



Your guide when someone close to you dies by suicide

Let's talk about grief

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Let's talk about grief

Your guide when someone close to you dies by suicide.

Synopsis

Let's talk about grief can help you understand the grief that you go through when someone important in your life has died by suicide.

Let's talk about grief contains a number of sections and a diary. Writing down your thoughts and feelings in your diary will help you work through your grief. If you do not feel ready to do a particular section, you can leave it and come back to it when you feel the time is right. Remember to listen to yourself and to respect yourself when you are coping with grief.

Research and text

Community suicide prevention committees in Zones 5 and 6 in collaboration with the Canadian Mental Health Association (Zone 6).

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CANADA
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*"To understand life, we must look back,
but to live it, we must look ahead."*

Let's talk about...

the stages of grief and feelings

When faced with the suicide of a loved one, we try to get through the stages of grief in our own way and at our own pace. The grieving process is different and unique for everyone. It is important to live one moment at a time.

The three stages of grief

Numbness and shock

Our first reaction when we hear about the death of someone close to us is either disbelief or a refusal to accept the reality of what has happened.

These reactions let us protect ourselves from the emotions we feel after learning of someone's death.

Disorganization

As we start to grasp that our loved one is dead, we feel a range of emotions, such as fear, anger, pain, and a sense of being left behind coupled with anxiety and sadness.

We feel vulnerable and may wish to die. The important thing is to talk about our feelings with someone we trust rather than keep our suffering bottled up inside.

Reorganization

We will gradually accept our loss, and our suffering will become less intense over time. However, the pain will come back at certain times and on dates such as birthdays, the holiday season and anniversaries. This is a normal part of the grieving process. We must learn how to deal with these times without our loved one.

"Healing from our grief takes time. It requires a certain amount of work on ourselves."

Let's talk about... the stages of grief and feelings

Grieving Process

After a period of six months to a year, recovery is usually well underway. If the feeling of sorrow persists and keeps us from leading a normal life, it may be time to seek expert help.

The process of grieving for someone close to us, whether they die by suicide or of natural causes, is similar. Death by suicide, however, brings some special difficulties with which we must deal. For instance, we may feel responsible for the death; we may spend hours trying to understand why the suicide happened; or we may feel ashamed and embarrassed.

Coping is easier if we are able to:

- accept the painful reality of the loss
- avoid cutting ourselves off from others, but set aside quiet moments just for us
- seek the company of open-minded people who accept us in our suffering and offer us support to get through this ordeal
- find reassurance that our feelings, no matter what they are, or how intense they are, are “normal”
- get in touch with our grief
- share our experience with people who have gone through a similar situation
- accept our feelings. Remember that crying helps, but you should not cry to the point of exhaustion
- try to distract ourselves and take a break from our grief
- read, go out, meet people, treat ourselves to relaxing moments or easy, enjoyable activities
- understand that grief is felt in different ways by different people
- be patient with those around us as we adjust to the absence of our loved one
- take up a few short-term projects
- take time to re-energize ourselves
- realize that all dates that remind us of the loved one will be painful during the first year of grieving. Know that as the years pass, they will become less painful
- accept that the ambivalence we feel between love and anger towards the person that died by suicide will diminish with time.

“You can regain a full life after a major loss.”

Let's talk about...

the stages of grief and feelings

People who have lost a loved one may find themselves dealing with several types of feelings. Here are a few examples:

Guilt

"What did I do or not do or what could I have done to prevent this from happening?" Guilt is a feeling that often paralyzes us. We may feel powerless and guilty about not having seen the signs that might have enabled us to prevent our loved one from taking such a fatal step.

Anger

The anger we may feel toward the deceased person is often hard to express. We may feel guilty about feeling angry, however, feeling angry is a normal reaction.

Shame

Suicide is still a topic about which most people do not want to talk. Therefore, it is not surprising that feelings of shame may set in. Out of fear of society's judgment, many choose not to talk about it; instead, they isolate themselves, which makes their grieving more difficult.

Rejection

Suicide is not a subject talked about "freely"; that is why people who have lost a loved one through suicide often fear society's judgment and the resulting accusations. They prefer not to talk about it and isolate themselves. This protective reaction is normal, but it makes the resolution of their grief more difficult.

Numbness

We feel cut off from our emotions (especially during the period of shock).

Denial

We refuse to accept the death or the way in which the person died (suicide).

All these feelings are common; they are part of the emotional process associated with loss that will lead to resolution of grief.

- Please go to page 12 to complete exercises related your grief and feelings -

"Other people, including professionals, will not know what can help me unless I tell them."

Let's talk about...

grieving for a child

Here are a few things to watch for when parents lose a child because of suicide.

Guilt

The death of a child is a terrible ordeal. It may be even more difficult in the case of suicide. It can give rise to a painful, deep sense of grief. The parents may feel responsible for not being able to protect their child or to prevent the child from dying by such an act. They may feel that they have failed in their role of protector and carry a heavy burden of guilt.

Accusation

Parents often try to assign responsibility for the suicide of their child. They may tend to blame themselves or accuse each other openly or indirectly.

Lack of communication

After the death of a child, parents are dealing with their feelings. They find it difficult to communicate their thoughts and emotions. Some, without regard for the other person's suffering, may demand that their partner be there to listen to them. Others may prefer to bottle up all feelings and move on to other things.

Different ways of expressing grief

Often, parents are not in sync when it comes to expressing their grief. Each, in turn, may go through periods of intense pain followed by a setback. Just as one parent recovers from a difficult stage, he or she will feel drawn back into it by the other parent, who may be entering a different stage of the grieving process. To stay away from this painful situation, partners may avoid each other. They need to learn they are unique individuals who will experience their loss in different ways. One will express emotions openly while the other will hold them in. One will immerse himself or herself in work; the other will try to forget. It takes a great deal of understanding and patience to let the other person grieve in his or her own way without feeling threatened.

"I do not expect other people to be any better at dealing with my grief than I would have been at dealing with theirs had I not experienced my loss."

Let's talk about... **grieving for a child**

Intensity of grief

The intensity of grief may vary for different reasons (i.e. coping skills, belief system, etc.). As a result, the emotional intensity of one of the parent's grief may seem different to the other's.

Sex life

The death of a child may disrupt a couple's sex life. The sexual appetite of one partner may increase, while the other's decreases. This may last for up to two years after the child's death. It is very important in such cases that the parents engage in a frank talk about their sex life.

Conflict

The sudden changes that result from grieving for a child may lead to discomfort and even conflict between spouses. One may become confused and not know how to adapt to the rapid shifts of the other partner.

Professional help

To help them deal with the ordeal of losing a child, the couple will very often seek expert help.

- Please go to page 15 to complete an exercise related to grieving for your child -

"It is risky to try new things. But it is even riskier to risk nothing."

Let's talk about...

taking care of yourself by...

- eating properly and staying away from foods that are low in nutritional value, such as fats, excess sugar, caffeine, and alcohol
- getting exercise that is in keeping with your state of health, your limitations and your interests
- keeping a regular sleep schedule despite your loss so that you do not suffer from sleeplessness
- sticking to your daily routine as much as possible. Include moments of relaxation to be in a better state of mind to work through your grief
- enjoying a few moments of relaxation, a leisure activity, the touch of someone's hand, or a massage
- expressing your feelings when they are close to the surface - for example, while you are watching a TV program, reading a book or looking at a scene that makes you feel sad
- surrounding yourself with people, pets and even plants that give you energy or comfort
- understanding that you will not forget the departed loved one, even if you gradually learn not to think of this person all the time
- drawing encouragement from all the progress you have made
- taking time to heal, without looking for escape in a false sense of well-being or becoming overly tired
- finding your spirituality

"People cannot become what they are not."

Let's talk about...

a letter to a person who is not mourning

Dear friend:

I have experienced a devastating loss. It will take me time, perhaps years, to get over my grief. For a while, I may cry more than usual. My tears are not a sign of weakness or a lack of hope or faith. They represent the depth of my loss and are a sign of my healing.

I may sometimes get angry for no apparent reason. The stress of grief increases the intensity of my emotions. Please forgive me if I seem irrational at times.

More than anything else, I need your understanding and your presence. If you don't know what to say, touch me, hug me, and let me know that you care. Please don't wait for me to call you. I am often too tired to even think of picking up the phone and asking for the help that I need.

Don't let me drift away from you. In the year ahead, I will need your presence more than ever.

If, by chance, you have ever gone through an ordeal that is similar to mine, share it with me. You won't hurt me.

This loss is the worst thing that has ever happened to me. Nevertheless, I will overcome it, and I will survive. I won't always feel the way I do at this moment. I will start to laugh again.

Thank you for being concerned about me. Your concern is a gift that I shall always treasure.

- Please go to page 16 to write your letter to a person who is not mourning -

"Most people want to help me. They wish me well, even when they do things that I might consider inappropriate."

Let's talk about...

hope

Whatever you do, don't give up

When nothing in your life is going right, when problems torment you and money worries surround you...
Rest if you need to, but whatever you do, don't give up.

When too many mistakes have been committed, when your entire universe threatens to crumble and, exhausted, you feel your confidence ebbing away...
Rest if you need to, but whatever you do, don't give up.

You know, life is strange sometimes, with its share of surprises and unforeseen events, and it is not given to us to know in advance how far we will have to travel or how many obstacles we will have to overcome in order to achieve happiness and success.

Think of how many people stopped fighting, when perhaps all it would have taken was just one more tiny step to transform failure into success. And yet, one step at a time is never that difficult.

So you must have the courage and the tenacity to take that tiny step more, knowing that life is a great and powerful friend that is always there by your side, ready to help.

You will soon find that this attitude will summon up, from the deepest part of yourself, life forces that you never even suspected and that will help you to achieve what you undertake.

But, first and foremost, remember:
When, in your life, difficult moments arise...
Rest if you need to, but whatever you do, don't give up.

Author unknown

Let's talk about... books to read

Bernstein, R. Judith. (1997). *When the bough breaks: Forever after the death of a son or daughter*. Missouri: Andrews McMeel Publishing.

Biebel, D. and Foster, S. (2005). *Finding Your Way After the Suicide of Someone You Love*. Zondervan Trade Books.

Cox, D. and Arrington, C. (2009). *Aftershock: Help, Hope and Healing in the Wake of Suicide*. Brodeman Holman.

Detrich, Richard. (1996). *How to Recover from Grief*. Judson Press.

Fitzgerald, Helen. (1995). *The mourning handbook*. New York: Fireside Books. ISBN 0-671-86972-8.

Kumar, Sameet. (2008). *Grieving Mindfully: A Compassionate and Spiritual Guide to Coping with Loss*. New Harbinger Publications.

Kushner, Harold. (1987). *When all you've ever wanted isn't enough: The search for a life that matters*. New York: Pocket Books. ISBN 0-671-55181-7.

Kushner, Harold. (1981). *When bad things happen to good people*. New York: Avon Books. ISBN 0-380-63092-6.

Leblanc, Gary. (2003). *Grieving the Unexpected: The suicide of a son*. Essence Publication (Canada).

Mericle, B. P. (1993). "When a colleague commits suicide." *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing*, 31 (9), 11-13.

Staudacher, Carol. (1987). *Beyond grief: A guide for recovering from the death of a loved one*. Oakland, Ca.: New Harbinger. Distributed by Raincoast Books.

Wrobleski, Adina. (1995). *Suicide: Why? 85 questions and answers about suicide*. 2nd edition. Minneapolis: Afterwords Publishing.

Let's talk about... professional help

If you need help to cope with the suicide of someone close to you, please contact the closest community mental health centre. Help is available on an individual basis or in a group setting:

Moncton

81 Albert Street
Moncton, NB E1C 1B3
Tel: (506) 856-2444
Fax: (506) 856-2995

Saint John

Mercantile Centre
55 Union Street, 3rd Floor
Saint John, NB E2L 5B7
Tel: (506) 658-3737
Fax: (506) 658-3739

St. Stephen

41 King Street
St. Stephen, NB E3L 2C1
Tel: (506) 466-7380
Fax: (506) 466-7501

Bathurst

165 St. Andrews Street
Bathurst, NB E2A 1C1
Tel: (506) 547-2110
Fax: (506) 547-2978

Richibucto

Place Cartier
Richibucto, NB E4W 5R5
Tel: (506) 523-7620
Fax: (506) 523-7678

Sussex

30 Moffett Avenue
Sussex, NB E4E 1E8
Tel: (506) 432-2090
Fax: (506) 432-2046

Fredericton

65 Brunswick Street
Fredericton, NB E3B 5G6
Tel: (506) 453-2132
Fax: (506) 453-8766

Edmundston

121 Church Street
Carrefour Assomption, Suite 331
Edmundston, NB E3V 3L3
Tel: (506) 735-2070
Fax: (506) 737-4448

Caraquet

295 Saint-Pierre Boulevard West
Caraquet, NB E1W 1B7
Tel: (506) 726-2030
Fax: (506) 726-2090

St. George

5 Riverview Avenue
St. George, NB E5C 3M1
Tel: (506) 755-4044
Fax: (506) 755-1807

Grand Manan

North Head
130, Route 776, Unit 3
Grand Manan, NB E5G 1E3
Tel: (506) 662-7023
Fax: (506) 662-7029

Woodstock

200 King Street
Woodstock, NB E7M 5C6
Tel: (506) 325-4419
Fax: (506) 328-4802

Grand Falls

131 Pleasant Street
Grand Falls, NB E3Z 1G1
Tel: (506) 475-2440
Fax: (506) 475-2452

Campbellton

6 Arran Street
Campbellton, NB E3N 1K4
Tel: (506) 789-2440
Fax: (506) 753-6969

Miramichi

1780 Water Street, Suite 300
Miramichi, NB E1N 1B6
Tel: (506) 778-6111
Fax: (506) 778-5296

Perth-Andover

35 F. Tribe Road
Perth-Andover, NB E7H 0A8
Tel: (506) 273-4701
Fax: (506) 273-4728

Kedgwick

39 Notre Dame Street
Kedgwick, NB E8B 1H5
Tel : (506) 284 3431
Fax: (506) 284 3426

Tracadie-Sheila

3520 Principale Street
Tracadie-Sheila, NB E1X 1C9
Tel: (506) 394-3760
Fax: (506) 394-3770

Shippagan

239A J. D. Gauthier Boulevard
Shippagan, NB E8S 1N2
Tel: (506) 336-3367
Fax: (506) 336-3366

To receive additional copies of *Let's talk about grief* please contact your community mental health centre.

Help us assess the helpfulness of *Let's talk about grief*, visit www.gnb.ca/health and provide your feedback.

Let's talk about... **your diary**

Keeping a diary can help you grieve. Create a diary by inserting sheets of paper in a binder or get a notebook. Complete the following exercises.

Write about... **the stages of your grief and your feelings**

How do I know if I have accepted the loss?

What am I doing to help myself deal with the consequences of this loss in my life?

Am I able to tell my story without constantly being overcome by my emotions?

How has this loss changed my beliefs and values?

Write about...

the stages of your grief and your feelings

What am I doing to improve my quality of life?

What have I discovered that has given my life renewed meaning?

What changes have I made to adjust since this loss?

What inner strengths have I developed?

Are there any stages in the grieving process that I have not completed?

Write about...

the stages of your grief and your feelings

Describe, with the help of words and images (e.g., crying), the feelings that you are experiencing. Remember that, given the fact that it is difficult to imagine that someone would die by suicide, all those who are going through or have gone through a situation such as yours share these feelings.

Description of my feelings in words

Description of my feelings in images

Write about...
grieving for your child

Do I feel guilty that my child died by suicide? Why?

Do I tend to blame my partner? Why?

How can I share my feelings with my partner?

How can I let my partner experience grief in his or her own way?

Has my sex life been upset? Do I talk about this with my partner?

Write about...
your journey

Month 1 _____ **Week #** _____

An important event in my life

Month 2 _____ **Week #** _____

Important people in my life

Month 3 _____ **Week #** _____

Changes in my life

Month 4 _____ **Week #** _____

The stage of grief I am completing

Month 5 _____ **Week #** _____

My future plans

Month 6 _____ **Week #** _____

How to implement my future plans

Month 7 _____ **Week #** _____

Reassessing which stage of grief I am completing to determine if I need professional help

Month 8 _____ **Week #** _____

My observations

Month 9 _____ **Week #** _____

My observations

Month 10 _____ **Week #** _____

My observations

Month 11 _____ **Week #** _____

My observations

Month 12 _____ **Week #** _____

My observations
