

Suicide Grief

Hundreds of books have been written about loss and grief, but few address the aftermath of suicide. While there are no set “answers” you may find the following suggestions helpful in dealing with your grief. They come from people who have grieved a suicide death; who have lived through and beyond the event.

- Know you can survive. You may not think so right now, but you can.
- Struggle with “why” it happened until you no longer need to know “why”, or until you can live with partial answers.
- Know your feelings are normal and that you will probably be overwhelmed by their intensity.
- Anger, guilt, confusion, forgetfulness are common responses. You are not crazy; you are in mourning.
- Be aware you may feel anger at the person, at the world, at God, at yourself. This is to be expected and it is important to express it in healthy ways.
- You may feel guilty for what you think you did or did not do.
- In trying to make sense of this death you may find yourself and others looking for something or someone to blame.
- It is not unusual to feel that life is not worth living or that you wish you could die. This does not mean that you will act on those thoughts.
- Don’t be afraid to cry. Tears are healing.
- Remember to take one moment, one day, one step at a time.
- Find a good listener with whom to share your thoughts and feelings. Call someone if you need to talk.
- Remember, the choice of suicide was not yours. No one person is the sole influence in another’s life.
- Expect setbacks. Your grief may come upon you like a tidal wave: the emotion can come and go. There will be unfinished pieces that arise and need to be dealt with.
- Try to put off major changes until you feel better able to make decisions.
- Give yourself permission to get professional help.
- Be aware of, but not responsible for, the pain of your family and friends.
- Be patient with yourself and with others who may not understand.
- Set your own limits and learn to say “No”.
- Steer clear of people who want to tell you what or how to feel.
- Call on your personal beliefs and meaning to help you through this difficult time.
- The willingness to laugh with others and at yourself are healing.
- Wear out your questions and feelings until you can let them go. Letting go doesn’t mean forgetting.

Working Towards Recovery

Grieving a suicide death is one of the most difficult challenges you will ever face. This is a time of pain and confusion and it is important that you find things that will help you work through your grief. Here are some suggestions that may be helpful. Remember each person is different and has different needs.

- Deal with the facts of the suicide as soon as you are able to. Make sure you get clear information. This can relieve your doubts and help you to face the truth.
- Lean into the grief. You can't go around it, over it or under it. You have to go through it to survive and begin healing.
- Don't be afraid to use the word "suicide". It may take some time, but keep practicing.
- Thinking that you are going crazy does not make it so. Most grieving people experience this. Feeling scattered and overwhelmed is a natural reaction to this devastating loss.
- Your emotions will often be raw and need to be expressed. If you don't, they will come out some other time, some other way. In the long run, being "brave" and keeping your emotions locked up inside is more difficult than getting upset.
- Acknowledge any feelings of guilt. It is natural to blame yourself, but remember, the actions of another are beyond your control. Persistent self blame can become self damaging.
- You may feel angry at the person who died, at yourself, at others, at God. It is important to express your anger in some way: e.g., do physical activity such as running, swimming, and walking; keep a journal.
- Be careful in your use of either alcohol or prescription drugs. Tranquilizers don't end the pain, they only mask it.
- It is important to create balance in how you spend your time, e.g. time with others, time for activities, and time to be alone.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it. If relatives and friends are not able to handle your grief, find people who can or call your local crisis line.
- If you find yourself comparing your grief with that of others, remember no two people grieve in the same way.
- Seek out a suicide support group or a professional grief counsellor. Both individuals and groups can provide understanding and support.
- Allow your pets to be a source of comfort. Animals are not judgmental; they need your care and are there when people are unable to be.

Remember suicide was not your choice. You do have the choice to survive and work through it. Take each step, each moment as it comes.

**Greater Victoria Police Victim Services
250-995-7351**