

# Complicated Grief

## Understanding Why

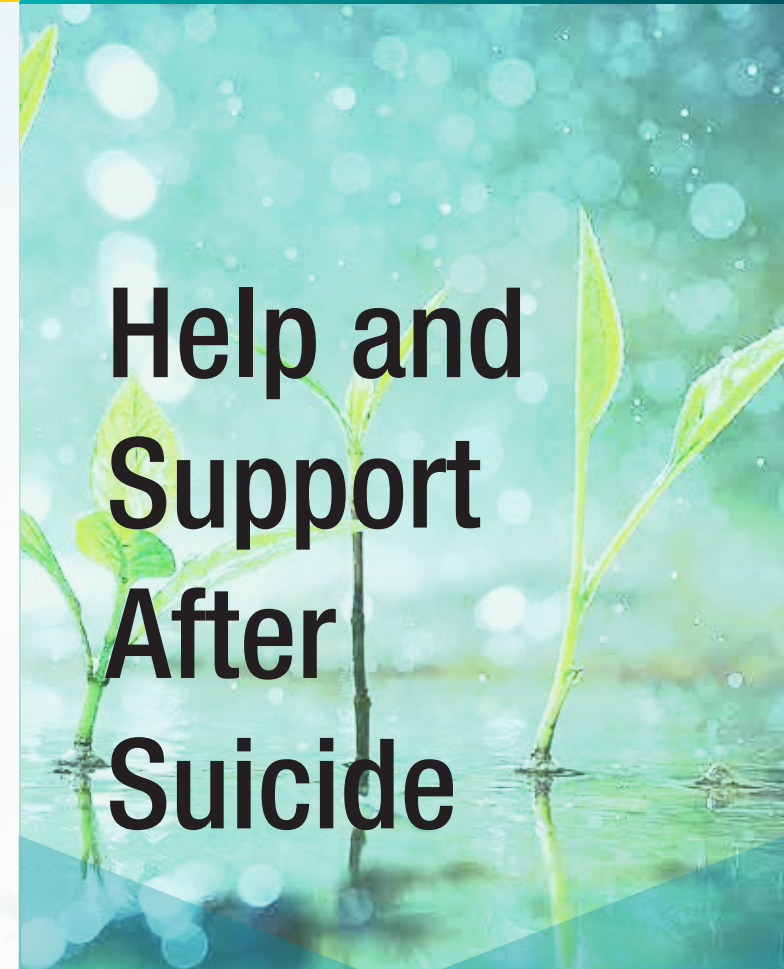
- Suicide involves complex factors and is not the result of a single event.
- Those who die are usually seeking to end unbearable psychological pain that may have been apparent or hidden and not shared.
- A point was reached where the pain was greater than the person's resources to tolerate it or to see other solutions.
- While it is natural to ask "Why?", we may never know the answers to this question.

Grief after a suicide death is often more complicated than other losses you have experienced. Police and other authorities need to be involved in the death investigation. There may be a final note or communication that raises questions for those left behind. You may have feelings of shame, guilt or blame, and feel isolated due to the stigma that is sometimes attached to suicide. Conflicts may arise concerning your own religious or spiritual beliefs or the beliefs of others who are reacting to the suicide death. People may ask how your loved one died; it can be healing to be honest when responding. While you do not need to hide that your loved one died by suicide, it is your personal choice how you respond.



# Help and Support After Suicide

Information and resources to promote healing



Most people ask  
*"How am I going to get through this?"*

To download this brochure electronically and for additional suicide prevention resources visit

[www.suicideispreventable.org](http://www.suicideispreventable.org)



Funded by counties through the Mental Health Services Act (Prop 63).



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# Surviving Suicide Loss

## Complicated Grief

No two grief experiences are the same. Some or all of the reactions below are often experienced by people who have lost someone to suicide. They may come and go like waves or they may feel constant and overwhelming.

- Shock and disbelief; the events seem unreal.
- A feeling of isolation -even in a crowd.
- Loss of concentration and inability to focus; problems going back to work or activities.
- Compulsive behavior such as overeating, excessive shopping, use of drugs, or excessive use of alcohol.
- Physical and/or mental exhaustion.
- Guilt for not having prevented the death.
- Blame, or questioning what you or others did or did not do.
- Anger or a sense of rejection or abandonment.
- Spiritual struggles.
- Relief, if following a difficult struggle with illness or behavior.
- Anxiety and worry about yourself or others and fear that another suicide will occur.
- Deep and profound sadness or depression.



# What to Say

If you know someone who has lost a friend or family member to suicide, the most important thing you can do is reach out and listen. Express your condolences and offer support the way you would to anyone who has lost someone close to them. Offer to help with meals or other tasks. Ask them about the way the person lived, not just about their death. For example: ask what the person's name was if you did not know them, or what activities they liked or their favorite song.

## Talking to a Child About Suicide

It may seem gentler to avoid the conversation or to conceal the actual cause of death, but more often than not children understand more than we realize. It is important to have a conversation that is age-appropriate but also honest to avoid undermining their trust and potentially creating a legacy of shame and secrecy that can persist for years.

Children grieve differently from adults and may have a different understanding of permanence.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention can help you navigate these conversations:  
[www.afsp.org/talking-to-others-about-what-happened#what-do-i-tell-my-children-](http://www.afsp.org/talking-to-others-about-what-happened#what-do-i-tell-my-children-)

## Supporting someone who is surviving suicide loss

*Be willing to listen as they talk about their loved one and the difficult and often confusing emotions they are experiencing. You do not need to offer answers, just be willing to listen with compassion.*

# Support After A Suicide Death

Many people who have lost someone to suicide are helped by connecting with others who have been through this experience. Reaching out to a suicide loss support program can alleviate the isolation that many survivors may experience, and the shared experience and wisdom of others can offer hope to find your way through this experience.

## Resources

If you are having thoughts of suicide, or are concerned about someone else, please call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** at **(800) 273-8255 [TALK]**

A trained counselor will answer your call 24/7.



**Friends for Survival (916) 392-0664**  
[www.friendsforsurvival.org](http://www.friendsforsurvival.org)

Friends for Survival has offered support for those bereaved by a suicide death for more than 30 years. Call their help line, sign up to receive their newsletter, and visit their web site for links to resources and reading material.

**Know the Signs: Directory of Support Programs for Survivors of Suicide Loss in California:** Visit the "Reach Out" page at [www.suicideispreventable.org](http://www.suicideispreventable.org)

**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)**  
AFSP is an organization that is dedicated to bringing hope to those bereaved by suicide. Visit their website to find local support resources and learn more: [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)