

When A Loved One Dies By Suicide

Source: Mayo Clinic Staff



When a loved one dies by suicide, emotions can overwhelm you. Your grief might be heart wrenching. At the same time, you might be consumed by guilt — wondering if you could have done something to prevent your loved one's death. As you face life after a loved one's suicide, remember that you don't have to go through it alone.

A loved one's suicide can trigger intense emotions. For example:

- Shock. Disbelief and emotional numbness might set in. You might think that your loved one's suicide couldn't possibly be real.
- Anger. You might be angry with your loved one for abandoning you or leaving you with a legacy of grief — or angry with yourself or others for missing clues about suicidal intentions.
- Guilt. You might replay "what if" and "if only" scenarios in your mind, blaming yourself for your loved one's death.
- Despair. You might be gripped by sadness, loneliness or helplessness. You might have a physical collapse or even consider suicide yourself.
- Confusion. Many people try to make some sense out of the death, or try to understand why their loved one took his or her life. But, you'll likely always have some unanswered questions.
- Feelings of rejection. You might wonder why your relationship wasn't enough to keep your loved one from dying by suicide.

You might continue to experience intense reactions during the weeks and months after your loved one's suicide — including nightmares, flashbacks, difficulty concentrating, social withdrawal and loss of interest in usual activities — especially if you witnessed or discovered the suicide.

Many people have trouble discussing suicide, and might not reach out to you. This could leave you feeling isolated or abandoned if the support you expected to receive just isn't there. Additionally, some religions limit the rituals available to people who've died by suicide, which could also leave you feeling alone. You might also feel deprived of some of the usual tools you depended on in the past to help you cope. 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.

- Keep in touch. Reach out to loved ones, friends and spiritual leaders for comfort, understanding and healing. Surround yourself with people who are willing to listen when you need to talk, as well as those who'll simply offer a shoulder to lean on when you'd rather be silent.
- Grieve in your own way. Do what's right for you, not necessarily someone else. There is no single "right" way to grieve. If you find it too painful to visit your loved one's gravesite or share the details of your loved one's death, wait until you're ready.
- Be prepared for painful reminders. Anniversaries, holidays and other special occasions can be painful reminders of your loved one's suicide. Don't chide yourself for being sad or mournful. Instead, consider changing or suspending family traditions that are too painful to continue.
- Don't rush yourself. Losing someone to suicide is a tremendous blow, and healing must occur at its own pace. Don't be hurried by anyone else's expectations that it's been "long enough."
- Expect setbacks. Some days will be better than others, even years after the suicide — and that's OK. Healing doesn't often happen in a straight line.

- Consider a support group for families affected by suicide. Sharing your story with others who are experiencing the same type of grief might help you find a sense of purpose or strength. However, if you find going to these groups keeps you ruminating on your loved one's death, seek out other methods of support.

If you experience intense or unrelenting anguish or physical problems, ask your doctor or mental health provider for help. Seeking professional help is especially important if you think you might be depressed or you have recurring thoughts of suicide. Unresolved grief can turn into complicated grief, where painful emotions are so long lasting and severe that you have trouble resuming your own life.

Depending on the circumstances, you might benefit from individual or family therapy — either to get you through the worst of the crisis or to help you adjust to life after suicide. Short-term medication can be helpful in some cases, too.

In the aftermath of a loved one's suicide, you might feel like you can't go on or that you'll never enjoy life again. In truth, you might always wonder why it happened — and reminders might trigger painful feelings even years later. Eventually, however, the raw intensity of your grief will fade. Understanding the complicated legacy of suicide and how to cope with palpable grief can help you heal, while still honoring the memory of your loved one.