



HAVE YOU LOST SOMEONE TO SUICIDE?

Support After Youth Suicide

In loving memory of Adam Cashen

SUPPORT AFTER SUICIDE

You may be experiencing shock, confusion, and unimaginable pain right now. Although, it is not uncommon to feel lost, confused, and as if you are to blame, please remember that:

It is not your fault and you are not alone.

In Canada, suicide is one of the leading causes of death among youth aged 15-24; and claims the lives of approximately 500 teenagers each year, leaving loved ones like you behind to grieve.

WHAT NOW?

**Surround yourself with loved ones.
Ask for help.**

What you have experienced is incredibly difficult and this booklet was developed to help you find the support you need to cope. There is no shame in asking for help when you need it; only strength.

SHARING EXPERIENCES

“I lost my son to suicide 6 years ago. I will always miss him and something inside of me died that day also, but in spite of this tragedy, I have choices: one of which is to find a path in my life that has meaning, through his memory.” ~ Lorraine

“Being around friends and family who knew my friend helped me because they could understand how I was feeling.” ~ David

“I used music to help me cope with my sadness.” ~ Rob

“At the time of my son’s death I drew comfort from spending time with his friends. We cried together, laughed together and shared many funny stories.” ~ Carol

“My doctor sent me to a psychologist. I’m glad I went and that my parents knew something was up. I’m still struggling but it has really helped.” ~ Morgan

“It has been 15 years since I lost my son. Time has passed so quickly, but the memories of him will last a lifetime. His passing has given new meaning and purpose to my life, and to those lives that I have touched.” ~ George

GIVE YOURSELF TIME TO GRIEVE

You may be faced with overwhelming waves of emotion as you try to cope with the loss of your loved one.



Anger
Guilt
Blame
Extreme Sadness

Everyone reacts differently to loss so give yourself the time you need to mourn your loved one's death.

Over time, the grief will become less intense.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GRIEF & DEPRESSION?

Grief is an expected and appropriate emotional response to loss. It is usually time limited and subsides gradually. Grief can consist of initial shock, feelings of loss, physical pain, a sense of emptiness, and even anger and guilt. However, if these feelings persist for longer periods of time and begin to interfere with your regular daily activities, you may be at risk of developing Depression and should seek professional help from a counsellor or your family doctor.

START THE HEALING PROCESS

Although everyone deals with grief differently there are a number of things that many people find helpful during this time:

- ***Surround yourself with loved ones.*** Do not isolate yourself. Although you may feel the need to be alone, prolonged isolation may contribute to increased feelings of loneliness and separation.
- ***Be honest.*** It's important to realize that what has happened is real - feel free to share openly with others and don't be afraid of your thoughts and feelings.
- ***Visit a health provider.*** Sometimes it helps to talk to a professional. Counselling may be available through your family doctor, workplace, school, or religious group.
- ***Ask for help.*** If you are feeling overwhelmed at times, it's OK to ask for help from family and friends.
- ***Join a support group.*** Many communities have grief support groups. If not, there are websites online where you can share your feelings with others who are experiencing something similar.

DEALING WITH STIGMA

WHAT IS STIGMA?

Stigma is a negative label often placed on people with mental illness. Stigmas are hurtful, judgmental and not based on fact.

You may be faced with some insensitive comments as neighbours, friends, family, and coworkers may not know what to say to you or how to react. Don't be afraid to talk openly about your loved one's death - this will not only help you heal but it will help people around you to understand and eventually come to terms with the loss. By sharing your story, you are also helping to combat stigma associated with suicide and mental illness.

LONG-TERM HEALING

Although the pain may never go away completely, you can learn to cope, and in time life will become easier as you find your new normal. Here are a few things to keep in mind that may help:

- **Share memories.** It helps to share memories with others, especially if you can talk to someone else who also knew the person you've lost.
- **Try to keep up your daily routine.** Keeping busy and working towards resuming your regular routine is important.
- **Take part in activities.**
- **Exercise.** Walking, running, yoga etc. may help to reduce the tension and stress you may be feeling.
- **Write in a journal.** Writing is a good way to express your feelings and it will help you process your thoughts.
- **Rest & eat.** Try to get 7 - 8 hours of sleep a night and eat to maintain your health.
- **Faith.** For some people, faith and spiritual support are helpful.
- **Finding a new hobby.** A hobby, sport, or interest may give you something productive to focus on and help you to find your "new normal".

SUPPORTING A SURVIVOR

Sometimes it's difficult for those who are grieving to reach out to others. Being there to support your loved one is important. Here are a few tips to keep in mind while being supportive:

- Be patient and respect the need to grieve.
- Let them know you are there for them and ready to listen if they want to talk.
- Educate yourself about suicide in order to overcome any preconceptions you may have about suicide or any discomfort you may feel talking about the subject.
- Avoid saying, "I know how you feel" unless you've also lost someone to suicide.
- Seek out survivor support groups and offer to attend a meeting with him/her.
- Run errands or cook a meal for him/her. Small acts of kindness go a long way.
- Don't be afraid to talk about the person he or she lost, especially if you knew them. Don't pretend the person didn't exist.

Your loved one may not seem like themselves for some time and he or she may experience mood swings. These reactions are common in the grieving process. Just be present and supportive.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Websites:

www.teenmentalhealth.org
www.leftbehindbysuicide.org
www.afsp.org
www.suicideprevention.ca
www.cmha.ca

Support Groups:

Survivors of Suicide (SOS), Halifax. (902) 835-3812 (www.sos-novascotia.com)
Survivors of Suicide (SOS), Cape Breton. (902) 565-7976 (www.soscapedbreton.ca)
The IWK Child and Adolescent Bereavement Group. (902) 470-8942
CDHA Adult Bereavement Support Groups. (902) 473-1622

Crisis lines:

Kids Help Phone. 24 hr. (800) 668-6868
Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team (Halifax Regional Municipality). (888) 429-8167



**Canadian Mental
Health Association**
Nova Scotia



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