

To the Newly Bereaved

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Grieving is a unique, lonely extremely painful process with each individual working through their own space at their own pace, but it is comforting to know what helped others who have experienced the anguish in the aftermath of a loved one's suicide.

"GIVE SORROW WORDS. GRIEF HAS NEED TO SPEAK, LEST WHISPER THE O'ER FRAUGHT HEART AND BID IT BREAK".

Wm Shakespeare/MacBeth

1. **Talk! Talk! Talk!** Speak of your pain, your loss and the cause of it as long and as often as you need to speak of it.
2. **Be with your grief.** Don't suppress, avoid or postpone grief's expression. Let yourself feel it! Cry! Tears are cathartic and cleansing. Friends/extended family feel helpless faced with the magnitude of the loss and grief. They try to soothe, may even plead with bereaved not to cry. Don't suppress your grief to spare others distress. If you are reluctant to express your pain in others' presence provide uninterrupted time each day to reflect upon the life shared, your loss and sorrow ... a time to mourn. Plan this private time during the day, allowing yourself some pleasant distraction during the pre-bedtime hours. In this manner you manage your grief and allow healing without the discomfort of thinking your grief expressions impose upon others.
3. **Let your friends give what they offer** ... to be with you, to share a meal, to run errands, to listen to your heartbreak. When you feel the times of being alone are unbearable, call upon them. Friends extend "Let me know how I can help?" Most are sincere. By calling on friends when we need support we allow them the gift of sharing our loss. On the other hand, if we continually refuse help, we may send the message that no help is needed and future offers would be an intrusion. Sensitive people will understand both your need for support and for time alone.
4. **We seldom feel like accepting invitations**, often for a long time, but consider being with close friends/family at small dinner parties, movies, concerts, sports events, etc. So what if you lose your composure! These social events provide the mind momentary respite from what has happened and are a useful focus when sleep is elusive or tormenting memories overwhelm us.
5. **There is nothing funny about suicide or the death of someone we love** but there is healing power in humor. It's o.k. to laugh. Laughter is healthy and healing. It releases chemicals that enhance ones sense of well-being. Laughter relaxes and rests us. Laughter reassures our wounded psychic. Provide an opportunity for laughter by being with fun-loving people, watch a good comedy show or rent a nonsensical movie. Don't expect films with a theme of violence, sex or societal issue to be relaxing.
6. **Re-establish routine in your life as soon as possible.** People thrive on orderliness in their lives and a loved one's death disturbs this orderliness in the most devastating manner possible. Re-establishing routine is a major, necessary step in reaffirming life's continuance and future well being. For those who are confronted constantly by the family member's absence re-establishing routine means redistribution of household chores and

living arrangements. Adjusting to a loved one's death means many heartbreaking, but necessary changes from life as it once was.

7. **Acute grieving depletes energy**, leaving little concern for good grooming. For a time it may take great effort and determination to shower, shave, arrange one's hair, makeup and dress each morning but caring for one's physical appearance is a critical step toward restoring well-being, balance and orderliness to one's life.

8. Provide the best opportunity for restful sleep by avoiding stimulants throughout the evening. Exercise is nature's anti-depressant. Exercise enhances sleep opportunity but should be done in the late afternoon. Caffeinated food, including chocolate and most carbonated drinks are sleep robbers. **Alcohol is a depressant** that magnifies an already depressed state of mind and does not contribute to restful, uninterrupted sleep. Alcohol masks feelings, lowers inhibition and deprives one of control. Alcohol consumption should be avoided during acute grief.

9. **Take the best possible care of yourself** ... of your emotional being, your mental, spiritual and physical being. Eat properly! Don't allow yourself to get too hungry or to go without meals. Try not to overeat. Often we experience a gnawing, empty feeling that we mistake as hunger and seek to fill that void with food that may be hard to digest or upsetting. Become informed of both the dynamics of grief and of suicide in order that your grief is not unnecessarily complicated by myths, fears and biases. Pace yourself. This process is aptly called "grief work" and it is truly the most exhausting task your emotions, mind or your physical body will ever be called upon to do. You may experience some physical symptoms, for grief often manifests itself physically. Do not dismiss these symptoms ... see your physician as soon as possible.

10. **Grief and the workplace.** For many bereaved it is an economic necessity to return to work soon after the funeral. Others return to work soon as a means of keeping mentally occupied and find solace in their work. Some postpone returning to their job fearing the additional stress created by work. Work can be helpful in restoring routine in one's life. Most employers are compassionate and sympathetic. Some have first hand knowledge of loss and grief and extend encouragement and understanding. Others have a very unrealistic view of how long it takes to "get over" a family member's death and may not be tolerant of mistakes, distraction or quick trips to the bathroom to dry tears. It can be helpful to discuss your limits and concerns with your employer, perhaps arriving at a compromise whereby you work a few hours a day when you first return to the workplace. It is also helpful when an employer engages a counselor to speak of suicide bereavement with fellow employees placing them at greater ease in offering you support.

11. **Suicidal thoughts are scary.** When someone we love dies we are overwhelmed by the pain of loss and fear of the future without them. We may believe we cannot endure the intensity of the pain. For a time, we may not wish to. When the cause of death is suicide the surviving family members have been shown the worst possible example of how one can end pain and problems and the survivor may view ending their life as a way to stop hurting. It is normal to want to escape the pain of loss and grief. It is not abnormal to think of ending one's own life to escape it. But there is considerable difference between having suicidal thoughts and acting upon them. If you are obsessed with thoughts of killing yourself, begin to seriously consider ways of ending your life or believe you don't deserve to live due to some circumstance surrounding the loved one's death, see a mental health professional without delay. It would be a grave injustice to compound the loss and magnify the grief of others by this manner of resolving your own.

12. **What's normal! What's not!** Grief as we are taught to understand it is intensely distorted when suicide is the cause of death. You may question whether your feelings are normal. Most likely they are and you are experiencing normal emotional reactions to an abnormal occurrence .. suicide. Grief after suicide is often very effectively addressed within the safe environment of a suicide survivor support group. Never hesitate to seek professional counseling.