

Bereaved by Suicide

The death of someone by suicide can be a devastating and shocking experience for all those close to them. Many people who are bereaved by suicide will experience a range of emotions which may include guilt, shock, sadness, confusion, rejection and anger.

Sometimes there may be a sense of relief because the person you loved is no longer suffering from poor physical or emotional health. Such a feeling does not mean you love them less. It is possible that people will feel embarrassed or ashamed because suicide can be a taboo subject and this can result in you feeling isolated. When bereaved by suicide, people often find it difficult to be open with others about the cause of death.

There are a number of reasons why a person may die by suicide. These include: stress and social pressures, problems associated with abuse or trauma, depression and mental health problems, chronic pain, and physical disability.

Mental illness

Sometimes a person who has died by suicide may have had a mental illness. If an individual has suffered with a long term mental health issue there may have been previous unsuccessful suicide attempts. However this does not make it any less traumatic when the suicide occurs.

Even if it is obvious that someone has mental health problems it is not possible to predict who will take their own life.

Guilt

Individuals may feel that they should have noticed something was wrong, but it is important to remember that the signs are not always obvious and may not even be picked up by experienced care professionals. Some people may feel that others blame them for the suicide, for example where there has been a relationship break-up.

Children may also experience feelings of guilt. They may feel the person has died because of something they said or did. It is not unusual for children to blame themselves and to harbour anxieties that they should have been able to stop it. It is helpful to allow them the opportunity to express any anxieties to enable you to reassure them.

Anger

Following a death, anger is a common feeling for both adults and children. In the case of suicide the anger may be directed towards the person who has taken their own life. They may be viewed as selfish and uncaring for not understanding the impact of their death on others. This anger may be heightened if you have children and you have to deal with their distress.

Rejection

Many people feel that they have been rejected by the person who died and this can be a very strong emotion in children. They may make comments such as 'if Daddy really loved me, he wouldn't have killed himself'. It is important for children to be reassured that their parent has not rejected them.

Talking to children about death by suicide

Often adults want to protect children from the pain death causes. The heightened anxieties caused by suicide may mean that they do not tell children the truth about the cause of death. Most organisations providing bereavement services for children, including Daisy's Dream, would support the idea that, however difficult, it is important to tell children the truth about suicide in a way that is appropriate for their age and understanding.

If you choose to give children a different version of how the person died, you will be expecting lots of other people, such as friends, family members and teachers, to enter into a potentially complex situation. It is likely that children will find out how the death happened but they will hear it second hand from other people. This may affect the trust in your relationship with them at a time when they are very vulnerable.

There is lots of useful information in the Death and Bereavement section of our website about books and online resources that offer support and guidance for families bereaved by suicide.

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