



# The Compassionate Friends

Offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents

## **SURVIVING YOUR CHILD'S SUICIDE**

### **ABOUT SUICIDE**

The final act of taking one's own life is never entirely predictable by anyone – until it has happened. There comes a point at which no human can stop another who is firmly committed to suicide.

Sometimes people may give warning signs or clues of their intentions. However, some of the clues are so disguised or coded that even a trained counsellor may miss them.

Most suicides are reactions to intense feelings of loneliness, worthlessness, helplessness, hopelessness and depression.

Many parents have experienced the frustration created by years of hospitalizations, medications and blame. This may be aggravated by the difficulties of living with a person who is constantly depressed.

### **AFTER SUICIDE**

Denial and feelings of shock, guilt, anger and depression are a part of the normal grief reactions and are **HEIGHTENED** when a child has died by suicide. It is not unusual to experience feelings of relief if the relationship with the child was destructive for the family.

The suicide of one's child raises painful questions, doubts and fears. The knowledge that your love was not enough to save your child may raise powerful feelings of failure. Realize that as a parent you gave your child your humanness – your positives and negatives – and that what your child did with them was primarily your child's decision.

Cultural and religious interpretations of an earlier day are partly responsible for the stigma associated with suicide. It is important that you confront the word suicide, difficult as that may be. This will take time. Rather than being concerned about the stigma surrounding suicide, concentrate on your own healing and survival.

It is easy and natural to blame yourself, your spouse or anyone else, but to do so can be counterproductive and helps no one. Avoid placing blame in an effort to explain **WHY** this happened.

Suicide is not inherited. It is an individual matter. However, the suicide of a family member can have a profound influence on others in the family.

### **GUILT**

Feelings of guilt may surface, and "if only" is a phrase you may find yourself repeating frequently. You may need to feel guilty for a while to know eventually that you are **NOT** responsible. Sometimes you need to go through a feeling to get beyond it. Believe in yourself. You are human - accept your limitations.

### **ANGER**

Anger toward your child may be a part of the trauma, and it is natural and healthy to express deep feelings of "How could you do this to me and to yourself?" Find constructive ways to express anger so that healing can take place. Examples are: talking about your feelings,

crying and physical activity.

## **WHY?**

There is a need to ask "Why?" The question should be asked, although often there are no clear answers. It is important to struggle with the questions, and eventually you will be able to let them go. To continue to ask "why" for years can become an obsession which would be destructive to you and those around you.

## **DEPRESSION**

Listlessness, inability to concentrate and the feeling that you have nothing to live for may be a part of bereavement. Moderate physical activity can be a means of combating depression. Allow family and friends to take care of you. You don't have to be strong. Maintain contact with persons you value.

## **SPIRITUAL MATTERS**

Often parents find themselves in a spiritual crisis and question their beliefs or feel betrayed by God. Religious concerns about the hereafter also surface. "Why did God let it happen?" is a question we can no more answer than all other questions about imperfections in this world. Try to pray for inner peace instead of an answer. It may also be helpful to question other parents who have experienced a suicide as to their feelings regarding spiritual or philosophical questions. For those with concerns of a spiritual nature, do try and find a gentle, non-judgmental member of your faith and open yourself to that person.

## **COPING CONSTRUCTIVELY**

- As a family, talk about the death to each other; talk about your loss and your pain. Talk about the good times you remember as well as the not so good. All family members will be grieving in their own manner. Try to understand this. It is better to express feelings rather than to internalize them. Crying is healthy and therapeutic.
- It may be helpful to write out your feelings or write a letter to your dead child, expressing all the things you were not able to say before the death. For many, it is a good way to say good-bye.
- Let friends help. When they ask what they can do to help, don't be afraid to tell them of your needs and what will help you. It will also help them.
- It may be beneficial to become involved with a mutual help group, such as The Compassionate Friends. Through sharing with others who have walked the same path, you may gain understanding of your reactions and learn ways to cope. Seek professional help and family counseling if necessary.
- Give yourself time – time and more time. It takes months, even years, to open your heart and mind to healing. Choose to survive, give yourself time, and you will heal.

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**AND**

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