Coping with Suicide Loss

It’s important to remember that you can and will overcome the pain.

If you have lost someone to suicide it is important to know that you are not alone. Each year over 33,000 people in the U.S. die by suicide. Research shows that in the course of a lifetime, 85% of us will lose someone we care about to suicide. That means that there are millions of people who, like maybe you today, are trying to cope with this painful loss.

The loss of someone we cared about by suicide is often shocking, painful and unexpected. The grief that ensues can be intense, complex, and long term. Grief work is an extremely individual and unique process; each person will experience it in their own way and at their own pace. Grief does not follow a linear path. Furthermore, grief doesn’t always move in a forward direction.

How to Cope

♦ You may find that it helps to reach out to family and friends. Because some people may not know what to say, you may need to take the initiative to talk about this, share your feelings, and ask for their help.
♦ Even though it may seem difficult, maintaining contact with other people is especially important during the stress-filled weeks after a loved one’s suicide.
♦ Keep in mind that each person grieves in his or her own way.
♦ Each person also grieves at his or her own pace; there is no set rhythm or timeline for healing.
♦ You may experience unexpected waves of sadness; these are a normal part of the grieving process.
♦ Some survivors find comfort in community, religious, or spiritual activities, including talking to a trusted member of the clergy.
♦ Many survivors use the arts to help them heal, by keeping a journal, or writing poetry or music.
♦ Try to take care of your own well-being; consider taking to a counselor or another professional if needed.
♦ Be kind to yourself.

Additional Suggestions

♦ 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. Remember — 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 not uncommon. It does not mean that 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 return 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 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.
♦ 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 all your questions, anger, guilt or other feelings until you can let them go. Letting go doesn’t mean forgetting.
♦ Know that you may never be the same again, but you can survive and even go beyond just surviving.

Adapted from Surviving a Suicide Loss: A resource and healing guide – American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and from Suicide and Its Aftermath: Understanding and Counseling the Survivors by Edward Dunne, John McIntosh and Karen Dunne-Maxim.
USD Resources

Counseling Center (Serra 300)
www.sandiego.edu/usdcc | 619-260-4655

The Counseling Center offers counseling to USD students, and consultation to USD faculty, staff, and families of students. The Center staff can also refer you to resources in the community.

Walk-in Hours
Monday – Friday: 11:00am to 3:00pm
Wednesday: 11:00am to 5:00pm

Center for Health and Wellness Promotion (UC 161)
www.sandiego.edu/chwp | 619-260-4618

Professionals are available to help with personal concerns through individual consultations.

University Ministry (UC 238)
www.sandiego.edu/um | 619-260-4735

University Ministry staff members are always available to listen to your concerns. You can contact your Resident Minister or stop by the University Ministry Center.

Student Health Center (Maher 140)
www.sandiego.edu/healthcenter | 619-260-4595

Medical staff is ready to provide you with quality and convenient outpatient medical care.

Residential Life
www.sandiego.edu/residentiallife | 619-260-4777

If you live on campus, your Resident Assistant or Community Director can be a wonderful resource to help you identify the best on-campus support to help address your concerns. Talk to them, they are here to help you!

USD Employee Assistance Program
USD faculty and staff can access counseling through the university’s EAP program, offered through Horizon Health. For more information, contact Human Resources or call Horizon Health at 800-342-8111.

For emergencies or to access after-hours care, call Public Safety Dispatch at 619-260-2222.

San Diego Access & Crisis Line: 888-724-7240
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-8255 (TALK)

For more information, visit www.sandiego.edu/youareusd/suicide-prevention/ or www.up2sd.org/know-the-signs.