



SURVIVORS ROAD2HEALING

Restoring hope and reclaiming lives
After a death by suicide

How Can I Help a Friend Through the Suicide of a Loved One?

I'll write this from the perspective of a mother/son loss because that's my story. The one thing she will need most is someone to let her talk. Sit down by her and say things like, "Tell me how you feel." "Do you need to talk about it?" "Don't be pushy or hover, but 'be there.'" (Most men prefer not to talk about it!)

** Don't ask her to let you know if you can help, she won't ask you. She isn't even thinking that well. Instead ask her, can I clean up your kitchen, mow your lawn, cook, or whatever.*

** Don't be surprised at things she says. Intense loss such as this can cause a rational person to become irrational. One thing you need to understand is that for at least the next 2 or 3 months she will think about nothing except the deceased. This is normal. Suicide leaves a multitude of issues to deal with, and for those that found the bodies, it's horrific. She has lost a part of her, and she will need a lot of time to work through it.*

** For a few months she'll probably be very scatterbrain, unorganized, can't make decisions, can't remember anything, cries very easily. Putting any kind of pressure on her will overwhelm her. But at the same time, don't make her feel helpless or childlike. (It's a tough balance) She will probably regress to this stage again around 11 months after the death. Anniversary dates are tough, especially the first one. The days leading up to it are almost always the hardest.*

** She will blame herself, and this is normal. It's an issue only she can work through, and all survivors have to do that. In her head she may know she isn't to blame, but it will take time to convince her heart. Allow her to work through it in her own time and her own way.*

** Please, never say to a survivor, "it's time to get over it" or "you have to go on with your life now." It will only distance you. Suicide is something you never get over...you learn how to get through it, and learning that is a process. It takes time. Also, please don't say things like "He's in a better place now." That sounds so cliché and mechanical, and it usually only makes us mad.*

** This isn't anything you can "fix", so please don't try to. Sometimes just sitting beside her and letting her cry will do wonders. As much as you hate to see her hurt, it's something she will have work through herself. Just be there for her. And remember, silence is OK sometimes, too.*

** At this point survival is not a sure thing to her, but she's in too much shock to make decisions about it all. Let her know you're there, but don't pressure her. I had a buddy that came over and took me out to dinner a couple times. I was feeling very quiet (because he didn't understand, and I knew that) and we would just sit there watching people, me wiping tears off my cheek, and not saying a word. Then he'd take me home and leave. I really needed that. I wasn't expected to "do" anything; I was just allowed to be whatever I needed to be. That's a real friend!*

** Somewhere around the 3rd month the shock will wear completely off, the "fog" will lift, and she will be zapped back to the very beginning of this grieving process. She may feel like she did a 'free fall' right back to day one. That's normal. People that start telling her to "get over it" and "go on with life" will only build walls. So I repeat, please don't say those things!*

**From around the 3rd month it will be a real hard road, with many ups and downs. Birthdays (hers and his) will be hard, as well as holidays and the death date anniversary. It will help to be mindful of that. It will take anywhere from 3 months to another year to find real hope again. For a parent it may take two years to "regain a normal life."*

**Something important for you to know that very few people understand, if you mention her son it will not cause her pain. The loudest cry from a survivor is "they won't let me talk about him!" or "They change the subject" and "No one mentions him except me. How can he just be forgotten?" You need to know that he is on her mind at all times. She won't have a single thought that isn't connected to him for several months. If you mention his name and she cries, it's NOT because you said something to hurt her. The tears are ALWAYS there- she just released some of them. This is important for a survivor, so please don't make it more painful by denying her the times she needs to talk about him. And never be afraid to bring up his name!! (However, let me remind you that most men prefer not to discuss it)*

I have an online support group that is wonderful. I am the founder, and it's survivors talking thru the issues connected with suicide that no one can understand except those dealing with it. As compassionate as you may be, and even if you love her- you still can't understand the issues she is struggling with. It's not at all unusual for a survivor to, herself, become suicidal in the first year or two after the loss. I strongly urge her to get into some sort of support group for survivors. I have some people in my group that were in therapy and getting nowhere, but just a few weeks in this group and they saw a huge change and began the healing process.

The best part of the support group is that you find out all the things you are going thru are normal. I thought I was honestly losing my mind when my son died. When I got my group going and found out that everything I was feeling (and thinking I was so odd about) was normal- what a relief that was!! And best of all, I found out you DO get through it. It just takes time.

Encourage her to read my website, and others like it. It will not only show how much you care, but she will know that there are others here for her. www.road2healing.com

Thanks for being a friend that cares. Sometimes a simple thing like a card, a hug, or even just a smile can make all the difference in the world!!

And finally, dear friend, This story sums it up better than anything else I can say:

The Most Caring Child

Author and lecturer Leo Buscaglia once talked about a contest he was asked to judge. The purpose of the contest was to find the most caring child. The winner was a four-year-old child whose next-door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his mother asked him what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, "Nothing ... I just helped him cry."



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