



After Suicide

Pima County Attorney's Office Victim Services Division

Contact us Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
(520) 740-5525

What is Suicide?

Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Most likely, your loved one was not seeking death as much as a way to end unbearable pain. A person who commits suicide puts his or her psychological skeleton in the survivor's emotional closet. It can be a heavy burden for the survivor.

Someone close to you has died. Your grief is intensified because the death was a suicide. The healing process is painful and often seems unnaturally slow. Understanding your emotions, as well as learning something about suicide, in general, could ease your grief. At first, you may be bewildered and full of questions, like: *Why? How could he/she do this to me? What if I had done . . . ? Am I going crazy? Are these feelings normal? How do I tell people about this suicide? What are the causes? Will I ever get over this?* You might find answers to some of your questions or you may eventually realize that some of your questions will never be answered.

Suicide is not inherited

While the risk of suicide is higher in those who suffer from serious depression or other mental illnesses, suicide is a behavioral response to stressful life circumstances. In a family, or even among friends, suicide may establish a destructive model of behavior to imitate. Thoughts of your own suicide are not an uncommon reaction to the suicide of someone you love and may surface immediately or years later. Seek professional help if your problems seem more than you can handle alone.

Why suicide?

Tens of thousands of suicides occur in the United States each year. People of all ages complete suicide; men, women, teens, children, the rich, the poor – no one is immune to this tragedy. Sometimes, there are identifiable reasons for a suicide: financial, family, career problems, poor health, trauma, losses in life; and sometimes there are no apparent causes. People who took their own lives generally felt trapped by what they saw as a hopeless situation. John Hewlett, author of *After Suicide*, says, "He or she probably wasn't choosing death as much as choosing to end this unbearable pain." As you look for answers and understanding, you also need to deal with your feelings of shock, anger, and guilt. The following are typical reactions to death; they do not occur in any particular order or persist for a particular length of time.

Initial shock: This isn't happening

Shock is a first reaction to death. You may feel numb for awhile, which can be a healthy reaction protecting you from the initial pain of the loss. Often it may help you to make necessary arrangements, such as notifying relatives and friends, arranging for childcare, deciding on funeral services, and carefully checking insurance policies, and debt and installment plans. Allow friends to help you with these arrangements and with your daily routine tasks. Take time to be alone if you want, but do not isolate yourself for too long.

Anger: Why am I so angry?

Your anger with the deceased is normal when the manner of death is suicide. (How could he or she do this to me?) You may also be angry at yourself, at God, or at other people. Do not try to deny this anger, but find someone with whom you can talk about it. Physical exercise and personal journal writing are helpful techniques to deal with this anger.

Guilt: If only I'd done something more

Perhaps the most overwhelming pain you experience will be the feeling of guilt. *If only . . . I should have . . . Why wasn't I there?* These are very common statements made by survivors of suicide. In retrospect, it is easy to remember things you might have said or see times that you might have intervened; however, that is in the past. The important thing is to forgive yourself and realize that, under the circumstances, you did what you could. Always remember, ultimately, you cannot prevent someone who is intent on killing him or herself.

Relief: I'm almost glad it's over

If you were closely involved with the deceased, perhaps his or her pain and suffering had become an emotional drain on you. A sense of relief that a difficult situation has ended is normal, even if the ending is an unhappy one. Accept your relief and do not let it grow into inappropriate guilt.

Crying: Should I control the tears?

You might find yourself crying for no particular reason, or you may find yourself holding back the tears. Crying can be a good release of feelings. It is important that you find time to allow yourself this release whether in solitude or with friends.

Stigma: What do I tell people?

Many people feel stigma or shame associated with suicide and may want to hide the truth from others; however, being honest is usually the best approach. Facing the truth is an important part of the grieving process. Some survivors may have difficulty accepting a loved one's death as a suicide and prefer to believe that the death was due to an accident or homicide. However, it is very important that you confront the word suicide and that you practice thinking, hearing, and saying it. Let others help you with this. Friends or the suicide hotline in your area may provide the emotional support you need, or you might want to join a support group and meet with others who have experienced the suicide of a loved one.

How to talk to children about suicide

If the deceased was a parent, or if there are children who were close to the deceased, talking to the children about the death may be one of the most difficult tasks you face. Do not ignore their needs, especially if you are the primary adult in their lives. Even very young children will be aware of the death of someone in their lives, and they will need an opportunity to ask questions and to get truthful answers. The National Institute for Mental Health says, "By talking to our children about death, we may discover what they know and do not know. If they have misconceptions, fears or worries, we can help them by providing needed information, comfort, and understanding. Talk does not solve all problems, but without talk, we are even more limited in our ability to help." (*Talking to Children about Death* - DHEW Publication #ADM79838). Just as you need emotional, non-judgmental support from someone close to you, children also need your support at this time.

Looking ahead

Your grief and sadness will eventually change; and, you will be able to pick up the pieces of your life and rebuild. There will be times, however, when these feelings surface very strongly, and you will need to develop your personal way of dealing with these times. Many individuals feel totally alone because of the uniqueness of their situation. Therefore, meeting with others who have had a similar experience alleviates much of the pain. You may be a great asset in helping others cope with their grief.

Survivors of Suicide Support Groups

Offers support for friends and family of a completed suicide. The group meets twice each month. For more information call 861-6632.

Important phone numbers

SAMHC	(520) 622-6000
Survivors of Suicide	(520) 861-6632
La Frontera Center, Inc.	(520) 838-5600
Victim Services	(520) 740-5525



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