



Grief support for children, teens, and adults

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*If you are feeling depressed and having thoughts of suicide, please reach out to someone who cares for you or call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-8255*

## Suicide Loss

Many parents ask, how do I tell my child that their parent, or close family member died by suicide? Societal stigma around suicide death makes it a difficult topic to discuss, but honest and open communication with your family will be key to a healthy grieving process.

### How to Talk About a Suicide Death

#### *Tell the Truth*

It can be tempting to omit details or tell an untrue story when speaking to children or teens about a death by suicide in an effort to protect them. However, we strongly encourage parents to share a few facts about the death, and allow their children to guide the conversation from there. This minimizes confusion and retains trust, which is important in times of uncertainty. Additionally, children may already know the facts surrounding the death or will hear them from others, so it's best you have an honest conversation with them as a trusting adult who they know cares about them. Children may ask questions that you feel uncomfortable with, but do your best to share brief and truthful answers to their questions.

#### *What Words Do I Use?*

The words we use to talk about a suicide death matter. Speaking about suicide in an informed way can help reduce the stigma and shame associated with suicide death. Some things to avoid saying include "committed suicide" which denotes criminal behavior (e.g. committed a robbery). Instead, saying "they died by suicide" or "he killed himself" reduces the stigma and judgement around the death by talking about it like any other death (e.g. they died of old age). As questions come up, ask your children their own thoughts, "You asked if Uncle Bill was being selfish. What do you think?" This can lead to a broader discussion around death and dying and helping your child understand the continuous connection they can have with their parent/family member who died.

#### *Responding to the "Why?" of Suicide Loss*

In general, surviving family members want to know why a person died by suicide, and we rarely have an answer to this question. Share with your children that there are many reasons for someone to die by suicide. Explain that it's not typically the result of one particular incident, which may assuage fear that children have about the death being their fault. You can share that suicide death is often the result of immense pain felt by the individual accompanied by a hopelessness that things may not get better.

### Should I Hold a Funeral?

For both children and adults it's important to memorialize the person who died. The service doesn't have to be a traditional funeral or memorial service, but discuss as a family the ways that you would like to say goodbye to the person who died. This memorial action can be one way your family starts to break down the stigma of death by suicide.



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## Outside Resources

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention page <https://afsp.org/ive-lost-someone> for those who have a loved one die of suicide  
- Grief Support for Suicide Loss Survivors page from Suicide Awareness Voices of Education <https://save.org/what-we-do/grief-support/>

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## Common Emotions Felt by Survivors of Suicide

It's important to understand that especially when grieving a death by suicide, you and your loved ones may feel a mixture of these and other emotions all at once. This is normal and is part of the grief process.

Anger	Hysteria	Anxiety
Guilt	Relief	Intense Feelings
Sadness	Rage	Feeling Unreal
Helplessness	Fear	Mood Swings
Depression	Loneliness	Confusion
Abandonment		

## What Can I Do to Support My Child?

- Maintain open communication
- Listen to their needs
- Respect the way they want to grieve
- Maintain routines and consistency where possible
- Provide them with choices
- Create times and traditions to remember the person who died
- Create a space for play and creativity
- Speak to their teachers for support at school

## Books on Suicide Loss

### Adults:

- [After a Parent's Suicide](#) by Margo Requarth, M.A., M.F.T.
- [Supporting Children After a Suicide Loss: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers](#) by Sarah Montgomery & Susan Coale

### Kids:

- [Someone I Love Died by Suicide: A Story for Child Survivors and Those Who Care for Them](#) by Doreen T. Cammarata
- [After a Suicide: An Activity Book for Grieving Kids](#) by The Dougy Center

### Teens:

- [Nest](#) by Esther Ehrlich
- [When a Friend Dies: A Book for Teens About Grieving & Healing](#) by Marilyn E. Gootman Ed.D.