

how can I cope after losing someone to suicide?



Losing a loved one to suicide is extremely painful. Grief is a natural response to loss and is a deeply personal experience. Everyone experiences grief in their own way. You might experience many profound emotions such as shock, confusion, anger, sadness, guilt, and shame. Not being able to seek social support because of the stigma attached to suicide can make grieving even harder. **Remember that you don't have to go through this alone. There is nothing that can take away your pain of loss but there are ways to reduce your suffering.**

EXPERIENCES OF GRIEF ARE DIFFERENT

Grief comes in many forms and can come up at various times, even long after the death. It helps to remember that there is no right or wrong way to grieve. You should allow yourself to experience whatever you are feeling, when you experience it. The meaning and experience of each of these emotions may be different for each of us. But it can be a good idea to familiarize yourself with these and keep them in mind during the periods when difficult feelings come up.

Guilt

You might experience feelings of guilt or a sense of failure that the suicide was not prevented. You might keep asking yourself 'what if I could have picked up on the signs earlier and done something'. You might also blame yourself for something that you did or said before their death. In reality, no one can predict the future, nor can they know all the reasons for another person's actions. It is human nature to blame oneself when experiencing a loss, rather than accepting the truth that some things were out of our control.

Shock

You might experience shock after

learning about your loved one's suicide. Your mind might even repeatedly go over the painful images of death. It can also have physical effects such as nausea, breathlessness, chest pain and sleeping difficulties. If you are facing any of these physical reactions for a prolonged period after facing a suicide loss, it is alright to consider consulting a doctor or mental health professional.

Disbelief

You might find it hard to accept that your loved one has died. It is a natural reaction for many. It can reduce in intensity over time as the reality of their passing becomes more real.

Numbness

You might not feel anything at all, as if you're completely numb. For some, it might take some time for the pain of the loss to be experienced.

Despair

Intense feelings of sorrow and despair might continue to return in the coming months and years. You might feel overwhelmed by sadness and helplessness. Some people bereaved by suicide might themselves experience thoughts and feelings of suicide. If you find this happening to you, reach out for help. While suicide

might seem the only option of relief to you now, there is hope and you can get through this.

Confusion

One of the hardest aspects of suicide bereavement is never being able to fully understand why your loved one took their own life. You might go over this question again and again, but continue to be left with unanswered questions. The causes of suicide are usually complex and there's never a single cause of suicide.

Anger

You might be angry at your loved one for abandoning you and leaving you with so much pain. You might also be angry at yourself or someone else for not preventing the suicide. These feelings can be complex and distressing. It is important to know that it is possible to both be angry with someone, and to still hold them dear in your heart. Sometimes anger is needed before you can accept the reality of the loss.

Shame

You might feel ashamed because of the stigma that persists in our society. You may feel unsure of what to tell people because of the fear of judgement. This can add to your grief. You can

speaking to someone you trust and maintain contact with them as you process your feelings.

You might continue to experience intense reactions to your loved one's suicide including nightmares, flashbacks, loss of interest in activities or social withdrawal. These reactions can be distressing. However, there are ways to work through these feelings and in most cases, these feelings will decrease or you will learn to manage them better with time.

HOW CAN I HELP MYSELF?

Spend time with nurturing people

You might not wish to be around people, but it is important to let yourself receive the love, support, and condolences you are given. Reach out to people you trust and who are willing to listen when you need to talk. Talking to someone about your feelings can help to make you feel less alone. Don't be afraid to tell people what you need.

Seek professional support

You can consider seeking out professional help if—

- Your grief continues to affect your physical and mental health or interferes with your life.
- You don't have a good support network to turn to for talking about your grief or loss.
- You are thinking of harming yourself. Some people bereaved by suicide might themselves experience thoughts and feelings of suicide. If you find this happening to you, reach out for help.

YOU CAN SEEK THE FOLLOWING SUPPORT OPTIONS:

Make an appointment with a mental health professional

such as a psychologist or counsellor. They can help you move through the grieving process and work with you towards coming to terms with your loss. They will also help you to think about ways to manage your grief.

Call a support helpline

Telephone-based counselling services can be a good way of getting information or support when you need it. Talking to someone on the telephone can also be helpful if you are finding it difficult to open up to the people you know or speak to someone face-to-face.

Reach out to a peer support group

This could be another helpful space to openly share your thoughts and learn tips for coping better from others who understand the experience of a suicide loss. It can help you feel less alone.

Establish a routine

In the beginning, your grief might take up all your energy just to get through the day. It is okay if you can't do the things that you "should do". It is more important to take care of yourself as you grieve. But it's helpful to reestablish a routine that can provide you a sense of normalcy and hope.

Grieve in your own way

There is no "right way" to grieve. Express your thoughts and feelings in a way that feels natural to you. Limit your contact

with those who tell you how to feel and what to think if you find it distressing. You can also choose to tell others how you're feeling or acknowledge your feelings privately. If you don't feel like talking, you can set aside time each day to grieve. Either way, it is helpful to acknowledge your experience.

Care for your health

It is hard to look after your basic needs in the initial stages of grieving. But your body needs strength to cope with the emotions. So, eat small amounts of food, move your body, take a shower, and drink water.

Give yourself time

Be patient and kind to yourself and don't feel hurried by someone else's expectations. Grief is a process that takes time. You might continue to experience setbacks filled with intense sorrow—and that is okay. Learning about certain triggers (e.g. interaction with specific people; special occasions such as birthdays) that cause your mood to change can help you identify ways to cope with them (e.g. limiting your interaction; practising relaxation).

Make opportunities to remember the person

Once you feel ready, you could plan for ways to remember the person. You do not necessarily need to participate in collective remembrances. You could:

- Plan a funeral or gathering of people who knew the person as a way to remember their life.
- Create a 'memory box' with items that remind you of that person.
- Write a journal about them or continue to do activities you enjoyed doing together.

Outlive is a suicide prevention programme for young people by Sangath, The Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy, and Quicksand. Learn more at www.outlive.in.

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