



“Why...?”

Taking Care of Your Feelings

Your body and mind have natural coping mechanisms which assist you in the early phases of traumatic grief. The initial experience of shock may lead you to feel detached, overwhelmed, confused, forgetful, and numb. As the weeks pass, feelings may begin to surface which reflect the pain of your loss. Protest, guilt, loneliness, shame and very deep sadness are just a few of the many feelings which you may experience in waves of varying intensity. These feelings are there for a reason and it is important to acknowledge and express them. Some things that may also be helpful during this time are:

- Claiming your right to grieve. Everyone grieves differently and there is no timeline for grief. Try not to feel pressured to meet the expectations of others on how you process your grief.
- Having support from friends and family to manage callers or visitors and to help with any funeral or memorial arrangements.
- Developing a brief, prepared response to share if or when people ask about your loss, so that you don't have to think of what to say each time.
- Taking one day at a time and being gentle with the expectations you place on yourself.

The Search for Answers

A death by suicide can lead to many questions, including “Why? Why did this happen?”. Asking questions is part of working through the trauma and grief you may be feeling. Allow yourself time to search for answers, and to make sense of this experience. Traumatic grief does not follow a linear path; but rather it is a process of ups and downs depending on the experience. Be patient with yourself and know that over time the pain will lessen.

Stigma and Language

Suicide is a complex issue. Although it is becoming better understood, stigma about suicide and suicide loss still exist. This stigma and lack of understanding can contribute to judgments, silence, and shame from others, negatively impacting those grieving.

The language used to describe suicide and suicide loss can challenge or reinforce stigma. When speaking about a death by suicide, the following is encouraged:

- Using “death by suicide”, “died by suicide”, or “suicide loss”
- Using “impacted by suicide loss” or “bereaved by suicide”

This language is understood to be more neutral and less judgmental than other phrases or words.

Help and Support are Available

Everyone grieves differently, but no one has to grieve alone. When you are overwhelmed with grief, it can be hard to reach out for help or know what kind of support to ask for. It can be important to let others help you. Some ways that you could access help and support are:

- Connecting with trusted friends and family
- Engaging with your cultural or faith-based community
- Making an appointment with your family doctor or general practitioner
- Finding and working with a trauma-informed counsellor or therapist
- Joining a bereavement support group for those who have experienced suicide loss, such as WRSPC'S “Why...” *Support After Suicide Loss group*.

Taking Care of Your Body

Traumatic grief can include physical experiences. Sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, pain and anxiety are possible physical responses to this grief. Some ways that may help manage the physical experience of grief are:

- Choosing nutritious foods
- Prioritizing sleep and rest
- Engaging in physical activity that is helpful to the body and mind
- Managing caffeine and alcohol intake, as they can have negative effects on coping

If the physical experience of grief becomes overwhelming and begins to significantly impact your wellbeing and ability to engage with life, it is encouraged to seek professional help from a family doctor or other health care professional you trust.

Grief after suicide loss and first steps towards healing.

Grief can be more complicated when death is sudden and unexpected. When a death by suicide occurs, people may experience traumatic grief. When trauma and grief interact with each other, many emotions can arise, and this can feel overwhelming.

The loss of a loved one challenges our ability to cope, and the stigma of suicide can make this more difficult. The following information and suggestions may be helpful as you begin to work through the trauma and grief of your loss.