

How can we help others cope?

Whether we are a relative, a friend or a professional supporting someone we care about, we may, at times, feel uncomfortable in not knowing what to do or say. It may be helpful to remember that our presence alone is enough. Just being there with them will give a sense of confidence and hope. We can offer our friendship by not judging their actions or reactions; equally important is that we do not indicate acceptance of the act as well in terms of “it was okay.”

We can give support by:

- Listening
- Allowing the person to grieve
- Reassuring that what they are feeling is normal and that suicide is not hereditary
- Avoiding clichés, such as “Be strong” or “Time will heal”
- Not judging the length of time it takes

The grieving person’s possible feelings of shock and numbness, pain, anger, and guilt may influence their relationship with you. They may not at first respond to you and they may lose interest in social activities or personal appearance. It is important to offer yourself and your support across time.

Through the help of supportive friends, professional counselling and support groups, we will develop a better understanding of our loss. There will be days when things seem normal again and then days with setbacks filled with pain and sadness. It is a great challenge to accept the going forward and stepping backward during the grief process.

24 Hour Help Line: 1-800-265-3333

Your not alone

We become aware that we cannot judge yesterday with the knowledge of today. We learn to let go of our “if only” and invest in the present. We need to learn that we are left to live and to live on day at a time.

Looking to the future doesn't mean we will forget our sorrow or our loved one but slowly new experiences and more happy memories emerge to heal the hurt.

Don't hesitate to seek help. In many communities, we are fortunate to have support groups which can assist us and other children in resolving our grief. Professional trained in working with the bereaved can also give support and telephone numbers of whom to contact for further information.



“MISSING THE ONE YOU LOVED”



24 Hour Help Line: 1-800-265-3333

Always there for you.

For further information you may contact the Office of the Chief Coroner at the following address and telephone number:

**Office of the Chief Coroner
PO Box 1000 Station 590
Iqaluit NU X0A 0H0**

Phone: (867) 975-7292
Fax: (867) 975-7294
Cell: (867) 222-0063

NOTE: This brochure is for general information only reference should be made to the *Coroner's Act* for complete information.



BREAKING THE SILENCE AND GUIDING LIVES AFTER SUICIDE



OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CORONER

NUNAVUT

A Guide to Understanding and Healing

When someone you love becomes a memory... that memory becomes a treasure

Learning to live after the death of a friend or family member is often difficult and painful. Grieving can hurt, but it is a necessary and normal process of adjusting to life without that person.

How death occurs can influence the form grief takes. When suicide is the cause, feelings of bewilderment, confusion, anger, guilt, and rejection can overshadow the intense sadness that is left in other types of loss.

Such strong emotions can inhibit the normal process of grief, causing the bereaved to feel isolated in their personal search for understanding and consolation.

How do you grieve the loss of one who has taken his or her own life?

How do you find answers to questions which are either very painful to ask, or difficult to share?

How can you help yourself?

What support or advice can you give to a grieving friend who has experienced such a tragedy?

Those who have worked with bereaved families have learned there is no easy answer or quick remedies to help someone overcome the trauma which accompanies the death of a loved one, particularly when suicide is the cause. But knowledge can be a powerful tool in learning to cope with the loss.

The complexities of suicide and its aftermath are not easy to understand. However, the Office of the Chief Coroner of Nunavut hopes that by sharing information, you can find a path towards healing, coping with this event.

What are our needs?

Understanding is inherent to our nature. We search for answers as to why things happen and how things come to be. We also need to have a sense of belonging, purpose and order in our basic needs which, in turn, enable us to cope with life's hardships.

The death of a loved one means the death of an important relationship. As a result, feelings of trust and security may be affected in other relationships.

Coping with death by suicide is difficult. There are often unanswered questions. Feelings of rejection, shame and embarrassment can lead to denial or a wish to hide the event. The perceived stigma attached to suicide may create difficulties for us as we work through our grief. It may impede discussion and affect our day to day living. As a result, avoidance and indifference may occur.

No matter what our relationship to the deceased, we need not be ashamed. In the end, suicide is the sole responsibility of the person who took their own life. *"This was their decision and action."*

A concern as to how others may see us, our feelings of guilt in thinking the somehow we should have been able to prevent the death and many other emotions may cause us to mask reality.

If we hide it from ourselves, it only inhibits the grief from being expressed.

However difficult it is, the word suicide must be confronted and accepted in order for the healing process to run its course. The death, not the form it takes, must be able to start healing.



What may we feel?

The bereaved often relate they feel they are "going crazy" with fears of not being able to cope with mixed emotions and thoughts. It is important to understand that our reactions are normal and are experienced by most people following a suicide.

These are some of the feelings experienced:

- Feeling of abandonment
- Shock and Disbelief
- Confusion or Depression
- Anger at the person and ourselves
- Anxiety or Panic
- Bewilderment
- Fear
- Humiliation and or Shame
- Guilt
- Sense of failure

Just as there are a wide range of emotional responses to the death, we may expect to have physical reactions as well: numbness, tightness in the chest, nausea, fatigue, headaches, loss of appetite, or an inability to sleep are natural.

Because the cause of death and the loss of the person affects us so deeply, we may also experience changes in personality and behaviour. We may feel detached from ourselves and others. This is common, but it may create distance among family members and other friends, particularly if intense feelings of guilt and anger persist. It is important to work through these feelings by accepting them and sharing them with others. We may find we cannot hide our feelings, nor should we. It may be helpful to be with non-judgmental people (e.g. a bereavement support group) who can assist us in understanding these feelings.

Consider, to, that professional help may be a great source of strength as we adjust to the trauma that has affected us and our family. It is important to rebuild our confidence and find new ways to strengthen our ability to cope.

How do we cope?

We will have questions as to the reasons for the suicide. Relief may be found in searching and attempting to piece together what happened; but, many are left to struggle and live with unanswered questions. However, the pain of our loss may bring us closer to understanding the pain and hopelessness of the person who has taken their own life. The fact remains that a loved one has died and we need to mourn the loss.

We need to start the grieving process in an open and accepting manner. The funeral is a good place to start. The Office of the Chief Coroner has an important role to play in acknowledging the life and death of the person. We need to consider the choices and options available with respect to the type of service we feel can help us and our friends and relatives confront the reality of the death. It is the place to begin to say goodbye.

You may wish to consider that there are many ways to cope:

- Have personal respect and dignity
- Communicate about our loss
- Gain an understanding of the grieving process as it relates to suicide
- Be around friends or people we know will accept whatever we are feeling
- Have contact with others who have had a similar experience and with whom we can share feelings
- Remember our personal strengths in previous difficult times
- Have courage



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Talking helps with Grieving