

- Expect that birthdays, and holidays will be difficult. Important days often reawaken a sense of loss and anxiety.
- Understand that it's normal to feel guilty and to question how this could've happened, but it's also important to realize that you might never get the answers you seek.

## What is known about teen suicide?

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), reliable scientific research has found the following:

- There are as many as 8-25 attempted suicides to one completed suicide—with the ratio even higher in youth.
- The strongest risk factors in attempted suicide for youth are depression, substance abuse, and aggressive or disruptive behavior.
- Males are four times more likely to die from suicide than females.
- Females are more likely to attempt suicide than males.
- Firearms are used in over half of youth suicides.

## When a child dies by suicide...

The reasons that cause many children to contemplate suicide include:

- Lack of friends
- Struggles over self-worth

- Feeling misunderstood
- Poor grades
- Break-up with a boyfriend or girlfriend
- Bullying by peers or classmates
- Difficult home life due to parents divorce and/or continual arguing
- Questions regarding sexual orientation

## It's okay...

**IT'S OKAY TO GRIEVE**—The death of a loved one is reluctant and drastic amputation without any anesthesia. The pain cannot be described and no scale can measure the loss. We despise the truth that the death can not be reversed, and that somehow our loved one returned. Such hurt! It's okay to grieve.

**IT'S OKAY TO CRY**—Tears release the flood of sorrow, of missing and of love. Tear relieve the brute force of hurting, enabling us to “level off” and continue on our cruise along the stream of life. It's okay to cry.

**IT'S OKAY TO HEAL**—We do not have to “prove” we loved him or her. As the months pass, we are slowly able to move around with less outward grieving each day. We need to not feel guilty about this for this is not an indication that we love less. It means that, although we don't like it, we are learning to accept death. It's a healthy sign of healing. It's okay to heal.

**IT'S OKAY TO LAUGH**—Laughter is not a sign of “less” grief. Laughter is not a sign of “less” love. It's a sign that many of our thoughts and memories are happy ones. It's a sign that we know our memories are happy ones. It's a sign that we know our dear one would want us to laugh again. It's okay to laugh.

# Surviving Your Child's Suicide



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## Surviving Your Child's Suicide

The suicide of a child at any age presents unique circumstances that intensify and prolong the mourning of parents and family members. Suicide is a reaction to overwhelming feelings of loneliness, worthlessness, helplessness, hopelessness, and depression. It usually happens when a person's pain exceeds his or her resources and ability to cope. Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 10 -14 year olds, the third leading cause among 15-24 year olds, and the second leading cause among 25-34 year olds.

While mental illness plays a role in many suicides, not everyone who dies by suicide is mentally ill. Sometimes there are warning signs of the person's intentions. However, clues may be so disguised that even a trained professional or counselor may not recognize them.

### After Suicide

Denial and feelings of shock, guilt, anger and depression are often a normal part of grief reactions, but are especially heightened when a child has died by suicide.

The suicide of one's child raises painful questions, doubts, and fears. The knowledge that your love was not enough to save your child and the fear that others will judge you to be an unfit parent may raise powerful feelings of failure.

Realize that as a parent, you gave your child what makes us human – the positives and the negatives – and what your child did was primarily your child's decision.

### Anger

You may feel anger. It may be directed at your child, those you believe failed to help your child, God, those who try to help you, or just the world in general. You may be angry with yourself because you were unable to save your child. It's okay to express anger, a common emotion when a child has died by suicide. Sometimes healing cannot begin until these feelings have been confronted and expressed.

### Guilt

Feelings of guilt following a child's suicide are normal for parents, family, friends, classmates and even coworkers. "If only" is a phrase you may hear yourself repeating frequently. You may need to feel guilty for a while until you begin to understand that you are not ultimately responsible for the decisions and actions of another human being – including your child. Sometimes you need to go through a feeling to get past it.

### Questioning

Some parents feel a need to ask the question, "Why?" Often, of course, there are no clear answers, which often proves highly frustrating for parents and other family members. After some time you may begin to realize that there are questions about the death of your child that will always remain unanswered.

## Depression

Lack of energy, sleep problems, inability to concentrate, not wanting to talk to others, and the feeling that there's nothing to live for are all normal reactions. Situational depression, unlike clinical depression, should eventually wear off. You can fight this type of depression with moderate physical activity, plenty of rest and a good diet. Allow friends and family to take care of you. You do not have to be strong. Maintain contact with persons you value. Talking with others who have been through a similar situation may help you to cope. You may even learn from them that it is okay to laugh and smile, even though it seems impossible now.

### If you have lost a child to suicide...

For parents, the loss of a child is among the most painful losses imaginable.

- Maintain contact with others. Suicide can be a very isolating experience for surviving family members because friends don't often know what to say, or how to help. Seek out supportive people to talk with about your child and your feelings.
- Remember that your other family members are grieving too, and that everyone expresses grief in their own way. Your other children, in particular, may try to deal with their pain alone so as not to burden you with additional worries. Be there for each other through the pain, tears and silences.