

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.

Suicide is sometimes described as the ultimate personal rejection but the organisation 'Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide' reminds us...."suicide is an individual choice – no-one is to blame for this death" (S.O.B.S. 2001)

Sometimes there may be a sense of relief because the person you loved is no longer suffering from physical or emotional ill health. Such a feeling does not mean you love them less. It is possible that people will feel embarrassed or ashamed because suicide is still a very taboo subject and this can result in you feeling isolated. It is not unusual for people to lie about the cause of death because of this.

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

Mental illness

Sometimes a person who has committed suicide may have had a mental illness. If an individual has suffered with long term depression or schizophrenia, there may have been previous unsuccessful suicide attempts. However this does not always make it any less traumatic when the suicide occurs. Even if it is obvious that someone has mental health problems it is not always 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.

Bereaved by Suicide ...continued



Rejection

Many people may 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 that 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 feeling very vulnerable.

Useful Organisations

Daisy's Dream

www.daisysdream.org.uk

Support for bereaved children and their families in Berkshire and surrounding areas.
(Postal address: PO Box 4738, Twyford, Reading, Berkshire RG10 9GT)

0118 934 2604

Cruse Bereavement

Counselling for bereaved adults and young people (some areas)

Young People: **0808 808 1677**

www.rd4u.org.uk

Adults: **0870 167 1677**

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Sudden Death Support Association

An organisation to help relatives and close friends of people who die suddenly

0118 988 9797

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)

www.uk-sobs.org.uk

Support and advice for survivors of bereavement by suicide

0870 241 3337 National Helpline (9am-9pm daily)

Useful books and articles

- **Beyond the Rough Rock by Julie Stokes & Diana Crossley** - Winston's Wish 2001
The booklet offers practical advice for families in the immediate days and weeks when suicide has been the cause of death.
- **Coping with Suicide by Maggie Helen** - Sheldon Press
- **A Special Scar by Alison Wertheimer** - Routledge 1991