



When a Friend or Family Member Commits Suicide

The death of a friend or family member is often shocking and upsetting. When a friend or family member commits suicide, there are often unanswerable questions and complicated emotions. People's reactions to another's suicide are varied, and can range from guilt to sorrow to anger.

This article is intended to provide you with some information to help you understand some of the reactions people go through in dealing with a friend or family member's suicide. It also provides some guidance to help, your family members or your friends through the process.

Why do people commit suicide?

Every suicide is a unique story. There is no predictable 'profile' of a person who will commit suicide. Therefore, there is no way to fully understand why a person would choose to take their own life. However, there are some explanations that may help you better understand a person's actions.

Significant depression is a characteristic of a number of medical and behavioral conditions. When depression becomes pervasive enough, some people may feel hopeless and helpless. When this happens, sometimes the person believes that suicide is the only alternative. Some conditions affect the person's ability to think rationally and to control impulses. Sometimes the loss of the rational thought, coupled with depression, can lead a person to think, "I want this 'pain' to go away...there is no other way out of this...." or "The world would be a better place without me."

Serious illness, chronic pain, substance use, life crisis, high anxiety, agitation, marital, financial, or even work-related difficulties can sometimes trigger depressive reactions and irrational thinking that can develop into suicidal thoughts.

Ways people react to the suicide of a co-worker

- **Uniquely Personal:** Each person will have their own response to a death by suicide of someone they know. It is important to understand and respect those differences. Some people may react and need to talk and others may not.
- **Shock and Disbelief:** It is very common to experience shock and disbelief upon finding out of a suicide. A person's suicide often leaves many questions unanswered. It is very frustrating to not have answers that explain why someone would take their own life. Even when survivors learn and understand the factors related to the suicide, such as depressive illness, no one ever can fully answer the "why" of the suicide. It is normal to struggle with questions about 'why' this happened, "Why can't they see that they're a



good person?”, “Why don’t they understand that things will improve?”” Why can’t they shake it off?”.

- **Guilt:** Often people develop feelings of guilt surrounding the suicide of a co-worker, believing that somehow they should have recognized the threat and that they could have done something to prevent the suicide. These feelings are very normal and common, but are most often not truly justified.
- **Guilt often arises when** the deceased had made either direct or veiled threats to others about their desire to commit suicide. People often do not take these threats seriously or do not see them for what they are. This does not mean that people are negligent or uncaring. Most of us aren’t trained to recognize symptoms of severe depression or what’s called “suicidal ideation”—thinking about suicide. Again, this is not a “fault.”
- **Anger:** It is very common for people to feel angry at the person who has committed suicide. A person may feel emotionally rejected, made the object of blame or speculations, or left to handle the emotional and practical challenges of a death by suicide. Anger is often mixed with grief and can feel very confusing. Suicide usually produces more anger than any other type of death.
- **Sadness:** Intense sadness is a normal part of the grieving process for many people. This sadness, especially when mixed with guilt and anger, can seem overwhelming. It is a natural part of the process, and it should fade over time.
- **Blaming:** A common reaction is to blame those close to the victim, because they ‘should’ve seen the warning signs’ or ‘could’ve prevented the act’. Although an understandable reaction to grief, it is incorrect and unwarranted and could compound the grief of those who are left behind.

How to help a grieving friend or family member

- Allow the person to express his or her feelings openly. Grieving people need to work through their feelings and often do so by sharing their feelings with others. Allow the person to say nothing and just be present with them.
- Be non-judgmental about the other person’s feelings. Each person has his or her own feelings about death and suicide. It is generally not helpful to impose your own feelings at a grieving person.
- Be mindful of the difficult dates. The day of the week and the specific date that the suicide occurred can be especially difficult for the next six months for survivors. As well as Anniversary dates (birthdays, holidays, wedding anniversary.....)
- If a grieving person is expressing suicidal feelings, strongly encourage them to get immediate help.

Helping yourself

- Ask for support from your friends and family. Someone you know has died, and it is natural to feel that loss.
- Talk about your feelings with people who can be non-judgmental and supportive.



- Seek out your friends or family members who are having similar feelings, as they might best understand how you feel.
- Take advantage of support services that are made available to you. Group interventions and bereavement support groups that are designed to help surviving friends and family members can be very helpful in understanding each other's feelings. These specialized support groups often are affiliated with local suicide prevention programs and may be listed under the Survivors section of the website of the American Association of Suicidology (<http://www.suicidology.org/>).
- Seek additional support if you feel you are having a difficult time coping after the initial shock wears off. If you are currently in treatment for depression or other psychological conditions, it is a good idea to contact your doctor or therapist if you are having trouble handling what has happened. Other supportive services include your Employee Assistance Program, your family doctor, clergy and local grief groups that can be located through your community hospital, hospice or mental health agencies.

Resources Are Available

Additional information, self-help tools and other resources are available online at www.MagellanHealth.com/member. Or call us for more information, help and support. Counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.