



# FIRE FIGHTER SUICIDE: HOW TO COPE WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

If someone you care about has died by suicide, this information can help you understand and cope with what has happened.

## SUICIDE AS A SUDDEN DEATH

It's shocking when someone you care about dies by suicide, and it is normal to feel confused, numb, angry, guilty or agitated. Here are some tips for coping:

- **Connect** by being with people who care about you and by comforting one another. Look for connections like those you find in conversations around the kitchen table.
- **Seek help** by telling people what you need — and what is helpful and what is not.
- **Understand** that painful feelings will ebb and flow. Emotions build up and peak, then diminish and recede before starting all over again.
- **Look for calm** by deep breathing, visualizing a peaceful scene or doing something you know will relax you.
- **Keep it simple** by taking care of your basic needs: food, water and sleep.
- **Take action** with a focus on today and on the next thing that needs to be done.
- **Allow yourself** to say yes or no to being around particular people or activities.
- **Be hopeful** by believing that it is possible to get through this difficult time and be okay.
- **Remember** the strengths you have used in your life to meet other challenges you have faced.
- **Protect yourself** by minimizing risky behavior, including using alcohol or drugs.
- **Stay safe** by getting emergency assistance or calling 988 to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in the United States and Canada if you feel suicidal.

## WHY SUICIDE?

People kill themselves primarily because of overwhelming mental and emotional pain, which one expert calls psychache. Pain becomes unbearable because:

- It's viewed as unending.
- It's believed it cannot be fixed.
- It's thought that only dying will end it.

Impaired psychological functioning (or not being in one's right mind) is often a contributing factor in suicide. "Choosing" suicide is not the same as making other choices. A multitude of personal and environmental factors — from severe depression to social isolation to not knowing how to ask for help — play a role in suicide. Each person's situation is unique.

People left behind to grieve a death by suicide look for answers to many questions. Sometimes these answers are helpful but also insufficient. Suicide is a complicated behavior that involves a person's body, mind, heart and soul. Most people's struggle with the question why leads both to answers and to the limits of what can be known.



### IN CRISIS? Call the Lifeline

Dial 988 for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in the US and Canada



If you're unable to function because of your grief, if your grief feels relentless, or if you're using alcohol or other harmful means to cope with grief, contact a peer supporter, behavioral health professional, employee assistance program or your physician.



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## NORMAL EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

Losing someone to suicide can bring on intense emotions, and it is important to allow yourself to feel however you are feeling while also reflecting on what is happening. Consider these feelings and reflections:

<b>DISBELIEF</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Suicide can happen to anyone.</li><li>• You cannot know what the person was thinking.</li><li>• It takes time to come to terms with a tragedy.</li></ul>
<b>SHAME</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The stigma around suicide is wrong.</li><li>• Suicide is caused by mental and emotional pain, not weakness.</li><li>• A person's life is about more than how they died.</li></ul>
<b>GUILT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No single factor is the cause of a person's suicide.</li><li>• No one can control another person's actions all the time.</li><li>• Hindsight after a suicide reveals information not previously known.</li></ul>
<b>ANGER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Being angry is okay; harming yourself or others is not.</li><li>• Anger can be released through a safe, healthy outlet.</li><li>• Anger is quieted by working through it over time.</li></ul>
<b>BLAME</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It is difficult to assign responsibility to one person or thing.</li><li>• Blaming is an attempt to make sense of what happened.</li><li>• Over time, blame is resolved by acceptance or forgiveness.</li></ul>
<b>ABANDONMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A suicidal person does not necessarily "choose" to die.</li><li>• Emotional pain can deny a person access to their reasons for living.</li><li>• People can irrationally think loved ones are better off without them.</li></ul>
<b>FEAR</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• After suicide, fear for others who might be at risk is understandable.</li><li>• Anxiety, obsessiveness or hypervigilance need to be addressed.</li><li>• Talking with a trusted person about your fears can be helpful.</li></ul>
<b>RELIEF</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It is natural to feel relief if interactions with the person were very difficult.</li><li>• Relief and profound grief can be present and valid at the same time.</li><li>• Expressing gratitude for an end to the person's pain is okay.</li></ul>