



Coping After a Suicide

Grief after a Suicide

If you've just picked up or been handed this information sheet, our sympathies are with you and your loved ones. While no one can tell you how to feel, the loss of a loved one by suicide is often shocking, painful and unexpected. The grief that accompanies loss can be intense, complex and long term.

This information is designed to help you understand both the grieving process as well as some of the emotions that you may be experiencing.

Grieving is a unique process which each person will experience in his or her own way and at his or her own pace. There is no standard time frame for the grief process. It generally does not follow a linear path, and may not always move in a forward direction. Life for survivors will be different.

At first, and periodically during the following days and months of grieving, survivors may feel overwhelmed by their emotions. These feelings are normal reactions and the expression of them is a natural part of grieving. Crying is the expression of sadness; a natural reaction after the loss of a loved one.

Common emotions experienced in grief are:

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|-------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Abandonment | Depression | Hopelessness | Sadness |
| Anger | Despair | Loneliness | Self-blame |
| Anxiety | Disbelief | Numbness | Shame |
| Confusion | Guilt | Pain | Shock |
| Denial | Helplessness | Rejection | Stress |

Coping Suggestions

While each person's grief is unique, we have compiled a list of coping suggestions for you based on the experiences of other people who have lost a loved one to suicide.

1. Take things one day at a time.
2. Know you can survive; you may not think so, but you can.
3. Consider getting professional help.
4. It is okay to not understand "why" it happened; suicide may be difficult to understand and we often are left with unanswered questions.
5. Know you may feel overwhelmed by the intensity of your feelings but that all your feelings are normal.

6. Contact a support group or organization for survivors such as TAPS. TAPS is the 24/7 tragedy assistance resource for anyone who has suffered the loss of a military loved one. Their toll-free hotline number is 1-800-959-TAPS (8277).
7. Find a good listener with whom to share. Call someone if you need to talk.
8. Don't be afraid to cry. Tears are healing.
9. Give yourself time to heal.
10. Remember, the choice was not yours. No one is the sole influence on another's life.
11. Expect setbacks. If emotions return like a tidal wave, you may only be experiencing a remnant of grief, an unfinished piece.
12. If possible, delay major decisions.
13. Be aware of the pain your family and friends may be feeling too. Talking about the person and grieving together can be healing.
14. Be patient with yourself and others who may not understand.
15. Set limits and learn to say no.
16. Avoid people who want to tell you what or how to feel.
17. Call on your personal faith to help you through.
18. It is common to experience physical reaction to your grief, e.g. headaches, loss of appetite, inability to sleep.
19. It is okay to laugh; it may even be healing.
20. Accept your questions, anger, guilt or other feelings until you can let them go.
21. Letting go doesn't mean forgetting.
22. Know that you will never be the same again, but that you can survive and even go beyond just surviving.

Information in this flyer has been adapted from the American Association of Suicidology and *Beyond Surviving: Suggestions for Survivors* by Iris M. Bolton.

You are not alone. Visit the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE) Outreach Center at www.dcoe.health.mil/24-7help.aspx or contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-8255**, and press 1. You can also take a self-assessment at www.suicideoutreach.org.