

How You Can Be Supportive AFTER A SUICIDE OR OTHER TRAUMATIC LOSS



After a suicide or other traumatic death, we often struggle on how to best support a grieving family member or friend. Survivors of suicide loss are deeply impacted by the suicide of someone close to them, such as a family member or friend.

Here are some ways you can support people who are affected by suicide loss:



Acknowledge the loss

Because of the history of shame or stigma associated with suicide, survivors of suicide loss often feel that people are nervous talking to them about the loved one who died. Reach out to a suicide loss survivor the same way you would with anyone who has experienced the death of a loved one. If you are unsure of how to help, begin with “I am so sorry for your loss. I don’t know what to say, but I am here for you.” Respect their readiness for further discussion about the loss; they may or may not be prepared to talk about their loved one’s passing.



Use the name of the person who died

Survivors are working to accept the reality of the death of someone they loved. Using the person’s name is often seen as you connecting with the loss and acknowledging the person’s life, as well as their death. This is especially important if you knew the person who died.



Share your presence

Grieving following any loss is a personal journey. Each individual mourns and processes their grief in a unique way. After a suicide death, the grieving process can be complicated and might include feelings of shock, anger, or guilt. Be there for a loss survivor without trying to “fix” their feelings. You can be present for them by sharing a cup of coffee, lunch, taking a walk together, or listening on the phone as they talk.

To talk with someone who will listen and help connect you to support: Contact griefsupport@namimaine.org or 1-800-464-5767, ext. 2317

For more information, visit NAMI Maine
After Suicide or Traumatic Loss





Help keep the memory of their loved one alive

We all want to stay connected to people we have lost. In your conversations with loss survivors, share a special memory if you can. Make space for the grieving person to talk about the good qualities of their loved one. Help them celebrate that person's life even as they are coming to terms with their death.



Stay in touch

No matter the cause of death, grief often lasts longer than most people realize. Many grieving people say their grief never ends, though it changes over time. Be patient with their struggles and don't expect them to "get past it" or get back to "normal." Allow them to grieve and mourn in their own way. If in doubt, ask the person how you can support them and continue to check in with them about what they need. Special dates such as birthdays, holidays, and the date of their loved one's death can be important times to connect and offer support.



Recommend seeking formal grief support

Many survivors of suicide have found that seeing a grief counselor or attending a grief support group is an important step in healing. There are some groups that are specifically for survivors of suicide loss. This is a difficult journey and is best done with supportive company. You can be part of that support. For a list of grief support groups in Maine, visit NAMI Maine's After a Suicide or Traumatic Loss page (QR Code on the first page).

Your support of someone experiencing grief after a death is vitally important. It sends the message that grief after a death is normal and the mourning process is best journeyed with the support of others. This is especially crucial when there is a death by suicide.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & SUPPORT

What's Your Grief Resources for those who are grieving and supporting the bereaved. whatsyourgrief.com/i-am-supporting-a-griever

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention A list of helpful tips to help you navigate conversations with survivors of suicide loss in a compassionate and responsible way.

<https://talkawaythedark.afsp.org/suicidelosssurvivor>

Maine Crisis Line Call or text **988**. Free. Confidential. Available 24/7.

