

## Healing....In the Aftermath of a Suicide

Nothing is as hard to understand as when someone makes the decision to stop living. While the pain and suffering of the person who dies by suicide has ended, it has increased many times over for those who grieve the death.

Those who grieve are often referred to as survivors. Whether you are grieving the death by suicide of a relative or friend, or know someone who is a survivor, the following information is important.

Upon hearing of the suicidal death of a relative or friend, many survivors report feeling numb and confused, almost like everything had just been turned upside down and inside out. Over the next few hours, days, weeks and months, they experienced other feelings such as intense anger, disorientation, rage, fear, guilt and anxiety. Loss of appetite, sleep disturbances and periods of "unreality" are common. There can be periods when survivors blame themselves or others for the suicide. For the most part, these experiences are very normal reactions to an abnormal event. While it is normal to blame oneself or others, it is important to recognize that neither you nor others are at fault. The person who died by suicide made the decision to do so.

If you are supporting someone else who is grieving a suicidal death, keep the following in mind:

- Give lots of support to those who are grieving a suicidal death, as you would those who grieve death by other causes.
- Be available to listen. Often those bereaved need to discuss the suicidal death. Recognize that they will struggle with the question of "WHY" for a long time. Do not offer ready made or pat answers in order to alleviate their feelings. They do not help in the short or long term.
- Recognize that those who are bereaved may display intense feelings of anger, guilt, anguish, fear, sadness, etc. You cannot, and should not, make these feelings go away. Think of it as a storm. It will become quite turbulent, but with lots of support people ride out their feelings. Attempting to block or avoid these feelings keeps people from moving out of the storm as soon as they might otherwise.
- Do not offer alcohol or drugs as a means of reducing their grief. They numb feelings which need to be expressed, and complicate the grieving process.
- Recognize your own feelings. In supporting others you will also need someone to talk to about your own feelings.
- Individuals who are grieving any death need support after the initial aftermath of the death. Many survivors report that generally friends and relatives were great during the time around the funeral, but stopped coming around after a few months. Sometimes, this can be taken as evidence that you do, in fact, blame them for the suicide. Apart from the intense emotional times during the funeral, there can be periods which are particularly difficult over the next few years (i.e. birthdays, anniversary of death, etc.)

(Source: [www.suicideprevention.ca/CASP/healing.html](http://www.suicideprevention.ca/CASP/healing.html))

The following suggestions are directed towards survivors and are provided by Iris Bolton, author of *My Son....My Son...A Guide to Healing after Death. Loss and Suicide*.

1. Know you can survive. You may not think so, but you can.
2. Struggle with "why" it happened until you no longer need to know "why", or until you are satisfied with partial answers.
3. Know you may feel overwhelmed by the intensity of the feelings, but all your feelings will be normal.
4. Anger, guilt, confusion, forgetfulness are common responses. You are not crazy – you are in mourning.
5. Be aware you may feel appropriate anger at the person, at the world, at God, at yourself.
6. You may feel guilty for what you think you did or did not do.
7. Having suicidal thoughts is common. It does not mean you will act on these thoughts.
8. Remember to take one moment or day at a time.
9. Find a good listener with whom to share. Call someone.
10. Don't be afraid to cry. Tears are healing.
11. Give yourself time to heal.
12. Remember, the choice was not yours. No one is the sole influence in another's life.
13. Expect setbacks. Don't panic if emotions return like a tidal wave. You may only be experiencing a remnant of grief.
14. Try to put off major decisions.
15. Give yourself permission to get professional help.
16. Be aware of the pain of your family and friends.
17. Be patient with yourself and with others.
18. Set your own limits and learn to say no.
19. Steer clear of people who want to tell you what or how to feel.
20. Know that there are support groups that can be helpful, such as Compassionate Friends, or Survivor of Suicide Groups. If not, ask a profession to help start one.
21. Call on your personal faith to help you through.
22. It is common to experience physical reactions to your grief, i.e. headaches, loss of appetite, inability to sleep, etc.
23. The willingness to laugh with others and at yourself is healing.
24. Wear out your questions, anger, guilt, or other feelings until you can let go of them.
25. Know that you will never be the same again, but you can survive and go beyond just surviving.....

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