

## **Your Grief is Unique**

### **Healing from Suicide Loss**

#### **Tips to Remember:**

- Acknowledge the loss as a suicide. It is easy to want to deny this fact that our love one chose to take their life. This will only complicate grieving further.
- Your healing may take longer than most people think.
- Your grief work may require more energy than you imagined.
- Your grief will not remain static but will unfold in your own unique way.
- Your grief may impact all areas of your life.
- Grief will not follow a logical progression of decreasing intensity.
- You will grieve not only for the person who has died, but also for all of the hopes, dreams, and needs that can no longer be fulfilled by this person.
- Your grief will involve a wider range of feelings than those typically recognized. Remember, feelings are not *good* or *bad*, *right* or *wrong*, they just are. Give yourself permission to feel whatever emotions you are currently experiencing.
- Grief may involve an identity crisis. You will have to figure out who you are now without the person who you have lost, particularly if it is a family member.
- At times you may fear that you are going crazy. You are not. You are having normal reactions to a very challenging situation.
- Sudden waves of grief may pop up at unexpected times. Be aware of what your triggers may be so that you are not blindsided by overwhelming feelings.
- Give yourself permission. Some days you can handle the feelings that surface, and some days you may "fall apart." Grief is unique – accept how it impacts you and let yourself feel the pain, rather than pretending it's not happening.
- Cry. Tears are not a sign of weakness - they are a sign that you have loved.
- Do not make major decisions too quickly.
- Maintain a support system. Try not to withdraw from loved ones. Remember they do care deeply for you and may not know how to help you.
- Communicate what you need to loved ones so they know how to best support you.

- Believe in yourself.
- Tell friends and classmates what you need. They may avoid you because they are afraid to say the wrong thing. They will be relieved to know what you need at this time.
- This loss may trigger feelings of grief for earlier losses that were not resolved.
- Talk about it! You do not need to go through this alone.
- Forgive yourself for whatever is going on inside you.
- Accept you may never know why your loved one took their life
- Exercise, sleep well, and eat well.
- Breathing exercises ([www.doasone.com](http://www.doasone.com)) (*Breathe2Relax App*)
- Care for/indulge yourself. YOLO: Remember that you only live once.
- Create a 'new normal' for yourself.
- Practice practical coping strategies:
  - Simple relaxation and distraction skills, such as taking three deep slow breaths, counting to 10, or picturing yourself in a favorite calm and relaxing place.
  - Think about how you've coped with difficulties in the past and remind yourself that you can use those same coping skills now.
  - Writing a list of people you can turn to for support.
  - Writing a list of things you're looking forward to.
  - Focusing on individual goals, such as spending time with mutual friends.
  - Do not feel guilty having fun! You need it and deserve it.
- Find the gifts in the loss.
  - Appreciating simple joys
  - Understanding other people more
  - Giving back
  - Caring more deeply
  - Having more empathy for others
  - Realizing everyone's journey is different
  - Supporting others in difficult times

### **Tips for coping with anniversaries and holidays:**

*Try to prepare ahead for anniversaries and holidays, as these may be difficult times for you. It might be best to plan ahead.*

- Rituals sometimes help with healing: Light a candle, go to suicide prevention walk/run, visit a memorial site, say a prayer, or write a poem.
- Think of a positive way to remember your loved one during this time. Perhaps have your loved one's favorite meal or go to that park you used to go to together.
- Think about holiday shopping. If the idea of crowds stresses you, think about shopping early, shopping online, or having a friend or family member accompany you.
- Remember that these days impact everyone differently. Accept it for what it is and allow yourself to feel it. Give yourself what you need, whether it is time for yourself or a dinner out with friends.
- Do what you can. If you need to visit with family for only an hour rather than an entire day, communicate that you need to leave and do what's best for you. Practice compassion for yourself with these needs.
- Visit others if you can as this may take your mind off of the stress or sadness.
- Donate your time or raise money in memory of your loved one. Perhaps serve a meal at a homeless shelter.
- Buy a decoration or ornament and hang it in memory of your loved one.
- Perhaps remember your loved one during this time by pulling out photo albums and sharing joyful, funny stories.