

## Beyond Surviving

*Here are some suggestions from someone who has lived through and beyond the suicide of a loved one.*

Know you can survive. You may not think so, but you can.

Struggle with 'why' it happened until you no longer need to know 'why' or until you are satisfied with partial answers.

Know you may feel overwhelmed by the intensity of your feelings, but all your feelings are normal.

Anger, guilt, confusion, forgetfulness are common responses. You are not crazy - you are in mourning.

Be aware you may feel appropriate anger at the person, at the world, at God, at yourself. It's okay to express it.

You may feel guilty for what you think you did or did not do. Guilt can turn into regret through forgiveness.

Having suicidal thoughts is common. It does not mean you will act on those thoughts.

Remember to take one moment or one day at a time.

Find a good listener with whom to share. Call someone if you need to talk.

Don't be afraid to cry. Tears are healing.

Give yourself time to heal.

Remember the choice was not yours. No one is the sole influence in another's life.

Expect setbacks. If emotions turn like a tidal wave, you may only be experiencing a remnant of grief, an unfinished piece.

Try to put off major decisions.

Give yourself permission to get professional help.

Be aware of the pain of your family and friends.

Be patient with yourself and with others who may not understand.

Set your own limits and learn to say no.

Steer clear of people who want to tell you what or how to feel.

Know that there are support groups that can be helpful. If not ask a professional to start one.

Call on your personal faith to help you through.

It is common to experience physical reactions to your grief, such as headaches, loss of appetite, inability to sleep.

The willingness to laugh with others and at yourself is healing.

Wear out your questions, anger, guilt or other feelings until you can let them go. Letting go doesn't mean forgetting.

Know that you will never be the same again, but you can survive and even go beyond surviving.

**Iris M. Bolton**  
**Author of "My Son, My Son"**  
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# Grief After Suicide

## A Pathway to Hope and Healing



Canadian Mental Health Association  
Prince Edward Island Division

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## After Suicide...

The unimaginable has happened. Someone you love has ended their life and yours is forever changed. You have experienced a profound and indescribable loss.

We apply the term "survivor of suicide" to our experience because it accurately reflects the difficulties that people face when they have lost a loved one to suicide.

This brochure has been written by survivors, like you, and the people who work with them. Yes, the pain and the grief that you feel is overwhelming, but you can survive. It may seem hard to believe, but one hour at a time, one day at a time, you can get through this. It is our hope that this information will help.

### Does anyone know how I feel?

Yes, more than you may realize. Approximately 1 in 4 people know someone who has died by suicide. Each suicide leaves behind a network of family and close friends who must cope with the same loss. You are not alone in your struggle. Many survivors find comfort through family, friends and neighbors who can provide both practical and emotional support, particularly in the crisis period after the death of a loved one.

### Why did this happen?

This is the question that will occupy much of your thoughts for some time. You may think you know the answer, but chances are you're only seeing part of the picture. The motivations behind suicide are complex and often cannot be fully explained.

After a suicide, family members and friends often go over past circumstances, questioning things they should or should not have done. Hindsight is 20-20. If you had known then what you know now, you might have done things differently. However, you did not know and you'll

never know if it would have changed the tragic outcome. Remember that suicide is a personal decision and no one is to blame for this death.

### What do I tell people?

Although it may be difficult to speak about suicide openly, it is important for family and friends to be told the truth. This allows you to help each other through your grief. You may choose to say something as brief as, "She died by suicide and I'm not ready to talk about it yet."

### What happens during bereavement?

Survivors often face many complex feelings following a death by suicide. Emotional responses may include feelings of abandonment, shock and disbelief, confusion, depression, anxiety, panic, bewilderment, fear, humiliation, shame, guilt, and/or a sense of failure. Talking about these feelings with someone you trust can help to diffuse their intensity. Physical reactions such as numbness, nausea, fatigue, headaches, problems sleeping and/or eating are also common. However, if these symptoms persist for more than two weeks or you have thoughts of suicide, seek medical attention immediately.

You may feel deep sorrow, anger, maybe even relief. There is nothing wrong with feeling that the burden is lifted, especially when the victim's emotional battles were known. You may feel angry because you now have another burden to carry. These feelings are natural. Don't deny them, as they are part of the healing process.

### What if this is more than I can bear?

This will undoubtedly be one of the most difficult losses you'll have to face. You may never get over the death itself, but you can overcome the grief. Your hope lies in working through it. Don't try to do it alone. There are people who understand what you're going through and are willing to help. For the person you lost, the pain is over. Now it's time to start healing your pain.

### Where can I get help in my community?

This brochure is not intended to be a complete guide for the suicide survivor - it only scratches the surface. Below are additional resources and supports that may be helpful in your journey through grief.

- In the early stages of your grief, it may be helpful to **talk to a professional**. You may obtain support through your family doctor, a cultural or spiritual leader or a work, school or mental health counselor.
- **The Island Helpline 1-800-218-2885** is available toll-free, 24 hours a day and provides crisis intervention, support, information and referrals in a caring, confidential manner.
- A **Survivors of Suicide Information Kit** includes more detailed information on coping in the aftermath of suicide and local supports available to survivors of suicide. These kits are available upon request, by calling one of the CMHA offices listed below.
- **Survivors of Suicide Support Groups** provide information, support, understanding and reassurance to adults who have lost a loved one to suicide. For current group listings call 628-3669 or toll free at 1-800-682-1648.
- CMHA's local **Resource Libraries** have many books, pamphlets and DVDs on suicide grief.

**For more information on these and other resources, please contact the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) in your community.**



CMHA/PEI Division ..... 902-566-3034  
CMHA East Prince ..... 902-436-7399  
CMHA West Prince ..... 902-853-4180  
CMHA Toll Free ..... 1-800-682-1648

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