

Name

**When Someone Close to You Has Completed Suicide**

***by Sherry Williams White***

Any death of a loved one can be traumatic, but when your loved one has taken their own life, the intensity of your grief can be severe. Your sense of reality may be destroyed and everything may feel out of control. A sense of disbelief can overwhelm you. Not only must you cope with the death of your loved one, but the cause of death and your search for answers to why may overwhelm you as you realize that you will never know the answer to your questions.

The one thing that most health professionals will tell you is that your loved one was looking for an escape from feelings of hopelessness. Additionally, they may have been embarrassed to tell you they had not been able to live up to their personal expectations or to handle certain situations. In spite of your family life, support, friends or belief systems, those who choose to end their lives are just looking for a way out of their pain. Whether you believe it or not, there is not much you could have done to stop them once they had committed to their plan. Once people decide to end their pain, they are most likely to accomplish it. John Hewett, author of After Suicide, writes that most people who kill themselves are not choosing to die, they just want to end their anguish and pain.

**What Does Grief Feel Like?**
Grief is a complex process that affects every aspect of your life. It is a physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological response. You may feel numb at first as you try to learn as much as you can about what happened. Unanswered questions can add to your pain and confusion. The shock, which initially protected you, gives way to frustration, fear, anger or pain.

Grief may come in waves and can be paralyzing. You may feel frozen inside and exhausted. You may not be able to concentrate or remember things. Anger and guilt are common emotions. You may feel angry with God, other family members, yourself or the person who died. It doesn't have to make sense to feel real. The ‘if only’ thoughts and the ‘should have’ thoughts can cause pain and doubt. You may wish you could turn back time and do things differently, but no one can retrace the steps and change what has already happened.

Depression or feelings of emptiness may temporarily overwhelm you. You may experience headaches, tightness in the throat or chest, muscle aches or a burning sensation in your stomach. Sleep disturbances, appetite changes, irritability, or crying are all a part of grief. Grief hurts.

Your anger may be so intense that it is frightening. Anger can turn to rage as you wrestle with the unfairness and the unanswered questions that seem to multiply. If only you could talk with your loved one and find the answers. You may be angry with your loved one because you feel you were robbed of the opportunity to help, to listen, to do something or to say goodbye. You may feel cheated, betrayed or helpless.

You may be consumed with guilt that you were unable to help your loved one or didn't even know something was wrong. You may feel as though you are sliding into despair. Blame and doubt become constant companions.

Grief can be isolating because no one knows what to say to you or how to act. You may feel embarrassed or ashamed of the way your loved one died. You may not even be able to talk about the death to anyone. You may decide it is easier to be alone or not let anyone get too close. At a time when you really need support, it is often difficult to ask for it.

**What Can I Do Now?**
Acknowledge your loss and begin to accept the pain of grief. Do not avoid it or try to lessen the pain of grief with medications, drugs or alcohol. Drugs may stop or delay the necessary grieving process. Learn to work through the hurt rather than mask it.

Share your thoughts and feelings by talking with others. You may find keeping a journal helps. It may help to find a support group. Ask your clergy, funeral director, or mental health professional for referrals. You do not have to do this alone.

Tell family and friends what you need. Work to keep the lines of communication open. No one can read your mind. They want to help, but may not know how. Be specific in requesting help. Tell them it is ok to talk about your loved one, to say his name and to share memories with you.

Take care of yourself physically. Grief places tremendous stress on your body. In spite of how overwhelmed or tired you are, you will need to exercise even if it means just doing some stretching exercises or taking short walks. This will help break the stress cycle so you can recharge your batteries. Avoid eating complex carbohydrates like, donuts, cake and cookies. Try yogurt, cheese or peanut butter and crackers. If you are having difficulty eating, try small frequent snacks instead of big meals. Limit your caffeine and drink plenty of water. Try taking several rest breaks during the day. This will give you energy especially if you are having difficulty sleeping.

Take time to go through your loved one's belongings. Do not allow others to rush you or to take over. You can do whatever you wish, a little at a time. You may want to consider sharing some of the special things with friends or family. These will be precious gifts.

You may experience changes in friendships. People who don't know what to say may avoid you or may say hurtful things. You may find unexpected support from others who were not previously close.

Re-establish your connections with your faith, if possible. Find a compassionate member of the clergy to talk with about the spiritual, religious and social stigmas of suicide. It is possible to learn to live with the unanswered questions that suicide raises, but you don't have to search for inner peace alone.

Try to establish a different kind of relationship with the person who died. Do the things that help you remember the life, not just the death. Make a scrapbook, write down memories in a journal or record stories on tape.

Write a letter to your loved one and forgive him for dying. Work to forgive yourself for living.

Don’t be afraid or ashamed to seek help. It is a sign of strength that you can reach out to take care of yourself.

Your loved one has died. You may feel consumed by the details and the circumstances of the death for a very long time. It is easy to focus on how your loved one died, rather than how she lived her life. When your heart feels heavy with grief, lighten the pain with memories of the life and love you shared.

You don't stop loving someone just because they died. It is acknowledging and living through the pain of grief that brings forth the energy and strength to allow hope and healing to return