

SURVIVING LOSS BY SUICIDE

Helpful tips for loved ones

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Self care articles for the bereaved

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Suicide has always been a sensitive subject to talk about. Families who have lost a loved one to suicide are often left with many lingering thoughts and feelings that are also hard to share.

Evidence indicates that the rate of suicide may be greatly increased because of Covid. Now is a good time to share some thoughts about suicide and how best to support families.

What is the “correct” way to say that a loved one died by killing themselves?

There are many ways that society describes this type of loss.

- ✓ “He/she completed suicide.”
- ✓ “He/She committed suicide.”
- ✓ “He/She took their own life.”

No matter how we say what has happened, losing a loved one to suicide causes complicated emotions and a lot of confusion. A common statement that I hear from families is:

- ✓ “I just don’t know why this happened.”
- ✓ “How did I not see this coming?”
- ✓ “What could I have done differently?”

It is common for families to feel as though they or their loved one are being judged, or that their loss is dismissible, after all, they took their own life.

Sometimes families feel that the world is judging them and their loved one. I don’t know if I can say that this is a result of what we might have heard, or how previous generations hid a family secret involving suicide, or what might have been seen on TV or social media, but I believe that the people who care about us do not judge our loved one or the way s/he died.

Families tend to think that hiding the manner of death will spare the judgement. My advice to families is, it is better to not hide the manner of death with the people closest to you. It will be one more facet that might be added to an already exceedingly difficult grief journey.

Knowing how a loved one has died and not coming right out and letting people know can cause the unnecessary burden of keeping that information from family and friends. With that may come fear that people will find out.

The best advice that I can give is to be honest by telling people how a loved one has died. Details are not necessary. It will not matter to the people who really care.

A second thought is that it does not make a person a bad person if they killed themselves. It does not make a person a “sick” person if they killed themselves. It does not make a person less loved or less special or any less of all the wonderful ways that they have been a part of a loved one’s life. People who have lost a loved one to suicide are not deserving of less support because a loved one took their own life. What matters is that they have lost a loved one and must now find a way to navigate a world without them. No matter the manner or cause of death, grief spares no one. No matter what a family decides in telling the cause of death, it is their decision and it will be honored and respected!

Here is some information that I share with my families; you are welcome to use it however you choose:

- ◇ If you’ve lost a loved one to suicide, once you move past disclosing the truth—if that is what you’ve chosen—I am confident that you will find those people in your life who can and will support you. This is not to say that there will not be cruel people along the way. Those same cruel people will be few, and they are the same people who judge others no matter what. The one thing that breaks my heart is hearing a bereaved loved one talk about

how they receive cruel remarks on social media. Sadly, cruel remarks are not exclusive to suicide. Cruel people can come up with cruel remarks for any reason. Please disregard them as best you can and focus on taking care of you, even if that means you must avoid social media for a while.

- ◇ Finding a support group that is specific for suicide will be the most helpful. If one isn’t available in your community, consider joining a general grief group.
- ◇ Seek help from a trained professional, preferably one who specializes in grief. Many hospices offer support for anyone. You do not have to have used hospice services to access the support that they provide.
- ◇ Look for a book on loss to suicide or seek out an online group. It is certainly worth a try. If something does not work for you, you can try again another time.
- ◇ You are worthy of support. Your loved one’s memory is worthy of honor. You have lost a loved one to death. All our loved ones die for one reason or another—the end result is the same. Grief follows all loss.

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW NEEDS MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SUICIDE, PLEASE SEEK OUT SUPPORT:

- ✓ Suicide hotline: 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433) or 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)
- ✓ National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- ✓ American Foundation for Suicide Prevention afsp.org
- ✓ American Association of Suicidology: Directory of Support Groups suicidology.org/suicide-survivors/sos-directory
- ✓ Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide sptsusa.org