



Coping with the Grief That Suicide Brings for Young Adults

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Finding a Power of Connection

For many survivors of suicide, there is a power of connection found with other survivors. It is important when dealing with the grief that follows a loved one's death, to push yourself to get out and seek the help that you need. It is not a time to be alone in life, but rather to surround yourself with life. Relief is found when a person can talk openly about suicide. A critical part for many survivors has been finding a "Surviving after Suicide" grief support group where there are no walls of stigma and understanding can be found. A support group provides a safe place where survivors can come and share their experience and support one another. Knowing there are others who understand the nightmare that you may be enduring can help in knowing that they are not alone and help them to take the next step to recovery.

Some survivors attend a support group almost immediately, while others may wait for years. Some attend for a year or two and then go only occasionally (such as the particularly difficult days; birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, etc.). In the beginning, it takes time to feel comfortable. However, sharing your sorrows allows you to be able to work through what has happened. Many times in our grief, our lifelong friends disappear. They may not know what to say or do or may feel uncomfortable. In a support group, fellow survivors often begin new friendships based on a common thread of understanding the pain and tragedy that your hearts have felt through the tragic loss of suicide.

ASPECTS OF TEEN / YOUNG ADULT GRIEF

Our youth **experience death at a higher rate than ever these days**. When grief enters a teen's life, they feel very isolated and alone. Confusion sets in and they become unfocused. Grades can plunge and the possibility of alcohol, drug abuse, and other general risk-taking behavior is greater.

Teens/Young adults often **feel invisible, overwhelmed, and frequently become the "forgotten grievers"**. For the adolescent, life itself is confusing. It is a time of transitions and subtle loss. They are taking on new responsibilities and saying good-bye to childhood. For the first time, they are riding the "emotional roller coaster of life." They are working hard to gain their own independence and establishing their new identity. If the death of a parent, a loved one, or a friend is added to their daily challenges of being a "normal" young adult, they will often become frightened, confused, and feel isolated. It is even more complicated when their loved one dies by suicide. For a teen, just like an adult, this type of death is traumatic. Often teens feel that there are few people that they can turn to for help.

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death and is the 2nd leading cause of death for ages 10-24 year of age. For every one death by suicide, there are 25 who attempt suicide and 100-200 young adults who are thinking of attempting suicide. For every death, there are about 18 people immediately affected.

It is important to meet “teens on their turf.” Help them to find a support group that they can “choose” to attend. Many schools are now offering teens in grief support programs during the school day. A support group will help them to find a safe place to share their feelings and emotions. Teens want to know they are not alone.

Teens want to understand the many aspects of their grief and they want to find hope. **Like any adult, they too, want to understand their grief.** These groups are not meant to take the place of professional counseling rather they are to be used in conjunction with one another.

With Suicide:

- There is no time for them to prepare mentally or emotionally.
- There was no time for good-byes; teens often share they didn't get to say good-bye and that they will never have the chance to say good-bye or that they loved them.
- Due to the shock and related stress those left behind may be unable to develop coping strategies.
- There is the disbelief and the big question of “WHY?”
- They struggle with guilt; they may feel guilty for the way they acted; for harsh words; or for what they didn't say.
- There's the anger; “How could this have happened to me?”
- There's the depression; “How can they survive?”
- There's the STIGMA; “What will people think?”
- Teens may feel responsible for their loved one's death and think that they somehow could have prevented the death.
- Teens often face grief alone; their friends are uncomfortable and don't know what to say.
- Teens try to be strong for their family and often struggle with many issues alone or they bury them so deep within that they later can create major problems later in life
- It's important to look for the windows of opportunity; many times, teens just want their parents or guardian to listen without interruptions.
- They keep busy to avoid their loss which puts them at greater risk for long term resolution. This type of response doesn't always have negative results; however, it can delay their healing process.
- It is important for bereaved parents to realize that children will mirror their reflections. If a child or teen sees mom or dad cannot function, how can we expect them to be different? It is important for parents to seek close family members or friends to assist their children as advocates.
- It is important to seek counseling as a family; this will help them to at an early age to know that it is not weak to ask for help.

YOUNG ADULT NEEDS ARE UNIQUE

- **They need to share in the family's grief process.** They need to be included so that they don't feel isolated. This may be difficult when they are miles away from home attending college.
- **They need to be loved.**
- **They need to be listened to.**
- They need to understand. Talk to them about grief and validate their feelings. Let them know it's okay to cry. **It is important to keep the doors of communication open.**
- **They may benefit from working with a counselor,** to express sometimes complicated and confusing emotions

- **It is important that they be part of the planning of the funeral.** This helps them to be recognized, and it allows them to become an active part of the visible grieving process. Let them know what to expect at the funeral.
- **Be honest with them about the death.**
- Many times, the **death of a friend can open wounds of grief from the past.** It is important to reach out to a student who has previously suffered the death of a loved one, especially if their loved one died in a similar way. Many people keep their grief deep within until another death happens.
- Young Adults **need outward signs of support** including hugs, a pat on the back etc. These are important physical forms of support.
- **Re-establishment of routine and discipline** is an important way to provide security. Inconsistency in family life is very typical during the first days following a death. Teenagers want and need structure.
- **Who are their role models?** Whom do they look up to? Parents, teachers, counselors, caring adults and their peers that have experienced death. It is important for young adults of all ages to see their parents getting better. It is a heavy burden for teens when they see that parents aren't getting better.
- **They need a stable environment to come home to.** They need to see that their family is doing their best to cope with their grief. If this is not happening in a reasonable time, seek professional help.
- **Much of the young adult's time is spent in school, and this can be a very lonely place.** Though it is important to establish a normal routine again, there may be times during a school day that the student will not be able to cope or focus.
- Teachers can help by excusing the student and possibly **providing a place for privacy and personal support.**
- It is important for parents and guardians to **share with teachers and school personnel important dates**, such as anniversaries of a loved one's death, birthdays and milestone events in their lives. These events can cause grief moments.
- **Many times, young adults will turn to the opposite sex for comfort.** They want to belong; they want someone who will care about them. If a teen is dating someone and they break up during this time, it can cause the loss to be more profound.
- **When pain is felt, relief is sought.** Young adults often give in to pressures of drugs and alcohol. They need to know that this is only a temporary means of escape and that it can and will cause a deeper depression.
- **Young Adults need their loved one or friend to be remembered.** If a fellow student dies during the school year, allow students to write a memory or say good-bye in a letter form. These letters can be put together and given to the parents. This can be very therapeutic for both the students and the grieving parents. A grieving parent's wish is for their child to be remembered.
- Rather than memorialize or glamorize the issue of suicide, schools can provide leadership in channeling the energies of students into projects to help the living. Schools that choose to elect some form of memorial following a suicide death, all such efforts **MUST include positive messaging.** It should be made clear to students that there are other solutions to problems. **It should be made clear to students that there are people to help.**

We're here for you.

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 (513) 870-9108 | companionsonajourney.org

RESOURCES

Companion's on a Journey Grief Support, Inc. 513-870-9108

- Crisis Response in the School and Workplace
- Children/Teens in Grief School Support Program- Open Group
- Post-vention to Suicide support group following the crisis intervention
- Understanding Your Child/Teens Grief-Session for Parents
- School/Trainings QPR Gatekeeper Training, Grief Awareness
- Adult Grief Specific Programs
- Mending Hearts for Grieving Children, Teens and Family Evening Program
- Teacher/Staff Support

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

- Suicide hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255): 24/7, free, and confidential
- www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- Local Hotline: 1-800-281-2273: 24/7
- The American Association of Suicidology: 202-237-2280. Website: suicidology.org
- The American Foundation of Suicide Prevention: afsp.org
- National Alliance for Grieving Children www.nationalallianceforgrievingchildren.org
- Mind Peace Cincinnati: mindpeacecincinnati.com
- SERA: Suicide Education Research Advocacy
- CCHMC - Linda Richey: 513-636-0211
- Teen suicide intervention: www.yspp.org
- Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)

Training

- Companions on a Journey Certified Gatekeeper Instructors
- QPR Institute www.qprinstitute.com

QPR –Gatekeeper Training:

Question... A person about suicide

Persuade... the person to get help

Refer...the person to get help.

QPR is not intended to be a form of counseling or treatment. QPR is intended to teach those who are in the position to recognize the warning signs, clues and suicidal communications of people in trouble to ACT vigorously to prevent a possible tragedy.

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