

When someone close to you dies by suicide

An excerpt from *Hope and Healing After Suicide*

You will survive. Yes, the grief is overwhelming. It is hard to believe now, but one hour at a time, one day at a time, you will get through it. And then, as time goes on, the pain will lessen.

Knowing what to expect

Emotional reactions to a suicide are intense and overwhelming. Knowing what to expect will help you cope and begin healing.

- Most survivors find it hard to think clearly. You may feel as if your brain is numb. You may forget things. You may replay the suicide over and over in your mind, and find you cannot stop asking “Why?”
- You are not to blame for the choice made by another person. You are not to blame for the suicide of someone close to you.
- It is not unusual to feel overwhelmed by sorrow, physically ill and angry. You may feel ashamed or guilty. Sometimes, survivors think about suicide themselves. These reactions and other strong feelings are normal. People react in different ways when they are mourning such a loss.

There is no timeline for grief. Heal at your own pace.

Let others help you

Your sense of confusion is likely so great at first that it can be hard to cope—so let other people help you. Look to your friends, family, place of worship, community and others for support. They can deal with callers and help make funeral and other arrangements. They can assist you in remembering what you need to know and do and in making some decisions. They can be there to simply listen.

This resource is adapted from the “Hope and healing after suicide: A practical guide for people who have lost someone to suicide in Ontario.” Download the full guide at www.camh.ca/hopeandhealing.

If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide, you are deserving of help. Please explore resources at www.camh.ca/gethelp. If you feel safe in the moment, follow up with your family physician or care team. If you require immediate, in-person emergency care, call 911, or go to your nearest emergency department.

Telling others

One challenge you will face is telling others about the suicide. Although it may be difficult to speak openly about suicide, it is important to tell family and friends the truth. This allows them to help each other cope with their grief and also helps you work through yours.

- In some situations, you might choose to say something as brief as, “She died by suicide and I just can’t talk about it yet” or “He lived with a deep depression and died by suicide.” Creating a brief statement that you repeat can be helpful so that you aren’t trying to think of what to say each time you need to tell someone. You do not have to disclose details to people who are not close to the family.
- In addition to telling family and close friends, you will need to notify people with whom the deceased had regular contact. Because telling people can be difficult, you may want to ask someone to help you make these phone calls. The list of people to inform might include school personnel, an employer and work colleagues, doctors, religious or spiritual organizations and the owner of the property where the deceased was living.

Additional resources

In this series:

- When children grieve
www.camh.ca/-/media/files/Hope_and_Healing-When_children_grieve.pdf
- When teens grieve
www.camh.ca/-/media/files/Hope_and_Healing-When_teens_grieve.pdf
- When someone close to you dies by suicide
www.camh.ca/-/media/files/Hope_and_Healing-Someone_close.pdf
- Working through the grief
www.camh.ca/-/media/files/Hope_and_Healing-Working_through_grief.pdf

Where can I get help in a crisis?

- CAMH Crisis Resources
www.camh.ca/crisisresources
- The CAMH emergency department in Toronto is open 24/7
www.camh.ca/ED

Where else can I find treatment or support?

- The Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention provides links to supports across Canada. <https://suicideprevention.ca/Need-Help>
- Bereaved Families of Ontario operates in various cities across Ontario.
<https://bereavedfamilies.net>

Where can I find more CAMH resources about suicide?

- When a Family Member is Suicidal
www.camh.ca/en/health-info/guides-and-publications/when-a-family-member-is-suicidal
- Hope and Healing after Suicide
www.camh.ca/hopeandhealing
- When a Parent Dies by Suicide... What Kids Want to Know
www.camh.ca/en/health-info/guides-and-publications/when-a-parent-dies-by-suicide