



EXPERIENCING SUICIDE LOSS & GRIEF

A RESOURCE FOR NWSLPA • PREPARED BY CHEATCODE

WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is the natural process that occurs in response to a loss. When we suffer a loss we encounter a number of different emotions: shock, denial, anger, guilt, sadness and a general feeling of being overwhelmed. Grief affects everyone differently and unfolds on unique timelines. Some of us feel many emotions immediately after a loss, while others might initially feel numb and disconnected.

Eat • Sleep • Make decisions • Stay on a schedule • Get motivated • Think clearly

All of these are very normal responses to loss. The intensity of your grief is measurable by the significance of the loss. The more you have invested in what was lost, the more intensely you will feel grief.

EXAMPLES OF GRIEF

In this life, we experience grief daily. While grief has often been associated with the loss of a loved one we may also experience grief in the following circumstances:

- Divorce
- Loss of Health
- Job loss/change
- Loss of financial stability
- A miscarriage
- Serious illness diagnosis
- Experiencing a traumatic event
- Loss of safety
- Death of a pet
- Change in Residence
- Loss of a dream
- Change of significant belief
- Loss of friendship
- Retirement
- Loss of identity
- Suicide
- Loss of innocence
- Physical Injury of self or loved one's
- Watching the News
- Hearing about the suffering of others (war, local tragedies, etc.)

STAGES OF GRIEF



DENIAL



ANGER



BARGAINING



DEPRESSION



ACCEPTANCE

THE GRIEVING PROCESS

Grieving is a highly individualized process. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Your grieving process depends on your coping style & skills, support system, life experience, faith, personality and the significance of the relationship.

It is important to remember that healing in grief takes time. It does not mean that the grief will go away, it will integrate into your life and continue to bring meaning. While there are stages of grief, there is no "normal" timeline for each stage and the process is not linear. Some people start to feel better in months, while for others it can be a process of years, depending on the significance of the relationship.

When we are experiencing grief, it means that a change has occurred, sometimes unexpectedly. For this reason it will take time to adapt to. Please be compassionate and patient with yourself and others during this time.

GRIEF EXPRESSION

When we are experiencing grief, we need to express it. It is important to express our feelings around grief honestly. While we may try to avoid expressing our grief, the grief process can only move forward if we acknowledge it, talk about it and express it. There are many healthy ways to express grief that include:

- Crying
- Talking
- Journaling, Poetry writing and Letter writing
- Dancing
- Screaming into a pillow
- Singing, playing and writing music
- Boxing Bags
- Throwing Rocks
- Playing
- Cooking and more...

GRIEF SUPPORT

When we are grieving we need support. Some places we can receive support are:

Friends & Family • Grief Support groups • Grief & Life Coaching • Licensed Therapy

EXPRESSING CONCERN TO A LOVED ONE

It can be scary and intimidating to bring up that we are concerned about a loved one. Often we are afraid we will say the wrong thing, make the problem worse or that our loved one will push us away further as a result of us expressing concern. Rest assured that when someone is struggling with depression, checking in and expressing love and concern is often a risk worth taking. Here are a few ways to be there for them:

- Be relaxed and nonjudgemental
- Be the first to open up with an approach like *"Things just feel really overwhelming lately, and I could use one of our coffee shop talks. Can you hang out this week?"*
- Don't try to diagnose or fix it
- Help them find help and don't give up
- Take care of yourself

A few conversation starters include:

- *I know you have been going through a lot lately, would you like to talk about it? I am here to listen.*
- *Are you willing to share with me how depression impacts you, so that I may be more supportive?*
- *What would be most helpful to you at this moment that will encourage you and support you?*
- *Do you have a support plan for when things get tough?*

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF SUICIDE

When we participate in open and honest conversations with our loved ones, we may identify signs of suicide, which include but are not limited to characteristics such as:

- Quiet, avoiding communication or isolating
- Recent loss of job, relationship, income, or housing
- Sudden changes in behavior
- More irritable, anxious, reckless, or confrontational
- Problems at work or school
- Losing interest in what they enjoy or giving items away
- Lack of or excessive sleep
- Negative statements about themselves or the future

IF A LOVED ONE IS EXPERIENCING THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE

- **ASK** directly about suicide with a question such as "Are you thinking about suicide?" Studies show that asking at-risk individuals if they are suicidal does not increase suicides or thoughts of suicide. In fact, studies suggest the opposite: acknowledging and talking about suicide may reduce suicidal ideation.
- **LISTEN** and help them focus on their reasons for living; avoid imposing your reasons for them to stay alive
- **BE THERE** in whatever way you can: in person, over the phone, or any way that shows support. Helping them feel connected is a key protective factor against suicide and escalation of thoughts of suicide.
- **FOLLOW UP** consistently, reassure them that they are not alone and that you care.
- **CREATE A SAFETY PLAN** which includes:
 - Sharing their feelings with someone they trust & identifying their point of contact in crisis
 - If they can't identify a friend or family member, seek another person in their community they feel safe with and have their number saved (medical professional, someone at work, school or church)
 - List contact info for alternate resources they can reach out to if their contact person can't be reached such as the National Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-800-273-8255
 - Write down this plan & have them keep it at all times to refer in crisis (in their wallet, purse or phone)

COPING AFTER SUICIDE LOSS

Suicide often leaves a plethora of unanswered questions in the midst of the shock and pain. Individuals who act on thoughts of suicide often do so in deep moments of severe depression and pain, when they cannot see beyond the pain. If you are hurting and confused after losing a loved one to suicide you are not alone.

Contagion is the process by which one suicide death may contribute to another. Although contagion is relatively rare (accounting for between 1 and 5 percent of all youth suicide deaths annually), adolescents and teenagers appear to be more susceptible to imitative suicide than adults, largely because they may identify more readily with the behavior and qualities of their peers.

The number one way to prevent contagion in the aftermath of a suicide is to be intentional about creating non-judgmental spaces to process the emotions around the tragic loss.

CONVERSATION STARTERS POST SUICIDE

Those left behind are often left with feelings of doubt, guilt, shame, anger, sadness and more. Healing happens when the community left behind is provided non-judgmental spaces to talk openly about their feelings. Some conversation starters for a meaningful discussion about the emotions and feelings related to the recent suicide include:

- When was the last time you heard from ____?
- What is something that you remember about ____?
- What thoughts and beliefs do you have about suicide?
- What are your fears for _____?
- What do you wish you would have known ____?
- What was left unsaid or undone? How do you feel about this?
- Have you ever had thoughts of suicide? If so, what has helped you to stay safe?
- How can we support you and keep you safe right now?
- Do you have a safety plan if things become difficult? If not, would it be alright for us to work on it?

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