

Understanding Suicide



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A suicide death is a result of multiple contributing factors, rather than a single event. Understanding these contributing factors may help you on your road to journey.

Several stressors and health concerns may lead to a sense of hopelessness which could result in a death by suicide. Depression is most commonly associated with suicide because it is often underdiagnosed or left untreated. Individuals with mental illnesses lead fulfilling lives by actively managing their illness. Depression, anxiety and substance abuse disorders, if unaddressed, increase the risk for suicide.

There are three categories of risk factors that individuals fall into in relation to suicide: health, environmental and historical. When these three categories co-occur, the risk for suicide increases. An individual's genetic makeup also plays a large role in their mental health struggles and risk of suicide.

1. Health Factors:

- Mental Illnesses: depression, substance abuse disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, psychosis, conduct disorder and anxiety disorders.
- Aggression, mood changes, and poor relationships
- Chronic or serious health conditions/pain
- Traumatic brain injury

2. Environmental Factors:

- Access to lethal means including; firearms and drugs (illicit, prescribed, or over-the-counter).
- Continuous stressful situations including: harassment, bullying, relationship problems, and unemployment
- Stressful life events including: loss of a job, divorce, and death
- Losing someone close to suicide or glamorizing a suicide death

3. Historical Factors:

- Prior suicide attempts
- A family history of suicide
- Child abuse

Experiencing Suicidal Grief

The loss of a loved one by suicide is often shocking and unexpected which makes the time after a painful experience. Individuals experience grief in their own way. Grief does not always follow a linear path after the death. Grief does not have a time frame. Not all suicide loss survivors will continue their lives in the same manner prior to the suicide loss. All will have to adjust to life without their loved one in their own way.

Suicide loss survivors will experience several emotions associated with grief including; shock, denial, pain, guilt, anger, shame, despair, disbelief, hopelessness, stress, sadness, numbness, rejection, loneliness, abandonment, confusion, self-blame, helplessness, depression, anxiety and more.

These are emotions commonly experienced by suicide loss survivors. These emotions are considered normal to experience throughout the grieving process. Many suicide loss survivors experience these emotions like a rollercoaster, where they are highs and lows. It is important to take one day at a time after the loss of a loved one.

Many suicide loss survivors often question why the suicide or death of a loved one occurred and if they could have done more to prevent it. This leads to feelings of guilt. In some cases, if the loved one had a mental illness, the survivor may experience feelings of relief. These feelings will most likely worsen and complicate the grieving process.

There is a negative public perception attached to suicide, mainly because it is commonly misunderstood. Many family members and friends do not know what to say or how and when to support the suicide loss survivor. They may rely on the suicide loss survivor to reach out and ask for help. However, the survivor may be experiencing feelings of shame or embarrassment that could make it difficult to reach out. It is important to recognize that ongoing support is critical to survivors and for maintaining family and friend relationships.

How to Take Care of Yourself

Over time, suicide loss survivors will begin to enjoy life again. The process of healing takes many forms.

Experiencing a loved one's death by suicide is a challenging, complex and painful experience. There are things you can do to help with the grieving process.

Attending support groups: You are not alone. There are support groups available, specifically ones for suicide loss survivors.

These support groups are safe spaces that allow individuals to share their stories without feeling shame or being judged. They are also a helpful source of guidance the healing process.

Following your gut: It is important to do what feels right to you. Do not feel like you have to disclose information or talk about the topic right away. Once you are ready to talk about the topic, family and friends will be able to support you in an appropriate way.

Writing: Some individuals have found it beneficial to write down their feelings, or to write a letter to their loved one. Writing allows you to express your thoughts and feelings in a safe manner. You may not be able to tell people face to face yet, in that case, writing would be a good way to start.

Asking for help: Allow your family and friends to support you. Several resources throughout the community including; therapists, co-workers, etc. are also available.

Sources:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Organization

American Association of Suicidology

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