

Guidelines...for Immediate Help from Close Friends in the Aftermath of Suicide

Everyone handles grief in his own way. It is a very personal thing. A mother, father, a brother or sister, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, and neighbors. Each will grieve individually. It is helpful to keep this in mind.

When there is a death of a loved one by suicide, be aware that there will be a depth and range of feelings. It is important to honor and respect the needs of the survivors in the days, weeks, and months following the suicide. Often you may feel helpless in this situation.

This list may prove to be helpful to you in understanding those things which may be comforting and those things which may not be helpful to the family. Some of these suggestions pertain to immediate needs – others are suggestions for the following weeks and months.

DO:

- *Respond honestly* to questions asked by the family. You don't need to answer more than asked. If they want to know more, they will ask later. Too much information too soon can feel hurtful.
- *Surround them* with as much love and understanding as you can.
- *Give them* some private time. Be there, but don't smother them.
- *Show love, not control.* If you make a person dependent upon you, you might both end up in a painful position.
- *Let them talk.* Most of the time they just need to hear out loud what is going on inside their heads. They usually aren't seeking advice.
- *Encourage* that any and all decisions be made by the family together.
- *Expect* that they will become tired very easily. Grieving is hard work.
- *Let them decide* what they are ready for. Offer, but let them decide themselves.
- *Get the names and phone numbers of anyone on the scene:* police, medical examiners, etc. (anyone who has been involved). The family may want to ask questions later.
- *Keep a list* of phone calls, visitors, and people who bring food.
- *Offer* to make calls to people they wish to be notified.
- *Keep the mail* straight. Help with errands.
- *Keep track* of bills, cards, newspaper notices, etc.
- *Keep a list* of medication administered (i.e. Sandy – aspirin 2x, 1 PM)
- *Offer to help* with documentation needed by the insurance company. (They generally require a photocopy of the death certificate, etc.)
- *Give special attention* to the other members of the family – at the funeral and in the months to come.
- *Allow them to express* as much grief as they are feeling at the moment and are willing to share.
- *Allow them to talk* about the special endearing qualities of the loved one they have lost.

DON'T

- *Assume you know best.*
- *Tell the person you “know how they feel”, if you don't.*
- *Make comparisons*, i.e. “I know how you feel because my Mother, Father, etc. died”).
- *Tell them what to feel.* Allow them to feel what they are feeling, when they are feeling it.
- *Try to explain* or change those feeling so that you are more comfortable, (i.e. pain, anger).
- *Treat them* as though they don't have sense enough to make decisions or understand what they are being told.
- *Preach to them.* If religion plays an important part in their lives, they will draw strength from it when they need it.
- *Tell them* it is God's will.
- *Tell the person* to call you if they need anything, anytime – unless you are prepared for a 3:00 AM phone call.
- *Try pushing anything* at them that will help to quiet them, such as drinks, medications, etc. If medication is necessary, let a trained person do it.
- *Ask about things* such as running errands, laundry, etc. JUST DO IT.
- *Try to stop them* from talking about their loved one.
- *Remove tasks*, responsibilities, or activities from them without their permission. They may wish to remain involved in those things which they feel they can handle.
- *Stop seeing them.*
- *Tell them* what you would do or how you would feel if you were them. YOU'RE NOT.
- *Make the loved one's* name taboo. If no one speaks his/her name, it feels as though everyone wants to forget the person existed.
- *Alter his/her room* in any way. Do not pick up clothes or clean the room. When the family is ready, they will take care of this in their own way or ask for help, if needed.
- *Let your own sense of helplessness* keep you from reaching out to a bereaved family.
- *Try to find something positive* (i.e. a moral lesson, closer family ties, etc.) about the person's death.
- *Make any comments* which in any way suggest that the care at home, or in the hospital emergency room, or wherever, was inadequate. (Families are plagued by feelings of doubt and guilt without any help from others).