



After the suicide - How you can help

Dealing with such a sudden loss is very difficult on the family, friends and even the first responders. There is little preparation for a suicide death so it is important to use a guide to stay focused on what is needed.

Here are a few pointers on what you can do to assist families dealing with the loss:

- **Day 1:** Appoint a neutral person/or offer to act as the answering service to the surviving family member. Ask this person to leave a message on the phone for all incoming calls. An example message may be "Thank you for your concern for the _____ family. At this time, they are not accepting calls. Thank you for your understanding"
- **Day 1:** If the surviving family member insists on maintaining their own phone ensure they are not continuously on the phone explaining the details. This is very stressful and is unhealthy for them to repeat to each person who calls. If you see they are getting distraught, offer to hold their phone for them for the next hour and keep a phone log of everyone who calls so they can call them back as they are able
- **Day 1:** Contact clergy/ministers from the survivors church (if they request it)
- **Day 1:** If possible, gather a list of items the survivors may need (clothing toiletries, medications, etc.) Get them enough to last 2-3 days
- **(Gunshot)After investigation is complete:** If there is blood or damage to the home due to a gunshot wound or from police breaking down a door to enter the residence, this will need repair. There are specific companies who deal with cleaning bio-hazard areas. The level of repair may be cleaning a floor to replacing sheetrock and repainting. Many insurance companies cover the repairs and some offer temporary lodging costs as well.
- The survivor will need to appoint a close friend to coordinate all cleaning of the home. If possible, do NOT allow the immediate family to enter the area of

the death until after all clean-up has been conducted. (**Cleaning may take from 3 days to 3 weeks depending on the level of need. The chemicals used may also require the home to remain shut for at least 48-hours)

- If there are children in the home
 - Offer to take them to school/daycare and pick them up
 - Pick up their homework from school
 - Ask the parent if they would like you to notify the school nurse/counselor
 - Arrange outings to keep the children occupied while the CAO is around
 - Research counseling services in the area to assist the family
 - If there are close family/friends, arrange for the children to sleep over for the night
- **Week 1:**
 - Offer assistance as needed
 - Be there; even if you sit in silence
 - Ensure they are eating and taking medications properly
 - Coordinate for someone to take care of their pets, lawn, etc if needed
 - Buy the survivor a book about grief recovery from a local book store

On-going: Remember that everyone deals with grief differently. If the survivor is pushing you away, just call them weekly to let them know you are available when they need you.

The date of death, birthday of the deceased, anniversaries and other significant dates may be difficult. Over the course of time, find out when those dates are and offer to take them out for a lunch or visit with them. Simply let them know that you care and that their loved one is not forgotten.

Look for local support groups, blogs etc. There are community walks nation-wide sponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Awareness (AFSP).

This is going to be a rocky road, but there is hope and things to get better. You may be feeling hopeless and defeated, but as you learn your new norm, you will see how strong you really are right now.

If you have a friend, neighbor or even a stranger that has a loss from suicide, you may be wondering how you can help them out and what you should do and not do while they are grieving.

Here are a few pointers:

DO

- Express your concern and sympathy
- Take time to visit them if they are accepting visitors – if you do not know what to say, it is okay to remain silent; Just having you there shows your support and care
- Send them a grief care package; www.1commonbond.org has some options
- Look for local support groups for them; they may be too upset to look for one themselves

DON'T

- Do not avoid them out of fear of what to say or do
- Ask them how their loved one died
- Ask them if they saw this coming or noticed any signs
- Say your understand – unless you also lost someone to suicide
- Tell them how long they should grieve
- Judge how long they should wait to get into a new relationship (if they lost their mate)

Let's face it – suicide is not a great topic to discuss. Unfortunately we are losing more to suicide each year and we are losing them from as young as 8 years old. When you do not have a chance to say goodbye to your loved one before their death, you are left with an unsettled feeling and your grief may even seem more difficult.

Studies show that suicides tend to be higher when there is a family history of suicide. That means that we must talk about the options that are out there to help. Suicide cannot be an acceptable option.

If you think a person may be having thoughts of suicide, ask them. If you are unsure of how to do that, call the National Crisis Hotline and they can help give you some assistance.

Their number is 800-273-8255 and they are open 24x7.

The best thing you can do to support is reach out and let them know that you care.

Showing you care means more than you will ever know.

-From a Survivor