



After Suicide

Pima County Attorney's Office Victim Services Division

Contact us Monday through Friday, 8am-5pm
(520) 740-5525

Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Your loved one probably wasn't seeking death so much as a way to end his or her unbearable pain. The person who commits suicide puts his or her psychological skeleton in the survivor's emotional closet. It can be a heavy burden.

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, may ease your grief. At first, you may be bewildered and full of questions, like: *Why? What are the causes? How could he/she do this to me? What if I had...? Am I going crazy? Are these feelings normal? How do I tell people about this suicide? Will I ever get over this?* You might find answers to some of your questions or you may eventually realize that some of them 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 out professional help if your problems seem more than you can handle alone.

Why suicide?

The tens of thousands of suicides that occur in the US each year cut across all sex, age and economic barriers. People of all ages complete suicide; men, women, young children, the rich, the poor, no one is immune to this tragedy. Sometimes, there are identifiable reasons for a person's suicide: financial, family, career problems, poor health, trauma, losses in one's life, or others, but 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 typical reactions to death do not occur in any particular order or remain any 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 the necessary arrangements such as deciding what type of service to have, notifying relatives and friends, arranging for child care if necessary and careful checking of insurance policies and debt and installment plans, which often have insurance clauses. Allow friends to help you with any of these arrangements and with your daily routine tasks. Take some time to be alone if that is what 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 also 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 all very common statements made by survivors of suicide. It is easy in retrospect to see the things you might have said or times where you might have intervened; however, all of that is in the past. The important thing is to forgive yourself and to realize that, under the particular circumstances, you did what you could. Always remember, ultimately, you cannot prevent someone who is intent on killing themselves.

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 for you. A sense of relief when a difficult situation ends is normal, even if the end 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 a 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 prefer to believe that the death was due to homicide, or accident, and you may have difficulty accepting your loved one's death as a suicide. However, it is very important that you confront the word suicide, 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 may want to join a mutual 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, your children 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 or visit www.sostucson.org

Important phone numbers

SAMHC	(520) 622-6000
www.samhc.com	
Survivors of Suicide	(520) 861-6632
www.sostucson.org	
La Frontera Center, Inc.	(520) 838 5600
www.lafrontera.org	
Victim Services	(520) 740-5525
www.pcao.pima.gov/	



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