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Practical

Ways to Cope with

Grief and Loss

After a Loved One

Dies by Suicide

HopeBeyondOurGrief.org

A survivor cannot simply “reduce” grief, especially after a suicide. The goal is not to make the grief disappear but to find healthy ways to carry the grief, lessen its overwhelming intensity, and gradually learn to live with the loss.

Some practical things a survivor can do include:

1.

Give yourself permission to grieve.

Don't judge yourself for crying, feeling angry, being numb, or having good days. Grief is not a sign that you are doing something wrong.

2.

Talk about what happened with someone you trust.

Find a person who can listen without judgment—a family member, friend, pastor, chaplain, counselor, or support-group member.

3.

Don't isolate yourself.

Even when you don't feel like being around people, try to maintain some connection. A short phone call, walk, meal, or visit can help.

4.

Take care of your body.

Grief is physically exhausting. Try to maintain regular sleep, nutritious meals, hydration, and some physical activity. Even a 10-minute walk can be helpful.

5.

Create a simple daily routine.

When everything feels chaotic, ordinary routines can provide a sense of stability: getting up at a regular time, showering, eating breakfast, taking a walk, and going to bed at a consistent time.

6.

Write down the thoughts that keep circling in your mind.

Journaling can provide a place to put the questions, anger, memories, and emotions that are difficult to express aloud.

7.

Give yourself permission to remember.

Look at photographs, tell stories, listen to meaningful music, visit a special place, or create a memory book. Remembering your loved one doesn't prevent healing.

8.

Be gentle with guilt.

Survivors frequently ask, “What could I have done?” or “Why didn't I see the signs?” Try to remember that hindsight gives us information that we did not possess at the time. A person's suicide is extraordinarily complex and is not something that can simply be reduced to one person's failure.

9.

Accept help.

You don't have to be strong all the time. When someone offers to bring dinner, mow the lawn, drive you somewhere, or sit with you, consider saying yes.

10.

Find others who understand suicide loss.

There is something uniquely comforting about talking with someone who can say, “I've been there.” A suicide-loss support group can provide understanding that friends who have never experienced this kind of loss may not be able to offer.

11.

Prepare for difficult dates.

Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and other significant dates can intensify grief. Don't be surprised when they hurt. Plan ahead—decide whether you want to be alone, with family, at church, visiting a meaningful place, or doing something that honors your loved one.

12.

Allow yourself moments of pleasure without guilt.

Laughing, enjoying a meal, taking a vacation, or having a good day does not mean you have forgotten your loved one. Joy is not betrayal. You are allowed to live.

13.

Take your questions to God.

If you are a person of faith, don't be afraid to bring your anger, confusion, and questions to God. Prayer doesn't have to be polished. Sometimes “God, I don't understand” is a perfectly honest prayer.

14.

Seek professional help when grief becomes overwhelming.

A grief counselor or therapist familiar with suicide bereavement can provide a safe place to work through complicated emotions. Professional help isn't an admission of weakness; it is an act of caring for yourself.

15.

Take one day—or even one hour—at a time.

After a devastating loss, thinking about the rest of your life can feel impossible. You don't have to solve the rest of your life today. Ask yourself, “What do I need to get through this hour?”

Remember

**You don't have to stop loving your loved one
in order to begin healing.**

Healing isn't forgetting. It isn't “getting over it.”
It isn't leaving your loved one behind.

Healing means learning, little by little, how to
carry the love and the loss together while
continuing to live. There will eventually be
moments when you laugh again, enjoy
something again, or look forward to tomorrow
again.

When those moments come, don't feel guilty.
Your joy does not dishonor the person you lost.
Your life still has value, and allowing yourself to
live is not leaving your loved one behind.

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