

# **LET'S TALK ABOUT GRIEF**



**YOUR GUIDE WHEN  
SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU  
DIES BY SUICIDE**

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## LET'S TALK ABOUT GRIEF

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### YOUR GUIDE WHEN SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU COMMITS SUICIDE.

*Let's talk about grief* can help you understand the grief that you go through when someone important in your life has committed suicide.

*Let's talk about grief* contains a number of sections and a diary. Writing down your thoughts and feelings in the diary will help you to work through your grief. If you do not feel ready to do a particular section, you can leave it and come back to it when you feel the time is right. Remember to listen to yourself and to respect yourself when you are coping with grief.

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Community suicide prevention committees in Regions V and VI, in collaboration with the Canadian Mental Health Association (Region VI).

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*“To understand life, we must  
look back, but to live it, we  
must look ahead.”*



## *Let's talk about...*

### THE STAGES OF GRIEF AND FEELINGS

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When faced with the suicide of a loved one, we will try to get through the stages of grief in our own way and at our own pace. The grieving process is different and unique for everyone. It is important to live one moment at a time.

#### **The three stages of grief**

##### **NUMBNESS AND SHOCK**

Our first reaction when we hear about the death of someone close to us is either disbelief or a refusal to accept the reality of what has happened.

These reactions let us protect ourselves from the emotions we feel after learning of someone's death.

##### **DISORGANIZATION**

As we start to grasp that our loved one is dead, we feel a range of emotions such as fear, anger, pain, a sense of being left behind, anxiety, and sadness.

We feel vulnerable and may wish to die as well. The important thing is to talk about our feelings with someone we trust, rather than keep our suffering all bottled up.

##### **REORGANIZATION**

We will gradually accept our loss and our suffering will become less intense over time. However, the pain will come back at certain times and on dates such as birthdays, the holiday season and anniversaries. This is a normal part of the grieving process. We must learn how to deal with these times without our loved one.

*"You can regain a full life  
after a major loss."*

## **Grieving period**

After a period of six months to a year, recovery is usually well underway. If the feeling of sorrow persists and keeps us from leading a normal life, it may be time to seek expert help.

## **Grief caused by suicide**

The process of grieving for someone close to us, whether they commit suicide or die of natural causes, is much the same. Death by suicide, however, brings some special difficulties with which we must deal. For instance, we may feel responsible for the death; we may spend hours trying to understand why the suicide happened; or we may feel ashamed and embarrassed.

Coping is easier if we are able to:

- accept the painful reality of the loss;
- avoid cutting ourselves off from others, but set aside quiet moments just for us;
- seek the company of persons who will not pass judgement on what has happened to us; who can accept us in our suffering; and who will offer support and comfort to get us through this ordeal.
- find reassurance that our feelings, no matter what they are, or how intense they are, are “normal”;
- get in touch with our grief;
- share our experience with people who have gone through a like situation;
- not be afraid of our feelings. Remember that crying helps but not to the point of exhaustion;
- try to think about something else and take a break from our grief;
- read, go out, meet people, treat ourselves to relaxing moments or activities we enjoy but that do not need a great deal of concentration or energy;
- understand that grief is felt in different ways by different people;
- be patient with those around us as we adjust to the absence of our loved one;
- take up a few short-term projects;
- take time to re-energize ourselves;
- realize that all the important dates that remind us of the loved one will be painful during the first year of grieving. Know that, as the years pass, they will be less and less painful.
- accept that our feelings (love-anger) toward the person who committed suicide will fade with time.

## *Let's talk about...*

### THE STAGES OF GRIEF AND FEELINGS

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People who have lost a loved one may find themselves dealing with several types of feelings. Here are a few examples:

#### **Guilt**

“What did I do or not do, or what could I have done, to prevent this from happening?” Guilt is a feeling that often paralyzes us. We feel powerless and guilty about not having seen the signs that might have enabled us to prevent our loved one from taking such a fatal step.

#### **Anger**

The anger we feel toward the dead person is often hard to express. We feel guilty about feeling angry, but we cannot help it because the suicide seems to be an act of rejection.

#### **Shame**

Suicide is still a topic about which most people do not want to talk. Therefore, it is not surprising that feelings of shame may set in. Out of fear of society's judgment, many choose not to talk about it; instead, they isolate themselves, which makes their grieving more difficult.

#### **Rejection**

Suicide is not a subject talked about “freely”; that is why persons who have lost a loved one through suicide often fear society's judgment and the resulting accusations. They prefer not to talk about it, and isolate themselves. This protective reaction is normal, but it makes the solving of their grief more difficult.

#### **Numbness**

We feel cut off from our emotions (especially during the period of shock).

#### **Denial**

We refuse to accept the death or the way in which the person died (suicide).

***All these feelings are common; they are part of the emotional process associated with loss that will lead to resolution of grief.***

## *Talk about...*

### **THE STAGES OF YOUR GRIEF AND YOUR FEELINGS**

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How do I know if I have accepted the loss?

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What am I doing to help me to deal with the consequences of this loss in my life?

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Am I able to tell my story without constantly being overcome by my emotions?

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How has this loss changed my beliefs and values?

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What am I doing to improve my quality of life?

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What have I discovered that has given my life renewed meaning?

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What changes have I made to adjust since this loss?

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What inner strengths have I developed?

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Are there any stages in the grieving process that I have not completed?

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## Talk about...

### THE STAGES OF YOUR GRIEF AND YOUR FEELINGS

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Describe, with the help of words and images (e.g., crying), the feelings that you are experiencing. Remember that, given the fact that it is difficult to imagine that someone would commit suicide, all those who are going through, or have gone through, a situation such as yours share these feelings.

#### **Description of my feelings in words:**

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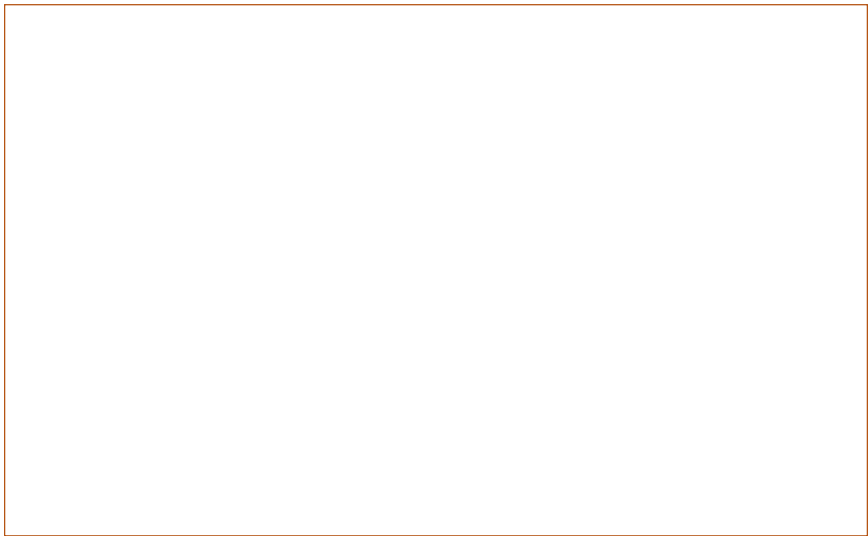
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#### **Description of my feelings in images**



*“I will be patient with others  
because I need their presence.”*

## Let's talk about...

### GRIEVING FOR A CHILD

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Here are a few things to watch for when parents lose a child because of suicide.

#### **Guilt**

The death of a child is a terrible ordeal. It is even more difficult in the case of suicide. It gives rise to a painful, deep sense of grief. The parents feel responsible for not being able to protect their child or to prevent the child from committing such an act. They feel that they have failed in their role of protector, and carry a heavy burden of guilt.

#### **Accusation**

Parents often try to assign responsibility for the suicide of their child. They tend to blame themselves or accuse each other openly or indirectly.

#### **Lack of communication**

After the death of a child, parents are dealing with their own feelings. They find it difficult to communicate their thoughts and emotions. Some, without regard for the other person's suffering, may demand that their partner be there to listen to them. Others may prefer to bottle up all feelings and move on to other things.

#### **Different ways of expressing grief**

Often, parents are not in sync when it comes to expressing their grief. Each in turn goes through periods of intense pain followed by a setback. Just as one parent recovers from a difficult stage, s/he will feel drawn back into it by the other parent, who may be entering a different stage of the grieving process. In order to stay away from this painful situation, partners may end up keeping away from each other. They need to learn that they are unique individuals and that they will experience their loss in different ways. One will express emotions openly, while the other will hold them in. One will immerse himself or herself in work, while the other will always be tired. One will enjoy recalling memories, while the other will try to forget. It takes a great deal of understanding and patience to let the other person grieve in his or her own way without feeling threatened.

*“Other people, including professionals, will not know what can help me unless I tell them.”*

**Intensity of grief**

The intensity of grief may vary. It will depend on personality type and on each person's relationship with the child as well as their hopes for the child. As a result, the emotional intensity of one of the parents' grief may seem different to the other.

**Sex life**

The death of a child may disrupt a couple's sex life. The sexual appetite of one partner may increase while the other's decreases. This may last for up to two years after the child's death. It is very important in such cases that the parents engage in a frank talk about their sex life.

**Conflict**

The sudden changes that result from grieving for a child may lead to discomfort and even conflict between spouses. One or the other may become confused and not know how to adapt to the rapid shifts of the other partner.

**Professional help**

In order to help them deal with the ordeal of losing a child, the couple very often will seek expert help.

*"I do not expect other people to be any better at dealing with my grief than I would have been at dealing with theirs had I not experienced my loss."*

# Talk about...

## GRIEVING FOR YOUR CHILD

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Do I feel guilty that my child committed suicide? Why?

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Do I tend to blame my partner? Why?

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How can I share my feelings with my partner?

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## Let's talk about...

### TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF BY...

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- eating properly and staying away from foods that are low in nutritional value, fats, excess sugar, caffeine, and alcohol.
- getting exercise that is in keeping with your state of health, your limitations, and your interests.
- keeping a regular sleep schedule despite your loss so that you do not suffer from sleeplessness.
- sticking to your daily routine as much as possible. Include moments of relaxation so that you are in better shape to work through your grief.
- enjoying a few moments of relaxation, a leisure activity, the touch of someone's hand, or a massage.
- expressing your feelings when they are close to the surface - for example, while you are watching a TV program, reading a book or looking at a sad scene.
- surrounding yourself with people, pets and even plants that give you energy.
- understanding that you will not forget the departed loved one, even if you gradually learn not to think of this person all the time.
- drawing encouragement from all the progress you have made.
- taking time to heal, without looking for escape in a false sense of well being or becoming overly tired.
- finding your spirituality.

*"It is risky to try new things.  
But it is even riskier to risk  
nothing."*

## *Let's talk about...*

### A LETTER TO A PERSON WHO IS NOT MOURNING

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Dear friend:

I have experienced a devastating loss. It will take me time, perhaps years, to get over my grief. For a while, it is possible that I may cry more than usual. My tears are not a sign of weakness or a lack of hope or faith. They represent the depth of my loss and are a sign of my healing.

I may sometimes get angry for no apparent reason. The stress of grief increases the intensity of my emotions. Please forgive me if I seem irrational at times.

More than anything else, I need your understanding and your presence. If you don't know what to say, touch me, hug me, but let me know that you care. Please don't wait for me to call you. I am often too tired to even think of picking up the phone and asking for the help that I need.

Don't let me drift away from you. In the year ahead, I will need your presence more than ever.

You can pray for me, unless you are doing so out of a sense of obligation. My faith should not exempt me from the grieving process.

If, by chance, you have ever gone through an ordeal that is similar to mine, share it with me. You won't hurt me.

This loss is the worst thing that has ever happened to me. Nevertheless, I will overcome it and I will survive. I won't always feel the way I do at this moment. I will start to laugh again.

Thank you for being concerned about me. Your concern is a gift that I shall always treasure.

*"People cannot become what they are not."*





## *Let's talk about...*

### HOPE

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#### **Whatever you do, don't give up**

When nothing in your life is going right, when problems torment you and money worries surround you...

Rest if you need to, but whatever you do, don't give up.

When too many mistakes have been committed, when your entire universe threatens to crumble and, exhausted, you feel your confidence ebbing away...

Rest if you need to, but whatever you do, don't give up.

You know, life is strange sometimes, with its share of surprises and unforeseen events, and it is not given to us to know in advance how far we will have to travel or how many obstacles we will have to overcome in order to achieve happiness and success.

Think of how many people stopped fighting, when perhaps all it would have taken was just one more tiny step to transform failure into success. And yet, one step at a time is never that difficult.

So you must have the courage and the tenacity to take that tiny step more, knowing that life is a great and powerful friend that is always there by your side, ready to help.

You will soon find that this attitude will summon up, from the deepest part of yourself, life forces that you never even suspected and that will help you to achieve what you undertake.

But, first and foremost, remember:

When, in your life, difficult moments arise...

Rest if you need to, but whatever you do, don't give up.

*Author unknown*

# Let's talk about...

## BOOKS TO READ

### English-language books:

Bernstein, R. Judith. (1997). When the bough breaks: Forever after the death of a son or daughter. Missouri: Andrews McMeel Publishing. 230 p.

Eadie, Betty J. (1992). Embraced by the light. New York: Bantam Books. ISBN 0-553-56591-5.

Fitzgerald, Helen. (1995). The mourning handbook. New York: Fireside Books. ISBN 0-671-86972-8.

Kushner, Harold. (1987). When all you've ever wanted isn't enough: The search for a life that matters. New York: Pocket Books. ISBN 0-671-55181-7.

Kushner, Harold. (1981). When bad things happen to good people. New York: Avon Books. ISBN 0-380-63092-6.

Kushner, Harold. (1991). Who needs God? New York: Pocket Books. ISBN 0-671-68027-7.

Mericle, B. P. (1993). When a colleague commits suicide. Journal of Psychosocial Nursing, 31 (9), 11-13.

Montgomery, Ruth. (1968). A search for the truth. New York: William Morrow & Co. - Bantam Books. N3725.

Staudacher, Carol. (1987). Beyond grief: A guide for recovering from the death of a loved one. Oakland, Ca.: New Harbinger. Distributed by Raincoast Books.

Van Praagh, James. (1997). Talking to heaven: A medium's message of life after death. New York: Penguin Group. ISBN 0-525-94268-8.

Wroblewski, Adina. (1995). Suicide: Why? 85 questions and answers about suicide. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Minneapolis: Afterwords Publishing.

*"Most people want to help me. They wish me well, even when they do things that I might consider inappropriate."*

## Let's talk about...

### BOOKS TO READ

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#### **French-language books**

D'Amours, L. et Kiely, M. (1985). Le processus de deuil après un suicide: Essai de conceptualisation. *Revue Québécoise de psychologie*, Vol. 6, (3), 105-115.

Delisle, Isabelle (1987). Survivre au deuil, Montréal, Les Éditions Pauline.

Deits, Bob (1987). Revivre après l'épreuve, Montréal, Québecor.

Ernoul-Delcourt, A. (1992). Apprivoiser l'absence. Paris, Fayard.

(Book for parents grieving for their child)

Fishel, Ruth (1988). S'aimer un jour à la fois. Québec, Les Éditions Modus Vivendi.

Franki, Victor (1988). Découvrir un sens à sa vie, Montréal, Actualisation.

Hétu, Jean-Luc (1997). Vivre un deuil. Éditions du Méridien. Sherbrooke.

Ladouceur, M. et Viau, M. (1991). Grandir ensemble dans l'épreuve, Montréal, Les Éditions Paulines.

Laffont, Robert (1984). Parent en deuil, translation of The Bereaved Parent by Harriet Sarnoff Schiff (1977), Éditions Robert Laffont, Paris.

Monbourquette, Jean (1984). Aimer, perdre et grandir, Saint-Jean-Sur-Richelieu, Les Éditions du Richelieu Ltée.

Moody, Dr Raymond (1977). La vie après la vie. Éditions Robert Laffont.

Nouwen, Henri J.M. (1981). Elle vient de mourir. Éditions Fides.

Og Mandino: L'ange de l'espoir; Le choix; Mission : Succès; Le cadeau le plus merveilleux du monde; Le retour du chiffonnier; Le plus grand secret du monde; Le plus grand succès du monde; Une meilleure façon de vivre; Le plus grand vendeur du monde; Le plus beau cadeau du monde (translation of The Gift of Acabar).

Pinard Suzanne (1997). De l'autre côté des larmes. Édition de Montagne.

Regnier, Roger et Saint-Pierre, Line (1995). Surmonter l'épreuve du deuil, Les Éditions Québecor.

Robichaud, Léon (1989). Guérir ses blessures. Québec, Édition Anne Sigier.

Salomé, J. (1993). Contes à guérir, Contes à grandir. Paris, Éditions Albin Miche.

Sarnoff, S. (1977). Le deuil dans la famille, Paris, Laffont.

Viau, Marcel et Fils (1988). Ceux qui restent. Éditions Anne Sigier.

*“There are people who can help you to get through your ordeal, especially those who have known similar losses.”*

## *Let's talk about...*

### PROFESSIONAL HELP

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If you need help to cope with the suicide of someone close to you, please contact the closest Community Mental Health Centre. Help is available on an individual basis or in a group setting.

#### **Moncton**

77 Vaughan Harvey Blvd.  
Moncton, NB E1C 8R3  
Tel: (506) 856-2444  
Fax: (506) 856-2995

#### **Saint John**

Mercantile Center  
55 Union Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Saint John, NB E2L 5B7  
Tel: (506) 658-3737  
Fax: (506) 658-3739

#### **St. Stephen**

41 King Street  
St. Stephen, NB E3L 2C1  
Tel: (506) 466-7380  
Fax: (506) 466-7501

#### **Perth-Andover**

Box 387  
Perth-Andover, NB E0J 1V0  
Tel: (506) 273-4701  
Fax: (506) 273-4728

#### **Bathurst**

165 St. Andrews Street  
Bathurst, NB E2A 1C1  
Tel: (506) 547-2110  
Fax: (506) 547-2978

#### **Tracadie-Sheila**

Tel: (506) 394-3760  
Fax: (506) 394-3770

#### **Richibucto**

Place Cartier  
Richibucto, NB E4W 5R5  
Tel: (506) 523-7620  
Fax: (506) 523-7678

#### **Sussex**

30 Moffet Avenue  
Sussex, NB E4E 1E8  
Tel: (506) 432-2090  
Fax: (506) 432-2046

#### **Fredericton**

65 Brunswick Street  
Fredericton, NB E3B 5G6  
Tel: (506) 453-2132  
Fax: (506) 453-8766

#### **Edmundston**

121 Church Street  
Carrefour Assomption, Suite 331  
Edmundston, NB E3V 3L3  
Tel: (506) 735-2070  
Fax: (506) 737-4448

#### **Caraquet**

295 Saint-Pierre Boulevard West  
Caraquet, NB E1W 1B7  
Tel: (506) 726-2030  
Fax: (506) 726-2090

**Shippagan**

Tel: (506) 336-3061  
Fax: (506) 336-3068

**St. George**

5 Riverview Avenue  
St. George, NB E0G 2Y0  
Tel: (506) 755-4044  
Fax: (506) 755-1807

**Grand Manan**

North Head  
130 Route 776, Unit 3  
Grand Manan, NB E0G 2M0  
Tel: (506) 662-7023  
Fax: (506) 662-7029

**Woodstock**

200 King Street  
Woodstock, NB E7M 5C6  
Tel: (506) 325-4419  
Fax: (506) 328-4802

**Grand Falls**

131 Pleasant Street  
Grand Falls, NB E3Z 1G1  
Tel: (506) 475-2440  
Fax: (506) 475-2452

**Campbellton**

6 Arran Street  
Campbellton, NB E3N 1K4  
Tel: (506) 789-2440  
Fax: (506) 753-6969

**Miramichi**

1780 Water Street, Suite 300  
Miramichi, NB E1N 1B6  
Tel: (506) 778-6111  
Fax: (506) 778-5296

*“Healing from our grief takes time. It requires a certain amount of work on ourselves.”*































## Yes, I would like to tell you what I think about LET'S TALK ABOUT GRIEF

Your answers to the following questions, together with the other replies we receive, help us to better assess the relevance of *Let's talk about grief*.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
First name                      Initial                      Last name
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
Mailing Address      Apt.
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
City                                      Province                                      Postal Code
4. Age Group     18 and under     19-34     35-64     65 and over
5. Date you acquired this guide: \_\_\_\_\_  
Month/Day/Year
6. Sex:     Male             Female
7. Marital Status:  
 Single             Married             Divorced/separated     Widowed
8. Household income     Under \$29,000     \$29,000 to \$50,000  
 \$50,000 to \$100,000     Over \$100,000
9. Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_  Full time     Part time
10. For whom did you obtain this guide?  
 self             others             received as a gift
11. Did the guide help you?     Very much     Some     Not at all
12. Comments/suggestions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

You can also share your comments with us by calling the Canadian Mental Health Association, New Brunswick Division, at:

(506) 455-5231 or by e-mailing us at [emhanb@nbnet.nb.ca](mailto:emhanb@nbnet.nb.ca).



Health and Wellness

Suicide Prevention Committee



CANADIAN MENTAL  
HEALTH ASSOCIATION  
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE  
POUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE



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Canadian Mental Health Association  
New Brunswick Division  
65 Brunswick Street, Suite 292  
Fredericton, NB E3B 1G5