to reduce the risk of suicide in those who have experienced such loss.*



Be Aware of Self-Blame and Grief Shame (to Ourselves and Others)⁴

It is a common experience to wonder what we could have done differently or why we could not prevent the suicide. It is normal to have these thoughts but we need to be conscious of how we speak to ourselves and others to avoid self blame or grief shaming. Grief shaming can happen so easily that we often do not realize we're doing it.

This might take the form of hindsight:

I should have seen this coming.

How could I not know she was struggling?

I should have asked more questions.

I should have reached out.

It can also take the form of minimizing:

A long time has passed, I should feel better.

Why am I so affected by this, I haven't seen or talked to them in years.

It can also take the form of judgment:

I've never seen you cry about this.

It doesn't seem like you care.

I should be more upset about this.

Instead, we should practice being mindful of our communication to avoid grief shaming. We can use affirming messages to empower those experiencing the loss.

Affirming messages to self:

I am so thankful I had them in my life.

No one is responsible, I am not responsible.

Affirming messages to others:

Here are some ways I am available to help. Let me know if any of these would be helpful right now.

I know I can't fix this for you but I am here to listen if you would like to talk or share.

It is understandable to feel however you feel right now.

When you feel alone, please know there are people who care about you.

Our expressions of grief are as unique as we are. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.



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Practical Postvention Help



Each situation is different. Below are some potential areas of practical help that may be relevant in a postvention situation. These lists are provided to help guide support but not dictate what should happen. Not all items are appropriate for all situations and it may vary as to who the surviving family members want support from. It is not appropriate for all people to do all these things with or for surviving family members.

The First 30 Days

A loss by suicide is a traumatic experience and will affect people in different ways. It is important to always prioritize and maintain safety for anyone impacted by the loss. *At any time, if there are concerns about your or another person's safety, call 911 for emergencies or 988, option 1 for crisis support.*

Immediate Family Members

- Ensure their *Safety* (see list in the Safety section on page 12).
- Provide trauma and grief support.
- Identify who to contact for notification and support (this can include family, friends, workplace).
 - Help attend to the physical and emotional needs of any children or youth in the family (The National Grief Center for Children & Families: www.dougy.org/)
- Let them know about Be Connected to access resources and work through barriers to accessing care, support and basic needs. Call 866-429-8387 or complete a referral form and a member of our team will follow up with you: connectveterans.org/postvention
- Identify who to contact to get system support (military, VA, TAPS, tribal resources, crisis and community programs).
- Determine if any actions are needed relating to benefits.
- If needed, facilitate remediation services, such as repair or cleaning of the site, by trained professionals.
- Determine if there are any needs for financial assistance.
 - Burial
 - For VA burial benefits, visit: www.va.gov/burials-memorials/
 - For state burial benefits, visit: dvs.az.gov/services/cemeteries
 - Hotel vouchers
- Facilitate access to bank accounts/finances. For example, a surviving spouse may not be familiar with handling finances, or accounts may only be in the decedent's name.

- Identify available counseling services for the family.
- Arrange for safe removal of any collateral substances in the home from the deceased.
- Arrange for childcare or pet care.
- Are there practical needs that the community can help fulfill?
 - Home care
 - Maintenance
 - Meals
 - Childcare
 - Transportation
 - Pet care
- Engage the faith community, if applicable to the family's situation.
- Does the family member grant permission for gatherings (e.g. a memorial gathering at a workplace or community organization)?
 - Help them navigate through the community support process.
 - Inform them that Be Connected team members can come out and interact with attendees to inform them of available resources.
- Be aware of any cultural traditions or beliefs around death and suicide so those can be accommodated as support is provided.

Community Members and Organizations

- Ensure *Safety* (see list in the Safety section on page 12).
- Access trauma and grief support.
- Contact Be Connected for postvention support for individuals, organizations, and communities.
- Decrease stigma around requesting help, and increase awareness of available assistance.
- Ensure community members and providers (e.g. emergency response, healthcare, mental health, social services, etc.) have continued support to address potential ongoing exposure.
- Be aware of media/social media and provide support to the family to manage if needed.
- Reinforce safe messaging around suicide (<https://sprc.org/keys-to-success/safe-and-effective-messaging-and-reporting/>)

The Future (30 Days to Lifespan)

A loss by suicide is a traumatic experience that can have long lasting effects. It is important to prioritize and maintain safety and support for anyone impacted by the loss over time.

Immediate Family Members

- Dispersal of personal effects, assistance with sorting or donation if/when requested by survivors.
- Unwanted item removal services.
- Long-term financial planning (e.g., accessing insurance, employment, getting benefits in place, etc.).
- Long-term grief support, especially around anniversaries, holidays, and other important dates.

Community Members and Organizations

- Long-term grief support, especially around anniversaries, holidays, and other important dates.
- Ongoing focus on postvention and prevention (e.g., training and equipping community members).

For direct links to organizations and resources visit:

www.ConnectVeterans.org/postvention

If there are concerns about your or another person's safety, call 911 for emergencies or 988, option 1 for crisis support.

Self and Community Care for Helpers



The military and veteran community is made up of thousands of people who naturally take on a helper role in their community in one way or another. Traumatic incidents like suicide loss can take a tremendous toll on helpers, especially with multiple exposures over time. This exposure may increase the helper's risk of having suicidal thoughts.

Self and Community Care is Essential for Helpers

Self-Care Ideas



Normalize the discussion of suicide and attempts with colleagues to make space for conversations in the future.



Take care of yourself with nutrition, movement, etc.



Get outdoors when you can.



Talk to a trusted friend.



Seek counseling or other support.



Practice mindfulness and breathing techniques:

- VA Mindfulness Coach App: mobile.va.gov/app/mindfulness-coach
- NSDR (Non-Sleep Deep Rest): www.NSDR.co
- Mindful (A Guide to Practicing Self-Care with Mindfulness): www.mindful.org/a-guide-to-practicing-self-care-with-mindfulness/
- Use self-care apps such as Headspace, Calm, and 5 Minute Journal.
- Use Insight Timer or other mindfulness apps featuring community connection.

Community Care Ideas



Take the time to acknowledge the challenges and support each other.



Participate in community events (car shows, street fairs, park gatherings, meetups, etc.).

Support Options for Helpers

If you need additional support as a helper, consider if these options are available to you:

- Employee Assistance Program if one is offered by your workplace.
- VA or Vet Centers for mental health services.
- Tribal resources.
- Community-based provider through insurance.
- Faith-based counseling services.
- Support groups (faith-based or community-based).
- Online support programs (e.g., apps, websites, texting, etc.).



How Be Connected Can Help



Be Connected operates statewide throughout Arizona and focuses on and engages:



Be Connected Postvention is here to support individuals, organizations, and communities when a suicide loss or attempt has occurred. Be Connected extends support and serves to connect people to the many resources available.



Use the QR code to visit the Be Connected Postvention Landing Page for more information and a link to the referral form.



Be Connected Postvention Support for Individuals

This support can be for anyone affected by a suicide loss, including family members, friends, coworkers, providers, community members, etc. Different people may be affected in different ways by a loss. Proximity, relationship, and perceived psychological closeness can all contribute to the impact of a loss.

- Postvention care navigation can create a care plan and identify resources for immediate and ongoing support. This can include federal (VA, DoD), state, and community resources (TAPS, support groups).
- Assistance with care navigation to connect to resources and work through barriers to accessing care, support, and needs.
- To access support, call 866-429-8387 or complete a referral form and a member of our team will follow up with you: connectveterans.org/postvention



Be Connected Postvention Support for Organizations and Communities

Be Connected provides:

- Help to engage support resources after a loss has occurred. For example, a Veteran Service Organization (VSO) experiences a loss by suicide and wants to bring together members to provide support. Be Connected postvention can engage partners to attend that convening, such as a mobile crisis team, VA personnel, clinicians, etc., to ensure the needed support is on hand.
- Information, training, and guidance on how to respond so the organization or community has the tools and support needed following the loss.
- Consultation on equipping the organization or community to focus on prevention going forward.
- Connection to the VA Suicide Risk Management (SRM) Consultation Program (www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/consult/index.asp). SRM provides free suicide prevention and postvention consultation, support, and resources to VA and community providers or agencies serving veterans.



Following an Attempted Suicide





Following an Attempted Suicide

Attempted suicides can bring about a wide range of emotions for the individual making the attempt and those around them.^{6,7} Families and friends often provide a safety net and help instill a sense of hope for the individual who attempted suicide. Therefore, it may be beneficial for family and friends to seek support for themselves and to help provide a better environment for the individual to recover.^{6,8} It is important to remember that recovery is a process that can vary in length depending on the individual, **and those around them**, and that the first 30 days can be especially crucial.^{6,7}

The First 30 Days Post Attempt

Individual

- Ensure *Safety* (see list in the Safety section on page 12).
- Identify who to contact for notification and support (this can include family, friends, providers, workplace).
- Are there practical needs the family and community can help fulfill?
 - Home care
 - Maintenance
 - Meals
 - Childcare
 - Transportation
 - Pet care - especially if their owner requires hospitalization

Immediate Family Members

- Ensure their *Safety* (see list in the Safety section on page 12).
- Provide emotional and social support.
- Consider how to provide age appropriate support to any children in the family (How to Talk to a Child about a Suicide Attempt in Your Family: www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/talk2kids/)
- Consider safety planning for family members.
- Provide care transition support.
- Are there practical needs that the community can help fulfill?
 - Home care
 - Maintenance
 - Meals
 - Childcare
 - Transportation
- Use affirming communication (see list in the Be Aware of Grief Shaming section on page 14).
- Are there contacts who need to be informed?

Community Members and Organizations

- Ensure *Safety* (see list in the Safety section on page 12).
- Contact Be Connected for resources and support.
- Use affirming communication (see list in the Be Aware of Grief Shaming section on page 14).
- Provide support to those affected by the attempt, including community members, coworkers, first responders, etc.



The Future (30 Days to Lifespan)

Individual

- What are their ongoing needs for support?
- Do they have any other practical needs?
- Contact Be Connected for resources and support.

Immediate Family Members

- Provide ongoing emotional and social support.
- Contact Be Connected for resources and support.

Community Members and Organizations

- Contact Be Connected for resources and support.
- Provide support to those affected by the attempt, including community members, coworkers, first responders, etc.

Resources & References



Resources

These are some of the resources available to survivors of suicide loss and suicide attempts. There are many additional resources that may be helpful at the federal, tribal, state, and community level as well and many of these resources can help guide you to other available supports for your area and situation.

988

Anyone can call 988 for crisis and emotional support. Press option 1 to reach the National Veterans Crisis Line.

Grief Counseling and Support Groups

Available services and groups will vary by geographic area. Be Connected can help you locate online services or in-person options in your area.

TAPS (Tragedy Assistance for Survivors Program)

The TAPS 24/7 phone number (800-959-TAPS) connects a loss survivor to options for accessing TAPS resources like hotel vouchers, biohazard cleanup, loss survivor support groups, etc.

VA Office of Survivor Assistance

This office is a resource regarding all benefits and services furnished by the Department to Survivors and Dependents of deceased Veterans and members of the Armed Forces (www.VA.gov/survivors/).

VA Bereavement Counseling

Family members may be eligible for VA Vet Center grief counseling (www.VetCenter.VA.gov/).

Be Connected

The Be Connected team is here to connect anyone to resources, including Be Connected programs and a network of thousands of resources across Arizona. Call 866-429-8387 or visit: www.ConnectVeterans.org/postvention

Acknowledgements

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Thank you to the many members of the Arizona Suicide Mortality Review and Postvention workgroup for contributing to this guide and the overall process for extending stronger, more coordinated postvention support to our community statewide. The strong and sustained collaboration of our public and private sector partners is a testament to your collective commitment to improving the lives of our service members, veterans, and their families.

Thank you to the partners of the Arizona Coalition for Military Families and Be Connected, who consistently demonstrate what it means to collaborate in order to have collective impact.

Thank you to the Arizona State University College of Health Solutions Be Connected data and evaluation team for their efforts toward the development of the content and draft of this guide.

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