

No Time to Say Goodbye
Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One

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Suicide Survivors

Suicide is especially hard on survivors. Guilt, anger, pain, depression, and physical effects may come on like a flood. If you are reading this in a few days, you may be feeling so devastated that you don't want to think about having a funeral service. It will be helpful to have one. Funeral directors, chaplains, and clergy can counsel you as to how to proceed. Your loved one's life can be honored.

Accept what has happened. This may take awhile to do completely, but calling a suicide an accident tends to prolong grief. Sooner or later, the truth will come out anyway.

Feelings of guilt are common. Like most suicide survivors, you may feel you didn't do your job. Also others may blame you. This feeling of guilt takes time to work through. Realize that even the most outstanding and loving parents and spouses (you could be one) might not escape this tragedy. Likewise, resist the temptation to find a scapegoat in someone else. Maybe it was possible or maybe not that something could have been done to prevent the suicide. No one may know for sure. The basic fact is that the person made the choice. Not you or anyone else could control the person's mind. Suicide is not so much "someone's fault" as it is a result of the "human condition."

Feelings of rejection are common. You may think that the one who took his or her life was rejecting you, was saying that you could not help. It is more likely that the person was totally engrossed with despair and feelings of inadequacy that had little to do with you.

Symptoms of stress are common. You may have Post-traumatic Stress Disorder – ongoing stress from severe shock. The event will come back to you in dreams or other ways. You may feel detached from the world and have trouble sleeping or concentrating. This may start to happen at once or much later. It calls for professional help.

Escape from silence. You urgently need to talk to people who will really listen and who know something of what you are experiencing. You may feel that no one could know. You'll be surprised. Most survivors have similar feelings. Find a suicide survivor support group and join it. You may also need private counseling.

You are not alone:

- There are currently 38,364 (2010) suicides annually in the USA – approximately 105 each day. http://www.afsp.org/index.cfm?page_id=04ea1254-bd31-1fa3-c549d77e6ca6aa37
- It is estimated that for every suicide there are 6 survivors.
- Based on this estimate, it has been suggested that there are now at least 4.5 million American survivors of suicide.

Further information, resources, and local support group referrals are available by contacting American Association of Suicidology Central Office.

American Association of Suicidology

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Suite 408

Washington, DC 20008

(202) 237-2280

email: amyjomc@ixnetcom.com.

Website: <http://www.suicidology.org/>

Dealing with Anger and Guilt after a Suicide

By Dr. Phil McGraw

After losing a loved one to suicide, it isn't uncommon to struggle with conflicting feelings of anger *and* grief. Dr. Phil has advice on dealing with these painful and troubling emotions.

Know that it's normal to feel anger toward the loved one who committed suicide at the same time that you feel overwhelming grief over the loss.

They made a devastating choice that will impact the rest of your life, leaving you to pick up the pieces and deal with the aftermath.

It's also normal to feel guilty after catching yourself feeling anger toward the deceased.

Ask yourself whether you love or hate the person you lost. Do you miss him/her or are you glad he/she is gone? Of course, you love and miss him/her. That's because these emotions are based on who your loved one was.

Do you feel guilty about loving and missing your loved one? Of course not. What you feel guilty about is your anger. The question is, are you angry at the person who committed suicide or are you angry about the choice he/she made to end his/her life, leaving you behind with the legacy of pain and hurt?

Chances are, you are angry at the choice, not the person " and it was your loved one who made that choice, not you. Had you known that he/she was going to commit suicide, you would have done what you could to stop it.

Accept that you couldn't change what happened and did the best you could with what you knew at the time. If you are burdening yourself with misplaced guilt, you are in effect confining yourself to an emotional prison.

The bars of an emotional prison are made out of guilt, anger, bitterness and resentment. But what people don't understand is that that kind of prison locks from the inside. There isn't anybody that can let you out of that prison except for you.

You wake up every morning and choose what to think. If you have chosen to carry the burden of guilt, shame, anger and hurt everywhere you go, what would happen if you decided, "I can't change what happened. So I'd better accept it and recognize that the life that I have today, tomorrow and the next day is going to be a function of what I

choose"?

Give yourself permission to say, "It's OK to be mad at what he/she did." Because it was *not* OK. Then get back in the game. That's the bottom line. You experienced a devastating loss, but you didn't choose it. Give yourself permission to move on.

Article found 11.1.12 -- <http://drphil.com/articles/article/201/>

Beyond Surviving -- Suggestions for Survivors

By Iris M. Bolton

1. Know you can survive. You may not think so, but you can.
2. Struggle with "why" it happened until you no longer need to know "why" or until you are satisfied with partial answers.
3. Know you may feel overwhelmed by the intensity of your feelings but all your feelings are normal.
4. Anger, guilt, confusion, forgetfulness are common responses. You are not crazy, you are in mourning.
5. Be aware you may feel appropriate anger at the person, at the world, at God, at yourself. It's okay to express it.
6. You may feel guilty for what you think you did or did not do. Guilt can turn into regret, through forgiveness.
7. Having suicidal thoughts is common. It does not mean that you will act on those thoughts.
8. Remember to take one moment or one day at a time.
9. Find a good listener with whom to share. Call someone if you need to talk.
10. Don't be afraid to cry. Tears are healing.
11. Give yourself time to heal.
12. Remember, the choice was not yours. No one is the sole influence in another's life.

13. Expect setbacks. If emotions return like a tidal wave, you may only be experiencing a remnant of grief, an unfinished piece.
14. Try to put off major decisions.
15. Give yourself permission to get professional help.
16. Be aware of the pain of your family and friends.
17. Be patient with yourself and others who may not understand.
18. Set your own limits and learn to say no.
19. Steer clear of people who want to tell you what or how to feel.
20. Know that there are support groups that can be helpful, such as Compassionate Friends or Survivors of Suicide groups. If not, ask a professional to start one.
21. Call on your personal faith to help you through.
22. It is common to experience physical reactions to your grief, e.g., headaches, loss of appetite, inability to sleep.
23. The willingness to laugh with others and at yourself is healing.
24. Wear out your questions, anger, guilt, or other feelings until you can let them go. Letting go doesn't mean forgetting.
25. Know that you will never be the same again, but you can survive and even go beyond just surviving.

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Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Amen.

--Reinhold Niebuhr