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Surviving The Suicide Of Your Son or Daughter

ABOUT SUICIDE

The suicide of your son or daughter raises painful questions, doubts and fears. The knowledge that your love was not enough to save your son or daughter may raise powerful feelings of failure. As a parent you gave all you could to the best of your ability, with the knowledge that you had at the time.

Denial and feelings of shock, guilt, anger and depression are part of the normal grief reactions. These are often heightened when a son or daughter 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 all the family. Parents, brothers and sisters, and grandparents—all are greatly affected, and each one will grieve in an individual way, some openly, some quietly. But be certain that all will be hurting.

Cultural and religious interpretations of 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 suicide, 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 their pain was so intense they may not have accepted any help you or anyone else had to offer. You may need to feel guilty for a while to know that you are 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 son or daughter. This is usually a protective mechanism we adopt to help us handle the 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.

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 parents find themselves in a spiritual crisis and question their 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 questions directly. Perhaps find a gentle, non-judgemental member of your faith, and open yourself to that person.

RELATIONSHIPS

Family relationships are often strained as each member grieves in their own way, and in their own time. Conflict between partners is common, especially if one grieves openly, and the other grieves 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. Include children (brothers and sisters) in the discussions, as they often feel left out. Remember they want to help and support you as parents just as much as you want to help and support them.]

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 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 son or daughter, expressing all the things you were not able to say before the death. Many find it helpful to write to their dead son or daughter 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 desperately want 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 to 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.