References

* American Association of Suicidology: Survivors of Suicide Fact Sheet. www.suicidology.org/web/guest/home
* Survivors of Suicide: Helping a Survivor Heal. www.survivorsofsuicide.com
* Survivors of Suicide: Healing After a Loved One’s Suicide. www.mayoclinic.com
* Suicide: Coping When a Loved One Takes Their Life. www.mayoclinic.com

Grief After Suicide

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
Division of Student Affairs
Counseling Services
2122 Old Library
Phone: 715-836-5521

Check out our web site virtual pamphlet collection at:
www.uwec.edu/counsel

“There are always two parties to a death; the person who dies and the survivors who are bereaved.”
-Arnold Toynbee

UWEC Counseling Services
2122 Old Library
Eau Claire, WI 54701-4004
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Grief After Suicide

Losing a loved one to suicide is a difficult experience, painful and unexpected. The grief that every individual experiences is unique. Not everyone who experiences a loss goes through the same grieving process. Sometimes grief can be short-lived and other times it can be intense and long-lasting.

Individuals can become overwhelmed with feelings of shock, guilt, denial, anger, confusion, helplessness, anxiety, numbness, shame, and self-blame. Those who survive after a suicide often struggle with why a person took their own life, as well as guilt about what could have been done to prevent the suicide. Grief after a suicide can be more complicated than grief surrounding a natural death.

In the event of a suicide, survivors may feel relief if the person who died was living with a difficult mental illness. Survivors may have a difficult time discussing their loss because of the stigma attached to suicide and the uncertainty of how their situation will be perceived by others. However, it is important to be able to express one’s feelings about the loss.

Healing does not occur at the same pace for everyone, but healing does occur.

Tips to Help

- Brace yourself for intense emotions of mourning. This can include feelings of shock, confusion, anger, despair, guilt, and intense grief.
- You might experience physical reactions of grief. This may include crying, emotional outbursts, and physical exhaustion.
- Other experiences include nightmares, flashbacks, withdrawal, avoidance of reminders of the deceased, rumination over what could have happened, loss of appetite, concentration difficulties, headaches, or digestive problems.
- Do NOT avoid your emotions. They may be intense and difficult to endure, but by denying your feelings you are not allowing yourself the opportunity to mourn. This can lead to a longer grief process or other problems in the future.
- Seek help and support from others. You can turn to friends, family and grief groups to help support you through your journey. Again, suicide can be difficult to discuss. Grief groups can provide a unique opportunity to be open about feelings and thoughts surrounding suicide. You may also find support and help through faith and spiritual beliefs. You don’t have to do it alone.
- Ask for help from a doctor or mental health professional if the mourning process becomes too difficult to handle.

Healthy Ways to Cope

- Stay connected to friends and family.
- Share your story with others.
- Grieve in a way that feels right for you. There are many ways to grieve.
- Give yourself enough time to grieve. Be gentle with yourself.
- Be ready for painful reminders of your loved one, especially the first few years.
- Expect special occasions to initially be difficult. Look at ways to honor the relationship.
- Expect setbacks. Some days will be easier than others. If you continue to grieve and seek the help you need the grief will eventually lessen.
- You will always remember the loss of your loved one. However, with time and healthy expression you will find your way through the pain and acceptance.

Resources

- UWEC Counseling Services
  Individual Counseling
  Group Counseling
  Self-Help Pamphlets and books
- The Healing Place:
  Free grief counseling
  @ Sacred Heart Hospital
  Phone: 715-717-4121

Counseling Services can help connect you with other resources in your community that can help!