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The death of someone close to us is one of life's most stressful events. When the death is from suicide, family and friends must cope with sadness at the loss plus all their feelings of confusion and sometimes even anger. It takes time to heal and each of us responds differently. We may need help to cope with the changes in our lives. But in the end, coping effectively with bereavement is vital to our mental health.

If someone close to you has just committed suicide, we hope this pamphlet will help you understand that you are not alone in your struggle and that help is available. If you have a grieving friend or relative, this pamphlet may help both of you understand and cope with this difficult time

HOW COMMON IS SUICIDE?

At least one out of four people knows someone who has committed suicide. The deceased leaves behind a network of family and close friends who must cope with the same inner turmoil that you are probably trying to understand and cope with now.

AM I TO BLAME? COULD I HAVE HELPED?

No, you are not to blame. After a suicide, family members and friends often go over the pre-death circumstances and events, blaming themselves for things they think they should or could not have done "If only I had persuaded him to get help!" or "If only I hadn't told her I wanted a separation..."

Even though suicide is an individual decision, it is a very natural and common reaction for survivors to feel guilt or responsibility. People who are left behind should seek out bereavement counseling our support groups to help relieve this feeling of responsibility.



GRIEF AFTER SUICIDE



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WHAT ARE THE STAGES OF GRIEVING?

There are many different stages of grieving. The three stages outlined below are ones which most people will experience. However, people do not usually flow from the first stage through to the last in a logical order. Some people may jump back and forth between stages, and the length of time it takes to go through the different stages may vary.

Stage I - Numbness or Shock

Initially, people function almost mechanically. You may also feel anger, confusion or even relief depending on the circumstances. These feelings are normal. Many people at this stage will keep an emotional distance from others to protect themselves and to avoid discussing the death.

Stage 2- Disorganization

It is normal to feel lonely, depressed and tearful at this point. You may have problems sleeping or eating. Some people may feel sorry for themselves and even hallucinate. You may agonize over things you think you could have done for the deceased. At this stage, you may need to reach out to someone and discuss your feelings.

Stage 3- Re-organization

You will begin to feel more comfortable and may find that there are moments in your day when you do not think about your loss. Your feelings will not be as intense and you will be able to focus on daily tasks. At this point, most people need encouragement to re-enter life's mainstream.

But remember, there is hope and help. You may never get over the death itself, but you will overcome the grief.

IS ANGER OR RELIEF A NATURAL REACTION?

While all kinds of loss are painful, the issues are different when dealing with a death by suicide. The length of time it takes to work through the stages of grief also varies depending on the circumstances.

Feelings of anger, confusion and relief are natural. Do not deny them. If the deceased person had been depressed and/or had previously attempted suicide, there is nothing wrong in feeling relieved that the burden is gone or that you are angry because you have another burden to carry.

If you do not work through these feelings you will prevent yourself from moving forward in the bereavement process. Not moving forward is dangerous; it can cause mental and physical illness and can tear families and friendships apart. It can stop people from coming to terms with the suicide. You must face your feelings before you can work them out.

HOW DOES SUICIDE AFFECT THE FAMILY?

It is important to realize that not all members of the family will grieve in the same way or go through the same stages at the same time. Every family member needs room and understanding to go through the bereavement process in his/her own way.

Be honest with children about the cause of death. Otherwise they will go through the grieving process again when they learn the truth. Be careful not to ignore or forget the grief experienced by children. They need help dealing with it but should not be protected from it.

HOW WILL MY FRIENDS REACT?

Friends are well meaning. They want to give support and help but they may not know how. They may be afraid that they will overwhelm you or think that you want to be alone.

Guide them. Tell your friends that you want and need to talk about your loss. By opening up, you will help yourself and help your friends help you. People who talk out their feelings are usually the people who recover most quickly from a loss by suicide.

If your friends seem uncomfortable talking about the death or even being with you, it may be a reaction to your discomfort. If you are uncomfortable talking about the circumstances, try not to be. Let others simply respond to the death of your loved one.

DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?

If you are bereaved and feel you need more assistance than friends and family can provide contact a community organization such as the Canadian Mental Health Association.

The Canadian Mental Health Association is a national voluntary association that exists to promote the mental health of all people. CMHA believes that everyone should have choices so that, when they need to, they can reach out to family, friends, formal services, self-help groups or community-based organizations.

You can also contact Victim Services for additional support, information and referral.
