



Understanding Suicide Grief

Grieving the sudden and traumatic loss of a loved one or dear friend is painful. Suicide grief sometimes makes things more complicated. Survivors of a suicide loss can expect to experience some or all of these reactions:

Shock – Disbelief, waiting to wake up from a bad dream, physical reactions such as headaches, stomachaches, hives, inability to eat, sitting and staring without awareness of what’s going on around you.

Fear/Anxiety – excessive worrying there may be another tragic event or death, fear you or another relative will also take their life.

Forgetfulness – not remembering what side of the envelope the stamp goes on, forgetting how to drive to a location you’ve driven to dozens of times before, not remembering how long ago you took ibuprofen.

Despair – deep pain, continuous crying, lack of desire to get out of bed. Feeling of hopelessness. Inability to imagine ever feeling better.

Anger – general irritation or specific anger/blame directed towards God, the deceased, and/or those around you.

Guilt – replaying events over and over. Despair setting in at a deeper level as you recall conversations you wish would’ve gone differently. Guilt for feeling relief (a common reaction when your loved one was suffering from a mental illness). Guilt for laughing or doing anything that resembles normalcy after your loved one’s death.

Relief – a common reaction when your loved one had been suffering from a mental illness and/or had made previous suicide attempts.

Isolation – you are likely experiencing emotions you have never felt before or certainly not at these depths before. It may be difficult to put into words what you are feeling. You may be unable to identify with others who are grieving. You may feel your grief can’t be shared because you think others were closer to the deceased and they need all the support.

Post-Traumatic Stress – Nightmares, reliving the event, hyper-alert/on-guard.

Crisis of Faith – revisiting what you believe, doubting your belief system, or an unwillingness to engage or discuss spiritual matters.

Stigma – fearful of what others think of you or your loved one, concern about your religion’s authority reaction.

Why – relentless search for an explanation, replaying events and conversations in search of an answer.

Numbness – absolute exhaustion that results in a “just going through the motions” approach. Everything seems gray or dull. Absence of vibrancy of any kind. Or functioning at a high level very early on in the grief.

Responsibility – feeling the burden of keeping your loved one’s memory alive, frequently checking in with others to ensure they are okay, ignoring your own emotional needs because you are too busy taking care of everyone else.