

# Coping with Suicide



**Learning about a suicide or an attempted suicide of someone you know can often create a range of intense emotions and reactions. You may try to make sense of this type of tragedy, and can find this action very difficult to understand and accept.**

You may experience reactions that involve feelings of shock, sadness and possibly varying degrees of guilt. You may feel upset and frustrated for not having been able to help prevent this act. Also, you may feel angry towards the person who engaged in this action and how they could create this level of upheaval for family, friends and colleagues. It often seems like we feel powerless towards something that we cannot totally understand.

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## **Why does someone consider or follow through on a suicide attempt?**

While the exact reasons why someone attempts or commits suicide are complex, many people who consider suicide are suffering from some form of depression, despair and hopelessness about their current or future life situation. They view suicide as a means to end their pain and despair.

It is not necessarily death they are seeking, but rather an end to their suffering. Difficulties arise when an individual does not

feel capable of overcoming difficult life circumstances and their sense of hopelessness. After repeated failures at attempting to change their situation or find ways to feel better, the person concludes that they will never be able to find a solution.

This despair leads to a life crisis that seems so intense that the only seemingly feasible way to avoid it is to attempt to end their life. Sometimes the action is well thought out and other times may result from an impulsive gesture.

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## Could you have prevented the suicide attempt?

It is normal for close friends, relatives and sometimes even colleagues to feel partly responsible and guilty about the person's suicide or suicide attempt. You may feel like there might have been warning signs or obvious clues that they were depressed and contemplating suicide. You may question whether you could have prevented the suicide/suicide attempt or done something different that could have changed the outcome.

This reaction is absolutely normal. Any suicidal hints conveyed by someone contemplating suicide were likely highly disguised, indirectly expressed or entirely non-evident. Furthermore, even if you were aware of their despair, your assistance and outreach may not have been accepted. Individuals contemplating suicide may isolate themselves from others. In many instances it is highly unlikely for others to intervene or prevent this action.

## What are your possible reactions?

As with any other loss, it is normal that you may experience all the responses and emotional reactions that are consistent with the normal stages of the grieving process. This process is natural and will last a certain amount of time, varying from one person to the next.

Shock and disbelief are usually the primary reactions experienced upon learning that someone you know has either made a suicide attempt or died as a result of suicide. Periods of confusion and numbness may also be present as you try to absorb and cope with the news. These reactions are generally more intense when the death was not anticipated or resulted from a suicide.

Suicide is very difficult to comprehend. You may not want to acknowledge and accept what has happened. You may even experience mixed emotions and be unable to make sense of a decision to follow through on a suicide attempt.

Afterwards, and often simultaneously with initial reactions, it is common to feel anger towards the person as many people are left to deal with the resulting emotional fallout. It is also possible that you feel angry or even disappointed with yourself for something you did or did not do that could have altered the person's decision.

Experiencing sadness is another stage of dealing with the loss and grieving. This is because you are becoming increasingly aware of the tragic loss of life that results from suicide. You may experience diminished appetite, sleep disturbances, difficulties focusing and other physical reactions. You may feel guilty or remorseful. You may be trying to make sense out of something that does not make sense.



## What can you do to cope and adjust to this event?

- 1. Try not to blame yourself.** While feeling possibly guilty and engaging in self-doubt is a normal reaction, individuals who make this attempt and life ending decision are responsible for their own actions.
- 2. Do not blame others.** They are most likely going through their own difficult time.
- 3. Do not try to minimize your reactions and avoid artificially speeding up the grieving process for yourself or others.** It is normal to need some time to come to terms and accept the circumstances of such an unexpected loss.
- 4. Do not hesitate to talk about your feelings and reactions with people who are close to you.** Ask them for help and support. If you talk about your feelings and seek appropriate support, chances are you will recover faster and return to your normal self in a shorter time period.
- 5. Be supportive of others.** They might be reacting the same way as you, or they might be coping in different ways. By supporting them, you may obtain mutual support and understanding.

**Need more assistance or support?** For more information, to book a counselling session or to access Homewood Health for any additional assistance or support, contact our Client Services Centre available to you 24/7 in English and French. All calls are completely confidential.

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