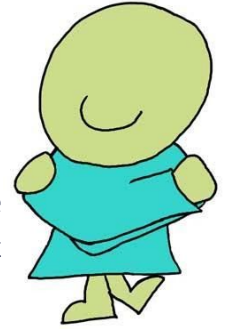


# Go easy on yourself...



Suicide affects many people: family members, friends, peers, co-workers and the community as a whole. It has a ripple effect. It's far reaching and has a significant impact on many more people than can be counted.

## After a Suicide

Following a death by suicide, many grief responses are significantly intensified and may be overwhelming. You may be experiencing a range of difficult emotions such as shock, disbelief or even anger alongside many unanswered questions including 'could I have done anything to prevent it?' and 'why did he/she do it?'.

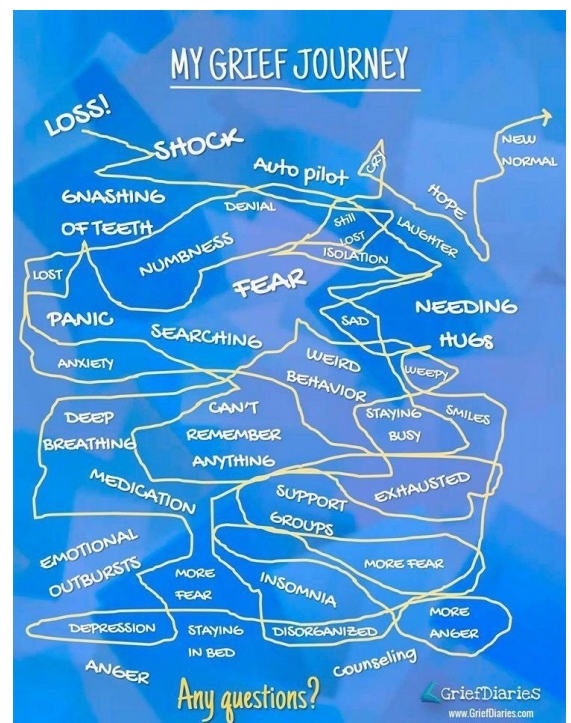
It is important to know that these types of emotions and thoughts are normal grief reactions and are very common amongst people bereaved by suicide. Grieving in response to a suicide requires an adjustment to life and will be different for everyone. It may be difficult to adapt to the changes you might face in your life - your hopes, your thoughts, your future and your beliefs may all be affected. Grief is a healthy part of the healing process and not a sign of weakness. As the grieving process is worked through, the intensity of grief should lessen. Throughout this process it is important for you to understand your emotions.

## Shock

Shock is often the first emotion you may feel, including disbelief and confusion. Shock can also affect people physically through symptoms such as nausea, sleeping difficulties, chest pain, shaking, stomach pain, and breathlessness. If you experience any of these symptoms you should see your local GP. These symptoms can also be associated with anxiety and feelings of helplessness.

## Grief and Loss

Grief is the normal and natural response to loss and can affect many parts of your life after a person close to you has suicided. Feelings associated with grief and loss vary and you may experience sadness, anger, hopelessness, anxiety, shock, panic, relief, denial, abandonment, regret, resentment, intense sadness, numbness or guilt. Whilst these feelings can be frightening and overwhelming they are normal reactions to loss. Accepting them as part of the grieving process is necessary for healing. You



may experience all of these emotions during your grieving process, or just some. You may also experience some of these feelings even when you have not known the deceased personally,

## **Guilt**

People who are bereaved by suicide can experience feelings of guilt. You might worry about not having picked up on suicidal behaviours or warning signs. It is important to remember that it is always easier to recognise a person's distress in hindsight, and that the level of support you offered to them was based on the understanding and ability that you had at that time. When someone is at the point of suicide, they are usually unable to think clearly and rationally and are may not feel they are able to express their true thoughts and feelings. No one is responsible for someone else's decision to take their own life.

## **Why?**

The question 'why' is one that can haunt people bereaved by suicide and in many cases, this feeling may linger for a long time. It is difficult not being able to understand why the person has taken his or her life. Even if you were aware of the problems and difficulties that the person was experiencing, it is difficult to understand why they felt that taking their life was their only answer. This is a normal thing to question and grapple with and sometimes there may feel there is simply no clear answer.

## **Anger**

It is normal to feel angry with the person who suicided as their decision to leave will have caused a lot of pain, however this reaction can feel confusing. You might find yourself blaming someone else or those you believe could have contributed to the suicide or even the person themselves. You may also feel angry with yourself for not preventing the suicide. Denying your anger can be far more damaging than letting yourself express it. Finding a way to do so in a safe and non-destructive way is important. Talking about it can help, as can participating in physical activities such as walking or playing sport.

## **Stress, Anxiety and Depression**

Sometimes, people who are bereaved by suicide can suffer stress, anxiety or post-traumatic stress symptoms. This is a normal reaction to the traumatic event of suicide. You may have difficulty sleeping, concentrating, experience disturbed sleep, feel panicked or not want to be alone. Loneliness can add to your grief or feeling as though no one else knows how you feel so it is important to try to surround yourself with family or friends for support during this time.

## **Questioning Mental Health**

We may question our own mental health during these times. We may ask "Could I do the same thing?", "Is there something wrong with me?" "Do I have mental health problems?" "Am I unsafe?" Or we may worry more so about our friends. We may be more concerned about what they say, their off handed comments or their changed behaviours. Sometimes this is warranted as we can all feel

unsettled, out of kilter, and unsure, like the rug has been ripped out from under us. The best way to combat and tackle these feelings is to talk to someone.

Likewise, parents can become more vigilant, concerned and worried about their own children. It may feel like they are more invasive, questioning and involved. Be empathic. Talk to them. Talk together. It may help both of you to feel better and more connected. A recent suicide can also bring up traumatic or bad memories for others near you. Give them a hug. Just be aware and let them know you are near.

## **Social Media**

Sometimes people find posting online to social media is a helpful way to express how they are feeling about their sadness and reach out to others. It can feel healing.

For many however, it may not feel like a space that they want to occupy and sometimes it can actually feel quite unhelpful and toxic. It may conjure up bad memories, unwanted feelings, and more sadness than otherwise experienced. It may also interfere with your friends in their processing of the grief if they continue to see reminders all over their social media feeds.

It is okay to take a break off social media too. Try to find some other productive ways to process your grief such as journaling, talking to friends, spending time with others, or doing sport.

Go easy on your friends, give them space to log off too if they feel it's not helpful for them and remember to check in to see if they are OK.

## **Worried that friend is not OK?**

If you are concerned about a friend and their safety after they've experienced a loss to suicide remember not to keep it to yourself. It can be a heavy weight for you to hold all on your own, so by sharing, you can make sure it does not affect your own mental health and the more support your friend can access. You can talk to a parent, a teacher or wellbeing about your concerns, or even directly to them about why you are feeling worried about them. They may be able to help.

What if my friend tells me that they are not okay but ask me to promise not to tell anyone else?

In such instances, it can seem conflicting whereby you may want to support your friend by remaining loyal, but at the same time that may not be in their best interest. In a serious situation like this, their safety is the most important thing. It is best to discuss this situation with a trusted adult or your school wellbeing to find a solution together.

## **How long will this go on for?**

The grieving time may also vary depending on personal circumstances, everyone's experience is different. It may seem as though the pain will never go away, but it is important to remember that things will eventually start to ease.

Remember that just because the pain might lessen, it doesn't mean that person means any less to you or that you will forget them. It is important not to feel guilty about feeling okay, laughing with friends or having 'good days'.

## When should I seek help?

Grief can be really consuming and feel quite exhausting. It can also feel very uncomfortable to sit with. It is important to seek help to allow you to process your grief in a productive and comforting way. This is particularly important if you are experiencing:

- a lack of sleep
- ongoing tiredness or low mood
- feelings/thoughts/acts of self harm
- anxiety (or ongoing stress or nervousness)
- isolation or loneliness
- a loss of meaning or numbness
- risk-taking behaviour
- a loss of appetite
- low motivation for school work/falling behind
- nightmares
- excessive anger or violence
- feeling consumed by the grief

There is no harm in talking. Why not try it?

## What can I do about these feelings?

- Go easy on yourself. It's normal to feel overwhelmed out of your depth...but remember that these feelings are a normal part of grief and will lessen with time. Be patient with yourself.
- Connect with family, friends, or peers who are also coping with the effects of the suicide.
- Be patient with yourself as you grieve. Don't expect too much from yourself too quickly.
- Try to maintain a normal schedule where possible.
- Look after yourself by eating well, getting enough sleep and exercising.
- Write down your feelings in a journal.
- Engage in activities you enjoy to refresh yourself.
- Remind yourself that everyone struggles at times... asking for help is a strength not a weakness.
- Remember it is okay to cry.
- Try to communicate to your supports what you need from them. It might be some understanding, someone to listen, some hugs, a distraction or some laughs.
- Allow yourself to feel the feelings. There is no wrong emotion. Go easy on yourself.
- Set reasonable expectations of yourself. It is okay to feel things and for your life to be a bit wobbly. Don't try to do everything at once.

## What is not helpful?

- withdrawing from family and friends
- not looking after your health and wellbeing
- using alcohol or drugs to 'cope'
- engaging in risky behaviours
- blaming yourself or others
- thinking that a struggle with mental health is a weakness
- Thinking "I should be able to handle this"
- Avoiding normal routines for long periods of time (ie: sport, school etc)

## What can I do?

- Talk to family
- Talk to friends
- Try doing some reflection, for instance journaling or drawing can be a great way to express yourself
- Recognise that looking after your mental health is the same as looking after your physical health. You wouldn't leave a broken leg to fix itself, so why leave your mental health to fix itself.
- When you are ready and if you want to, you can create a memory of the person you have lost by creating a tradition, making a scrapbook, giving a gift or a donation in their name, lighting a candle for them, or displaying pictures of them
- Look at the CANVAS Wellbeing page. There are resources and information relating to Mental Health, Grief and seeking support for yourself or others.
- Have a chat to your GP about how you are feeling.
- Contact school wellbeing ([wellbeing@ignatius.vic.edu.au](mailto:wellbeing@ignatius.vic.edu.au)). They are experienced in grief and more than happy to support you in any way they can.
- Remember that you won't be locked into "seeing someone" in wellbeing for a long time if you choose to...the reality is a one off chat could make all the difference.

## Break the Stigma

Former North Melbourne footballer Wayne Schwass is a mental health advocate and shares his experience and personal knowledge. A powerful and informative interview that would be great for families to watch and discuss. Particularly Fathers and sons.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1WOt6QXvxg>