



# Surviving the Suicide of a Brother or Sister

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS BEREAVED PARENT SUPPORT & INFORMATION CENTRE, VICTORIA

The suicide of your brother or sister raises painful questions, doubts and fears. You may feel devastated and shattered. The knowledge that your love was not enough to stop them dying may raise powerful feelings of failure. As a brother or sister you gave all you could to the best of your ability, with the knowledge you had at the time.

Denial and feelings of shock, guilt, anger and depression are all parts of normal grief reactions. These are often heightened when a brother or sister dies by suicide.

It is natural to blame yourself or others, however try to avoid placing blame in an effort to explain *WHY* this terrible thing has happened.

Suicide has a profound impact on the whole family. Parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, and other family members - all are affected, and each one will grieve in an individual way, some openly, some quietly. But be certain all will be hurting.

Cultural and religious interpretations from and religious interpretations from an earlier time are partly responsible for the stigma that can still be found associated with suicide. Although it is often difficult, it is important to confront the word and the reality that the death was by 'suicide'. For some people this may take time.

## **GUILT**

Feelings of guilt may surface, and "if only" is a phrase you may find yourself repeating frequently. Consider replacing "if only" with "perhaps". Perhaps it would have made a difference. Remember that their pain was so intense they may not have been able to accept any help you or anyone had to offer. You may need to feel guilty for a time to know eventually that you were not responsible, because we must often go through a feeling to get beyond it. Believe in yourself; you are human; accept your limitations.

## **ANGER**

Anger is also a common reaction - anger at others, at professionals, and even anger at your brother or sister. This is usually a protective mechanism we adopt to help us handle pain and hurt. Recognise the pain and hurt under the anger. Recognise also that anger can often create more problems if you let it take over, and do not talk it out or find constructive ways of expressing it.

## **WHY**

There is a need to ask 'why'? Often there are no clear answers, but it is important to struggle with the questions and eventually you will be able to let them go.

## **SPIRITUAL MATTERS**

Often we find ourselves in a spiritual crisis, and question our beliefs. Those who previously had a strong belief may feel betrayed by God. Believers or not, questions about "life after death" surface for most people. These are natural reactions, for death strikes at the very core of our existence. Face these questions directly. Perhaps find a gentle, nonjudgmental member of your faith, and open yourself to that person.



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## RELATIONSHIPS

Family relationships are very often strained because each member grieves in their own way, and in their own time. Conflict between partners and between remaining children is common, especially if some grieve openly and others grieve privately. Knowing this can occur helps to understand what is happening within the family. Try to talk, as a family, about your pain, and about your feelings and the different way each has been affected. Insist that everyone is included in the discussion (parents & children). Let parents know that you want to help and support them, as much as they want to help and support you.

## COPING IDEAS

- **Talk** about the good times you remember, as well as the not so good.
- **Crying** is normal, healthy and therapeutic. It reflects your love.
- **Give** all family members space and try to minimize the desire to over protect. Involve all family members in the decisions you make in rebuilding your lives. Don't crowd other family members. It may be helpful to keep a journal and write about your feelings and thoughts, or write a letter to your dead brother or sister expressing all the things you were not able to say before their death. Many find it helpful to write to them on special days such as birthdays and anniversaries, telling them of their love, of events in their lives, and how much they are missed.
- **Have** a plan in place with a friend or relative whom you know you can ring when life becomes too difficult. Someone you know will listen, without judgment and allow you to tell your story over and over again.
- **Allow** family and friends to help. Let them take care of you. You don't have to be strong all the time. Don't be afraid to tell them of your needs and what will help you. They usually want desperately to help but often need guidance from you on how to do that.
- **Allow** time to feel sad and reflective.
- **Consider** joining a support group. Through sharing with others who have walked the same path, you can begin to feel normal again and rebuild a sense of hope in the future. It takes courage to join a support group, but the rewards are immense.
- **Seek** competent caring professional help if necessary.
- **Above all**, give yourself time. It takes time to open your heart and mind to healing; to choose to survive.

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