



When a Friend or Family Member Commits Suicide

The death of a friend or family member can be shocking. When a friend or family member commits suicide, there are often questions that cannot be answered. How a person reacts to suicide varies. Some people feel guilty or angry. Others may feel sad.

This information can help you understand what many people go through in dealing with the suicide of a friend or family member. It also provides some guidance to help you, your family members and friends.

Why do people commit suicide?

Every suicide is different. There is not a typical kind of person who commits suicide.

It is hard to understand why anyone would take their own life. But there are some explanations that may help.

Severe depression is one of the primary reasons for suicide. A number of medical and behavioral conditions can cause depression. When it's severe, some people may feel hopeless. They may feel helpless and alone. Sometimes a person may begin to think that suicide is the only way to deal with it.

Some conditions affect a person's ability to think clearly too. When combined with depression, this can lead a person to think, "I want this 'pain' to go away." Or "there is no other way out of this." Or "the world would be better without me."

There are many issues that can trigger depression. Some may cause irrational thoughts. This may lead to suicide. They include:

- Serious illness.
- Chronic pain.
- Substance abuse.
- Life crisis.
- Stress.
- Marital problems.
- Financial concerns.
- Work problems.

Ways people react to a suicide

- **Uniquely Personal:** Every person responds in his or her own way. It is important to know this. Some people may need to talk. Others may not.
- **Shock and Disbelief:** It's common to experience shock and disbelief. A person's suicide often results in many questions. It is hard not knowing why someone would

take their own life. Even when survivors understand the factors related to it, no one can fully answer why. It is normal to struggle with questions about this.

- **Guilt:** Often people have feelings of guilt thinking they should have seen it coming. They may think they could have stopped it. These feelings are normal. But they are most often not justified.
- **Anger:** Anger is a common feeling many people have. A person may feel emotionally rejected. They may feel left alone. Anger is often mixed with grief. This can be confusing. Suicide usually produces more anger than any other type of death.
- **Sadness:** Intense sadness is normal. It can seem overwhelming when mixed with guilt and anger. This is natural. It should fade over time.
- **Blame:** It is common to blame those close to the person who has died. Some think they should have seen the warning signs. Or that they could have stopped it. This is understandable. But it is not right. And it could make those left behind feel worse.

How to help a person who is grieving

- Allow the person to talk about their feelings. Those who are grieving need to work through them. They may do so by sharing their thoughts.
- Do not judge the person. Each person has his or her own feelings.
- Be mindful of difficult times. The date of the suicide can bring back a lot of feelings. Keep this in mind.
- If a grieving person is talking about suicide, urge them to get help right away.

Helping yourself

- Ask for support from your friends and family. If someone you know has died it is normal to feel that loss.
- Talk about your feelings with people who will not judge you.
- Seek out family members or friends who may have the same feelings. Share how you feel.
- Get additional support if you are still having a hard time. If you are in treatment for depression or other psychological conditions, contact your provider. Other support services include your family doctor or clergy. You can also find out about local grief groups through your local hospital or mental health groups.

This document is for your information only. It is not meant to give medical advice. It should not be used to replace a visit with a provider. Magellan Health does not endorse other resources that may be mentioned here.