

Coping with Suicide Grief

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Now what?

When a loved one dies by suicide, emotions can be overwhelming and devastating. On top of the natural grief, you may be dealing with the stigma associated with suicide and experiencing other emotions such as guilt - “Could I have done something more to prevent this?” or even anger - “How could they do this to us?”

No two people will grieve the same way, for the same amount of time. Using healthy coping strategies can begin your journey to healing and acceptance.

Prepare for Powerful Emotions

You might continue to experience intense reactions during the weeks and months after your loved one’s suicide, especially if you witnessed or discovered the suicide. These reactions are normal. Just remember that you do not have to go through this alone.

- **Shock:** You may initially deny the reality of your loved one’s death and disbelief or emotional numbness may set in.
- **Anger:** You may feel anger towards your loved one for leaving you and their family behind. You may also be angry at yourself or others for “missing” the clues of suicidal intentions.
- **Guilt:** You may fall into the “what if” trap, asking yourself if you could have done something different and blaming yourself for the outcome.
- **Despair:** You may experience extreme sadness, loneliness, or helplessness.
- **Rejection:** You may wonder why your relationship wasn’t enough to keep your loved one from dying by suicide.
- **Confusion:** Many people try to make sense of the suicide or try to understand “why.” **However, you may have to accept that those questions may stay unanswered.**

Adopt Health Coping Strategies

- **Keep in touch:** Reach out to friends and family. Surround yourself with people who are willing to listen and offer comfort.
- **Grieve in your own way:** There is no “right” way to grieve, so find healthy ways to cope that work for you.
- **Be prepared for reminders:** Anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays can be painful reminders of your loved one. Don’t feel bad about mourning those days or needing to change traditions that are too painful to continue.
- **Don’t rush yourself:** Your healing must occur at your own pace. Don’t be hurried by others expectations for you to “move on.”
- **Expect setbacks:** Some days will be better than others and that is okay. Healing is not linear.
- **Consider support groups:** Sharing your story with others going through similar experiences may help you find a sense of peace or strength.

Facing the Future

In the aftermath of a loved one’s death, facing the future may seem scary. You may feel that you don’t want to go on or that life won’t be enjoyable. Reminders may trigger painful feelings, even years later. However, the intensity of the grief will ease. By adopting healthy coping strategies, you will begin to heal, while still honoring the memory of your loved one.

Know When to Seek Help

If you are experiencing extreme and constant emotional pain or physical problems, please reach out to your doctor or a mental health care provider. Seeking professional help is very important, especially if you find yourself having recurring suicidal thoughts. **Seeking help is not a sign of weakness.**

Sources: *Suicide Awareness Voices of Education*
Mayo Clinic, Suicide Grief

Contact Us

24-hour Hotline | 330.376.0040
24-hour Chat | victimassistanceprogram.org

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