



# **A Guide to Help You Cope with Suicide**



**Victim Assistance Unit  
Denver Police Department  
1331 Cherokee Street  
Denver, Colorado 80204  
720-913-6035**



## **DPD Mission Statement**

In partnership with the community, we endeavor to operate a police agency with a focus on preventing crime in a respectful manner, demonstrating that everyone matters.

## **Victim Assistance Unit Mission Statement**

We are committed to supporting victims, witnesses and families affected by crime and non-criminal stark misfortune through respectful, timely and thorough response and engagement.

## **Victim Assistance Unit Statement of Purpose**

In an effort to foster an understanding of both law enforcement and victim issues as well as enhance the partnership between the community and the Department, we strive to educate and inform the community and the members of the Denver Police Department in a culturally competent manner.

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Please feel free to contact the Victim Assistance Unit  
if you need any support or assistance.

720-913-6035

Office Hours are:

Weekdays 8:00 am –5:00 pm

Weekends and Holidays 7:00 am - 3:00 pm

*Office is Open 365 days a year*

## Introduction

Somebody you know and care about has completed suicide. You may be having thoughts and feelings you don't understand.

This guide is for you, the survivor, to help you cope with this terrible loss. Please take a moment to read through this pamphlet. You don't have to do this alone.

The first section of this pamphlet provides some answers to concerns and frequently asked questions surrounding the death by suicide of a family member or friend.

The second section outlines the stages of grief including emotional and physical responses. You may feel the need for further support. The final section provides a list of places to call for additional outreach and help, as well as suggested readings.

*This is only a guide. It is intended to help you understand and/or anticipate what to expect.*

### It's Important To Know:

- It may not seem real and may be hard to accept.
- You could not have prevented it.
- This was not your fault.
- You are not being punished.
- Everybody reacts differently.
- It's okay to be angry.
- You may never understand why.
- Its common to feel a sense of relief.
- It's important to talk about it.
- If your having thought of hurting yourself please tell someone you are feeling this way

## Questions You May Be Asking Yourself

### What Do I Say To People When They Ask?

- If you don't want to answer a question, don't. If you do choose to answer questions, tell the truth. You can choose how much information you wish to share with different people. Some people may not know what to say, so they avoid you. You can't help that. What you can do is talk to somebody who understands - a friend, another suicide survivor, a professional.

### Is Suicide Inherited?

- No, it is not inherited. However, family and friends may see it as a solution to their pain and may choose to imitate the suicide. If you are severely depressed or have suicidal thoughts, get help now, before you too feel overwhelmed.

### How Could This Have Happened?

- We all go around with the belief that the world should operate in a certain way, with order and sense. When a loved one completes suicide, it can make us question our whole view of the world. Our faith can be shaken, and we may question everything we believe in. It is important to be patient with yourself during this time and to be aware that you can re-establish your faith in the world and in life.

## Suggestions of What To Say To Children

- Be honest. Children receive many messages about death in the family. These messages need to be true and accurate.
- Stick to the simple truth and resist the urge to soften or shade it.
- Listen carefully. Children have many questions to ask and just as many strong feelings.
- It is okay to talk about the deceased family member or friend. It is appropriate to express both good and bad feelings. This will allow children to talk about what happened .
- If you wish, it may be helpful to consult a member of your clergy or spiritual advisor to assist with speaking to children.

## Stages Of Grief

Everyone is different, and your reactions to the suicide of a loved one or friend are as unique as you are. Some reactions, however, have proven widespread enough to characterize phases or stages of grief.

### **I. Impact-Shock Stage**

Shock is a first reaction to death.

- You may feel numb.
- You may not be able to follow a normal daily routine.
- You may feel confused and helpless.
- You may not believe the situation and deny that anything has happened.
- It is too soon to accept the depth of your loss.

When the initial shock begins to wear off, you may experience a flood of intense emotions which can cause you to question your sanity. These strong feelings may include anger, denial, guilt, fear, and/or sadness. You may handle them well initially, only to have them return for no apparent reason.

*It's normal to go back and forth between being "numb" and being "shocked" by the death. It is all part of the healing and coping process.*

## **II. Anger Stage**

Anger is one of the immediate, intense reactions most people will have to the suicide of a loved one or friend.

Anger may be:

- Directed at the loved one.
- Directed at self.
- Directed at God.
- Directed at other people or things.

*Don't deny your anger. Talk about it; think about it; and constructively work with it.*

## **III. Guilt Stage**

The most intense anger you experience may be the way you feel about yourself. You may ask yourself:

"Why didn't I listen?"

"If only..."

"I should have..." etc.

You may wish you had recognized the problem early enough to do something about it. You may have noticed that in the time leading up to the death, your loved one or friend seemed to be feeling much better, and you relaxed your concern.

You need to know it is not uncommon for a suicidal person to feel better once the decision to die has been made. The problem has not been resolved, but your loved one has found an answer: suicide.

Some people believe an individual has a right to end his/her life. The term "rational suicide" is used to describe a suicide that has been thought about and planned, perhaps as a way of dealing with a painful terminal illness. This is an area of controversy, and whether or not you accept it, what you need to think about is that the suicide was an individual decision - rational or not. It was your loved one's or friend's choice, not yours.

If you feel your presence at a particular time could have prevented the suicide, you are assuming too much. A person who is determined to complete suicide is likely to accomplish it. Rather than letting the hurt isolate you, share your time and understanding with somebody else who is hurting. Get involved with others, such as support groups for survivors of suicide.

*Try not to criticize yourself for your behavior toward your loved one or friend while s/he was alive.*

## **V. Relief Stage**

Perhaps his/her pain and suffering had become an emotional drain for you. You may have felt unfairly burdened, or just exhausted. Now you may be feeling a sense of relief that you don't have to worry any more or perhaps relief that the pain of the deceased has finally ended.

A sense of relief when a difficult situation ends is normal. When the "end" is an unhappy one, the relief can still be there, but now it may be colored with guilt.

*Don't expect perfection of yourself. Accept your relief and don't let it grow to inappropriate guilt.*

Survivors may experience a wide range of physical reactions, which can be attributed to the suicide of somebody close to them. These reactions are normal responses to traumatic events.

### **Physical Reactions**

- numbness
- difficulty breathing
- nausea
- fatigue
- sleep disturbance
- blurred vision
- weight loss/ gain
- dizziness
- feeling emptiness
- tightness in the throat
- lack of muscle strength
- exhaustion
- digestive problems
- blood pressure change
- headaches
- diarrhea/constipation
- loss of interest in sex
- hypersensitivity

Survivors may have the impulse to block out the pain and become "too busy" to experience the emotions of grief. If you don't release feelings and emotions, they will surface without your consent and at inconvenient times.

***Remember: to grieve is normal, necessary, and very human. If you were not capable of grieving you would not be capable of loving.***

## Support Groups

**Compassionate Friends** For parents who have lost a child through death.

1-877-969-0010.

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

**Heartbeat.** Support group for anyone who has lost a loved one to suicide.

In Denver, call (303) 697-6984 or 303-318 5028 or call Suicide Education & Support Services at 1-970-506-2737.

[www.endsuicide.org/heart2.html](http://www.endsuicide.org/heart2.html)

**The Denver Hospice.** Variety of Support Groups for all ages and Individual counseling.

(303-321-2828) and ask for the grief center

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

**Judi's House.** Grief support services for children & teens.

(720) 941-0331

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

**Suicide Hotline**

**1-800-784-2433**

**Colorado Helpline**

**1-800-SUICIDE**

**Denver Health Medical Center (DHMC)** (303)-436-6266

**Emergency Psychiatric Services**

**Mental Health Center of Denver-Intake** (303)-504-1250

**Combined Crisis Line**

**(303)-436-4100**

(24hrs/7days a week)

## **Suggested Reading**

(Available at Denver Public Libraries).

Baughner, Bob. *After Suicide Loss: Coping with Your Grief*. This booklet was written to help you understand some of what you may experience after someone you love or know had died from suicide.

Bolton, Iris. *My Son My Son: A Guide to Healing After Death, Loss, or Suicide*. A mother's story of her son's suicide.

Carlson, Trudy. *Suicide Survivor's Handbook: A Guide to the Bereaved & Those Who Wish to Help*. Readable & practical, written with some of author's experiences.

Fine, Carla. *No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One*. The author provides a compassionate guide for dealing with the guilt, anger, and confusion using her experiences, those of other survivors, and advice from mental-health professionals.

Lucas, Christopher. *Silent Grief: Living in the Wake of Suicide*. Practical book to guide friends & families of suicides through grief recovery. (Of special interest to parents of teens.)

Smolin, Ann & Guinan, John. *Healing After the Suicide of a Loved One*. Authors address special needs & emotions of survivors of suicide including natural grief, the added guilt, rage and shame that dealing with a suicide often engenders. Includes a directory of worldwide support groups.

Stimming, Mary (ED.). *Before Their Time: Adult Children's Experiences of Parental Suicide*. This book includes first-person narratives & a resource section with a national listing of suicide survivor support groups.

(Another good resource is any bookstore in your area.)

