

# ADVICE FOR CAREGIVERS ON SUICIDE

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## **1. Acknowledge the death the same as you would the death of any friend.**

Don't pry for information about the circumstances. Don't shy away if you do not know what to say. Your phone call, card, letter, or presence conveys acceptance and love.

## **2. Acknowledge the bereaved person's pain.**

Say, for example, *"I know this is painful for you now."*

## **3. Show you care.**

Weep with them, use the touch of a hand, a hug, an arm around the shoulder to say you care.

## **4. Offer the gift of self.**

Say, *"I'm here because I care about you and I'm concerned for you. I know that you've had a death in the family. I don't know all the circumstances but I want you to know I'm here for you and your family. Are there things I can do for you? Can I sit with you?"* When you offer self, and when it is sincere, you seldom will sit in silence; you will have given your friend permission to grieve in your presence.

## **5. Give them permission to be angry.**

Say, *"It's okay to be angry."* When the survivors can verbalize anger, they can externalize, rather than internalize, the anger and put a name to it. Once it is external, they can better deal with it.

## **6. Don't try to make them own up or admit to anything.**

Most people don't want to say the word *"suicide."*

## **7. Avoid asking questions or making statements that will cast blame on survivors.**

They are already overburdened with guilt.

## **8. Give them permission to talk about their loved one.**

Don't be afraid to mention their loved one's name or to recall pleasant memories you shared with the deceased.

## **9. Listen. Don't analyze. Don't change the conversation.**

Don't make it heavier or lighter than it is. Don't rationalize suicide. Listen.

## **10. Encourage the survivors to avoid judging yesterday with the knowledge edge of today.**

They did the best they could with what they knew at the time. Help them assess how much of their guilt is valid.

## **11. Stay in touch.**

Telephone the survivors, remembering them on the painful anniversaries and holidays. Meaningful letters can be read over and over at difficult times.

## **12. Watch for warning signs of unhealthy, morbid grief.**

If after six weeks to three months, you see the following symptoms, there is reason to believe the survivor is experiencing complicated grief. The person will:

- A. be withdrawn, less emotionally accessible to friends and family.
- B. be irritable, expressing other depressive symptoms.
- C. have steadily deteriorating work, job, or school performance rather than returning to a fairly normal level.
- D. be obsessed with details of the death.
- E. continue to talk about the suicide victim as though he or she were still alive.

## **13. Express your concern.**

Do it in a manner that conveys genuine caring. Don't begin by saying, *"You need counseling."* In a private, well-timed moment free of distractions, begin by saying, *"I am concerned about you. I've watched you during the past several months. I want to share my concern with you."*

## **14. Share your observations.**

Give concrete examples: *"You've withdrawn from your friends. You tell me all you think about is death. You've even said you're not doing as well with the kids as you used to do. It's hard for you to go to work."* Conclude by saying, *"It's important you listen to yourself and recognize these symptoms are warnings that you are having trouble with grieving."*

## **15. Suggest that it is more than you or they can handle.**

Say, *"It would be helpful for you to speak to someone who knows how to help someone grieve."*

## **16. Help them find a counselor or support group.**

Offer options, such as the clergy, a hospital chaplain, a mental health therapist, a private practitioner, or a self-help or support group.