

# Support for People Living with Suicide Loss

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If you are very new to the tragedy of suicide loss, despair may be your companion. We hope you find some time to rest your burden and share it with those of us who need no explanation. You are not alone. The fact that someone died by suicide does not diminish our love for them, their value, the contribution they made to our families and communities and our right and need to celebrate and honour their lives and accomplishments. It is how a person lived, not how they died, that defines someone.

People who are impacted by suicide loss are the most courageous people we know. Be well, be peaceful, be hopeful.

## Normal Reactions to Suicide Loss

### Shock and Numbness

Suicide bereavement is one of the most intensely painful experiences you are likely to undergo. The pain may be so overwhelming initially, that your natural defence mechanism shuts down. At some point the numbness leaves and you will need to go through the pain that is buried.

### Deep Sadness

Deep sadness is normal. Other common feelings experienced may include helplessness, hopelessness, fear, failure, anxiety, depression, rejection, and abandonment.

### Anger and Blame

Anger and blame may be directed towards those you perceive to have been at fault. These may include doctors, counselors, friends, family, yourself or even the person that died.

### Guilt

Survivors of suicide often feel they missed or ignored earlier warning signs of distress. Hindsight plays a role in this. Others may have decided to give up trying to help as they needed distance to keep themselves healthy.

### Shame

It may be difficult to discuss the cause of death for fear of being judged. Rather than telling stories, it is okay to say you are not ready to talk about the loss. Some people continue to believe the myth that all people who die by suicide are either mentally ill or come from dysfunctional families. Others who care

may stay away as they do not know what to say or how to be helpful. Let friends and family know what you need from them.

## Relief

You may feel relief after a suicide, especially when the relationship with the deceased has been difficult and chaotic or if you have watched the person suffer for a long time.

## Denial

You may not fully accept the reality of the suicide. You may move in and out of denial. This is especially common in the beginning of grief.

## Why Questions

“Why” questions over and over in an effort to understand the reason your loved one died by suicide is a normal part of the healing process. With suicide, even when people think they have touched upon the answer – the “Why” question continues to surface.

## Fear

You may fear that other family members or friends will die. Loss of self-esteem and confidence in problem solving or decision-making is normal.

## Depression

The world as you knew it changed the moment your loved one died. Grief impacts everything including sleep patterns, eating habits, concentration, energy levels and motivation.

## Spiritual or Religious Beliefs

Spiritual beliefs and values previously held may be challenged. You may question the meaning or purpose of life. Fear of rejection by your religious community can also be a factor.

## Thinking About Suicide

Due to the intensity of the grief process, some people just want the pain to end and begin to experience suicide related thoughts. Having these thoughts is common and does not mean you will act on them. However, it is important to seek help and have an assessment completed regarding these thoughts and feelings.

## Reaching Out

If you feel you need more support than family or friends can provide, contact your doctor or counseling agency in your area. Other resources include Canadian Mental Health Associations, spiritual community, bereavement support group, crisis line and Provincial, Territorial or Regional Distress or Suicide Line.

## Coping Strategies for Living with Suicide Grief

### Claim your right to grieve

Not only is it important to grieve, it is necessary to experience the pain of the suicide loss in order to gain relief. Remember the grief process takes a long time and may never be fully resolved.

### Express Emotions

Grief is emotional. It is a natural response to a traumatic loss. Make time to grieve. Let people you trust know when you need support. Teach others how they can be helpful. Most people will not automatically know what you need. Talk to others who have experienced a loss by suicide.

### Actions

Doing something active rather than just thinking to resolve emotions is healthy. Examples include, journaling, writing letters, walking, and exercising.

[www.suicideprevention.ca](http://www.suicideprevention.ca)