



PETER'S PLACE

Grief After Suicide

Things that may be helpful for those who are grieving after a loved one's suicide:

- **Remember that grief is a process that takes time.** Our culture does not often honor this, nor does it encourage the process that may be necessary for those who are suicidally bereaved. Patience can be a great gift to give to yourself as you grieve.
- **Allow yourself to experience all feelings** and share them with those who are willing to listen.
- **Seek support and ask for it when you need it.** Sometimes a grief support group (possibly one specifically geared to survivors of suicide) can assist with this. Oftentimes those who are grieving (or who have experienced the death of someone they love to suicide) can provide a level of comfort and support that others may not be able to do.
- **Remember that you can have boundaries with others.** Others may ask you questions about the death and/or about how you are managing. If you would rather not discuss things at that time, however, you have the right to say "I appreciate your interest, but I'd rather not discuss that just now. If I feel the need to talk about that in the future, though, I will consider touching base with you."
- **Do your best to suspend self-judgment.** Oftentimes those who are suicidally bereaved feel ultimately responsible for the suicide, or that they should have seen the "warning signs," and/or that they should have been able to prevent it. Exploring these feelings may be helpful; however, letting go of self-judgment also is important to the healing process.
- **Realize that holidays, birthdays, special occasions, and the anniversary of the death of the person might all be "triggers" for more acute grief responses.** Take extra care to have personal and/or professional support available at these times.
- **Reach out for professional help if necessary**, especially if you experience thoughts of suicide yourself. These thoughts sometimes surface, but it does not mean that you will act on them. If you feel as if you may, ask for help or dial 911 for immediate assistance.
- **Engage in rituals of remembrance**, if they feel helpful for you. In our culture, often the funeral is the only form of ritual we have to remember a loved one. Sometimes after a suicide, others may feel as though remembering or talking about the deceased person might make you upset or ruin your day; consequently, an unspoken "code of silence" can result. If it's helpful for you, find rituals that may help to process your grief. This can mean lighting a candle, looking at pictures, visiting the cemetery, writing a letter to the deceased or doing community service in honor of the deceased person. Repeat these rituals as many times as you need to if they bring you comfort.
- **When you feel ready, you may wish to get involved in community efforts** to prevent suicide or educate about suicide and the experience of those who are bereaved by the suicide of a loved one. Only you can decide if/when this might be something you choose to do.