

sosad

Save our Sons and Daughters

Suicide

Bereavement

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Ceannaire Comhártaíochta Lú
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Introduction;

When a person close to you dies the effects on your emotions and your own life can be devastating. Every single person deals with their grief in their own way but after the loss of a loved one they can experience some or all of the following emotions; shock, denial, anger, guilt (unrealistic guilt or realistic guilt), bewilderment, depression and fear. Unexpected or sudden deaths can trigger other different and strange emotions. Suicides are often unexpected and sudden and can trigger emotions such as blame, shame and rejection. These are all natural reactions and happen to everyone after a suicide, to various degrees, because we are all different and have different coping mechanisms.

Grief is a normal and natural response to loss. It is the emotional pain you feel when someone you cared about dies. Grieving is both a personal and individual process. There is no time limit to grieving and everybody grieves differently even if they are grieving for the same person. Just as your relationship with the person that died was unique so is the grieving process you will go through.

'As each one of us grows older, more of our life lies in the past than in the future. As time passes we may come to realise that the future is an illusion, only the past is real!

In the long run the most important thing about the people who have died is not how they died, but how they lived. Indeed we may have taken them for granted while they were alive, only later can we see how they fit into the full pattern of our lives. And the meaning is in the pattern.'

Colin Murray Parker OBE, MD, Life President of Cruse Bereavement Care

Healing after a loved one's suicide.

When a loved one dies by suicide, the impact on anyone who was close to the person can be intense and overwhelming and can leave you reeling. You may even feel that you are going crazy, or feel like you are in a bad dream, but this is just a normal part of the early stages of grief. At the same time you might be consumed by guilt, wondering if you could have done something to have prevented your loved one's suicide and facing lots and lots of questions and what ifs. The literature on the subject indicate that you will face a lot of different emotions but the problem is that they do not come to you one at a time, instead they gang up on you all together especially when you are at your most vulnerable. Just try to remember that the whole grief process you are experiencing is normal and to help you understand what it is you are or will be experiencing, we have listed some of the most common emotions that affect us after a suicide below, in no particular order.

Shock and disbelief;- Right after the suicide, it can be hard to accept what has happened. You may feel numb and have trouble believing that the loss has really happened and you cannot get things right in your own head. We should treat the shock as something good that protects our minds from the full impact of such a tragic loss. People often suggest that without the shock, their minds would have just exploded. It makes us feel strange and confused but it keeps the full reality of what happened at bay, until we are more able to cope with it.

Sadness or despair;- You may experience feelings of sadness, loneliness, helplessness, emptiness and you may cry a lot, even when you do not expect to. In truth, we are bound to feel really sad and low, but it is also the grieving process at work and the crying is seen as a way to get rid of some of the pent up emotions festering away within our souls.

Anger;- You may be angry with your loved one for abandoning you and leaving you with a legacy of grief. You may also be angry at yourself, God, the doctors or anyone else you think may have contributed in any way to the suicide. This anger is normal but we have to learn to deal with it in a positive way and not let it extend the grief any longer than it should be.

Guilt;- You may blame yourself for what happened, or blame yourself for not seeing what was coming or that your loved one was in such pain and despair and that you were no help at all. Talking openly and honestly with those you feel comfortable with, or a professional experienced in suicide bereavement, will help you deal with your guilt and help you recognise that guilt is just another emotion that hurts us when we are at our most vulnerable.

Fear;- You may feel anxious, helpless and insecure about your future and life without your loved one. The more people you have to talk to and the more people who have supporting you in practical ways the more this fear will be alleviated. You may fear that it could happen again to someone else you love so you will become over protective and more worried about their safety. Talk openly with them about your fears and work out, together, how to convince each other that everyone is safe, even from suicide.

Rejection;- You may experience feelings of rejection because the one you loved did not come to you with their problems and ask you for help. This adds to the feelings of guilt. One of the most common things included in suicide notes is the fact that the person did not want to burden or fail his/her loved ones anymore so they did not reject you, they just did not want to burden you anymore with their own problems.

Shame;- Because of the terrible stigma associated with suicide, and maybe your own feelings of guilt, betrayal and rejection you may feel ashamed about the manner of death and the fact that you feel that you let them down. But suicide, to those that attempt it, is a way out of terrible emotional pain and misery, which comes from depression and/or the inability to cope with their problems. They were neither rational or thinking straight when they died, and there should be no shame in it for anyone else. Plus you cannot have really let them down, if you did not know what they had planned to do.

Physical Symptoms;- Grief often involves physical problems including fatigue, nausea, lowered immunity, changes in weight, aches and pains and insomnia. Again these are normal and just an unfortunate part of the grieving process but if you are ever in any doubt, go and visit your GP.

Questions;- You may struggle with many questions such as “Why?”, “What If?” “How did I let this happen?”, and so on. Thousands of questions that you feel you need the answers to in order to cope. The fact is that we are never going to get the answers to most of these questions and we will never cope with our grief until we fully accept this. This really is an area where professional support can help a lot.

Finding ways to cope after suicide.

The aftermath of a loved one's suicide can be physically and emotionally exhausting. As you work through your grief, be careful to protect your own well-being. The most important factor in healing from loss is having the support of other people. Even if you are not very comfortable talking about your feelings, it is very important to express them when you are grieving. Sharing your loss makes the burden of grief easier to carry. Accept support, no matter where it comes from and do not grieve alone. Connecting to others will help you heal.

Turn to family and friends;- Reach out to loved ones for comfort, understanding and healing. Surround yourself with people who are willing to listen when you need to talk, and offer a shoulder to lean on when you just can't or don't want to talk.

Feeling alone and isolated;- Some of the bereaved by suicide find it hard to face others, particularly in the early days. Having to try to explain what happened and answer everyone's questions is extremely difficult and painful. Some also feel, mostly because of the stigma of suicide, or the shame they feel, that they cannot face others and will not get the chance to express their true feelings. This too is ok and normal. Start talking to those you trust and feel comfortable with first, and as that begins to help you, talk to others until you see and feel that it does not bother you as much as it did at the beginning.

Grieve in your own way;- Do what is right for you. Do what you feel is right. If you are not ready to do something, (EG go to visit the grave) wait until you are ready. Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, it is your grief and no one can tell you when it is time to "move on" or "get over it". Don't worry about going crazy, you are not, even if you feel that way sometimes. It is just all the feelings and emotions barraging you when you are at your weakest, and recognising this is a great way forward.

Face your feelings;- In order to heal, you have to acknowledge your feelings, or better still, talk them out with a professional. Avoiding or trying to suppress your grief, even if it is for the best of intentions (eg looking after the rest of the family) will only prolong the grieving and may lead to further problems down the road, such as depression, anxiety and other health problems.

Don't Rush yourself;- Losing someone to suicide is a devastating and painful blow but the healing has to happen at its own pace You cannot force you way through it in a hurry and neither is there any " quick fix" way out. You cannot compare your grief to anyone else. We all grieve in our own way and time. We are all different and unique and our grief will take its own time to work through.

Expects set backs;- As you work through your grief, you will begin to feel more and more “good days” but sometimes we get setbacks and it may seem that we are back where we started. But this is normal. Your healing process does not happen in a straight line and you should learn from these knock backs. Even in the early stages we may well feel guilty because we had good memories or thoughts of the person we lost, but try not to feel guilty, it is just the grieving process at work, and aren’t the good memories much better for you.

Grief Triggers;- Anniversaries, birthdays and other special occasions will always be painful reminders of your loved one’s suicide but try to be prepared for an emotional hammering. For some people the build up to the occasion is the worst and for others it is the occasion itself. Just try to be prepared and aware of your feelings and accept that this too is completely normal. Don’t blame yourself or believe that you have made no progress in your grief. These occasions, no matter the time since the suicide, are difficult but temporary.

It is normal to feel sad, numb, angry, alone etc following such a tragic loss. But as time passes, these emotions should become less intense as you accept the loss, especially if you are receiving professional help. It is always difficult to accept that you need help, but you will find that any help at all is much better than trying to cope alone.

When you feel the time is right, and you could do with professional support, get in contact with agencies that deal with suicide bereavement and accept all the help they offer. It may well be a difficult step, but the benefits to you will far outweigh the anxiety and doubts.

What has helped others

Acknowledging all feelings

Talking honestly with family and friends-telling the truth

Having a talk and check up with your doctor

Reviewing pictures and Mementos

Rearranging and storing the belongings of the deceased

Writing a letter to the deceased

Meeting others with similar experiences

How to help those living with suicide loss

Caring and supporting a loved one who has been bereaved by suicide can be difficult. You may feel that there is nothing you can do to help or you may fear that you will make things worse. But even by just being there and offering a listening ear and a shoulder to lean on, you can help. The most important thing you can do is just be there or available should you be needed. You might not know exactly what to say, but that is alright too. Just try not let your discomfort, (or the stigma of suicide) keep you away from the person you really want to help. It is very important for relatives, friends and the larger community to support people through the grieving process. Those bereaved by suicide need, at some time or other, the opportunity to talk about the suicide and the person who died.

The support of friends and relatives can make a huge difference to the bereaved person's capacity to manage their grief.

Bereaved people need compassion, recognition and validation of their experience. They also need lots of practical and emotional support. Don't be surprised or alarmed by the intensity of their feelings. These feelings can come in waves and when they least expect it, but helping them to realise that this intensity will go after a while, will help them cope.

People bereaved by suicide need to be listened to, heard and understood and not judged or hurried through their grief. They need to express the different parts of their grief in their own way.

Bereaved people may need help with the practical things in life, especially soon after the suicide and funeral. Different relatives and friends can help in their own ways such as helping around the house, helping with the children, helping with the shopping, cooking and whatever else needs to be done to keep everything else, with regard to the suicide, as normal as possible. Just remember that the person grieving will find it difficult to ask for assistance and may have a lot of difficulty making decisions and identifying how you can help so you may have to decide for them.

Take care of yourself, especially if you too were close to the person who died and you are experiencing your own grief. It is very difficult to cope with your own feelings if you are trying to help deal with someone else. Everyone grieves in their own way so the person you are trying to help is probably not having the same feelings and thoughts as yourself. On the other hand talking together about the good memories and the good times you had with the person who died is as helpful and uplifting as anything else and the more time passes the more of these good memories you will have for yourself, and to share. When the time is right, help the bereaved person get connected to professional support agencies such as SOSAD where support and counselling is available, even if it means that you have to get in touch yourself, remind them of appointments and accompany them until they get settled in.

sosad Ireland has a range of services available to help you through this terrible time, including first response visitors who will go and meet whenever you want. We also offer peer support services as well as full counselling services to those that need it and there is no fees involved. If there is anything specific you need from us, please do not hesitate to call us on the numbers listed below. These are 24 hour information and emergency support line and there is always someone available to help you.

It is always best practice to visit your own general practitioner as soon you can and they can advise you of the professional services available to you. Otherwise you can select the service that best suits your needs. Please feel free to contact us if we can be of further help. Every one of our bereavement visitors and counsellors are fully trained and experienced in suicide bereavement and volunteer with SOSAD in order to make life a little easier for you.

Resources- all confidential

sosad Drogheda;-	041 9848754
sosad Navan;-	046 9031855
sosad Dundalk;-	042 9327311
sosad Cavan;-	049 4326339
sosad Kingscourt;-	042 9668992



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