

Coping with suicide



Suicide brings with it a number of extremely intense and varying emotions by all that it touches. Reactions range from feelings of anger and sadness to feelings of guilt and failure on the part of the living. Often times, survivors of suicide feel responsible and blame themselves for not being more attuned to the deceased's need for help.

The following is a list of emotions that are evoked by suicide:

Denial: When tragedy strikes, denial is typically the first emotion experienced. Survivors may be in disbelief or feel as though they are in a nightmare.

Shock: People in a state of shock may appear unresponsive or unable to focus. This can be expected, since shock can serve as a protective shield when dealing with tragedy. It is an interruption, or numbing, of normal feelings, actions, and reactions that allow the person experiencing it time to process the event.

Guilt: After a suicide, many people feel a sense of guilt, believing that they could have done something to prevent the death.

Failure: Survivors of suicide may feel responsible or as though they failed the deceased in some way. Survivors may fixate on arguments or negative interactions that occurred, believing that those events were the cause for the suicide. In most instances, there are many stressors that contribute to a person's decision to die by suicide.

Instigating an argument prior to death can be a way for the person to distance him or herself from those with whom they were close.

Anger: Feeling angry after a suicide is common and such anger can be projected at objects, strangers, friends, and family members.

Disillusionment: Sometimes, after a suicide, activities and events that used to bring people together lose their desirability. Sometimes, religious people question their faith in a god who would let such a tragedy touch their lives.

Depression: Deep sadness and prolonged feelings of helplessness and apathy are common to close friends and family members of the deceased. They may threaten to harm themselves following a suicide if support and resources are not accessible.

After a suicide, it is often difficult for survivors to resume their normal lives and ability to function. The following can be helpful in normalizing feelings about the suicide and in progressing through the grief process.

- Know that you can survive.
- Be aware that you may feel angry at the person, at God, and at the world. Know that these feelings are normal and okay to express.
- Take it one moment or one day at a time.
- Remember that regardless of the situation, you did not cause the suicide to happen.
- Try to put off major decisions until you can think more clearly.
- Be aware of the pain that family and friends may be feeling as well.
- Be patient with others who may not understand what you are feeling.
- Keep a healthy distance from those who want to give you advice or tell you how to feel.
- Allow yourself to laugh with others and at yourself when something is funny.
- Letting go does not mean forgetting.
- Avoid isolation. Unfortunately, grieving a suicide is often lonely because others are unsure of what to say or how to respond. Reaching out to friends and looking into survivor support groups can be helpful.
- Expect difficult times. The emotions that suicide evokes can be overwhelming, especially in the first few months following the death. Recognize that there will be times of great sadness and plan ahead for positive ways to cope with difficult feelings when they arise. Make a list of things you like to do: ride a bike, listen to music, take a walk, garden, etc.
- Use your Employee Assistance Program and the benefits that are available to you. EAP Counselors are available 24/7.
- Remember to take care of your needs and the needs of other family members. It is okay to find joy in interactions with friends and family members following a suicide.

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Access your EAP 24/7 by phone or web.

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