



Appalachian Regional Healthcare

CHAPLAINCY SERVICES

Director Sam Stacy

***ARH Chaplaincy Services-
Connecting Patients and Staff
with the God of Grace, Mercy
and Peace.***

Dealing with Suicide

"Everyone wants to be the sun that lights up my life. But I'd rather find my moon...someone who can shine on me during my darkest hours."

Dennis Gallemit

Photo © Jan Andersen 2011

<http://www.chasingdeath.com>

Dealing with Suicide

What miserable comforters you all are!"
Job 16:2b

What words can we say to help in dealing with a suicide?

What words should we not say in this situation?

Dealing with Suicide

Things Not To Say

Never say words that are minimizing the loss:

- "At least you have other children."
- "You're strong; you can handle it."
- "You have so much to be grateful for."
- "Well he was bipolar, right? Could have seen that coming."

Dealing with Suicide

These types of comments add to the pain of grief because they attempt to reduce the loss and make it seem less painful, rather than recognizing the deep suffering the suicide survivor is experiencing.

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Things Not to Say

Never give unsolicited advice like:

- "You need to get over it and move on."
- "Be strong."
- "You'll find a new girl."
- "You are young you will find another husband/wife."

Dealing with Suicide

As with the minimizing remarks, a grieving person needs to feel sad in the present and not think about the future right now.

To griever, these feeble attempts to motivate or cheer them up feel like the speaker is telling them to ignore the pain they are currently feeling

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Things Not to Say

Never spiritualize the loss such as:

- "God doesn't give you more than you can handle."
- "Everything happens for a reason."
- "You know she's in hell, don't you?"
- "He's in a better place."

Dealing with Suicide

No major religion teaches anymore that death by suicide automatically means hell, but this merciless thought persists, inferring that God punishes people for being sick.

In our broken world, unspeakable tragedies occur daily, but that doesn't mean God causes or approves of those tragedies.

Sadly some grieving people have turned away from God as their ultimate source of comfort because of such misguided beliefs.

Similarly, assuring someone that their loved one is in heaven is not helpful to a survivor in early grief when the mindset is: "BUT I WANT HIM HERE WITH ME!"

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Things Not to Say

Never Ask painful personal questions such as:

- "Why do you think he did this?"
- "How did she do it?"
- "Did she leave a note?"
- "Did you have to clean up the mess?"

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It is human nature to be curious, but probing questions about the intimate details of the suicide are invasive and hurtful. Those who genuinely care about grieving persons should let them decide when and how much they want to tell about their loved one's death.

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Things Not to Say

Never Imply blame:

- "Did you see this coming?"
- "What is going on in your family?"
- "This sounds like it's hereditary."
- "Probably [something the survivor did] is what sent him over the edge."

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To suggest that any of the people left behind by a suicide contributed to that death in any way is cruel.

Suicide survivors almost universally struggle with thoughts like, "If I had only [fill in the blank], my loved one might still be alive."

The last thing a person suffering suicide grief needs is a statement implying guilt on their part, or that they or their family is defective.

Experts estimate that 90% of people who die by suicide suffer from a mental illness, whether diagnosed or not.

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Things Not to Say

Never say negative things about the person who died such as:

- "What a selfish thing to do."
- "She chose to leave you."
- "It's too bad his faith wasn't strong enough."
- "That's what drugs will do for you."

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Although anger toward the one who died is often part of the grieving process, it is never appropriate to say negative things about the deceased to the grieving family. Any comment that implies suicide was a choice, rational or not, lacks understanding. A person who dies by suicide sees death as the only alternative to unbearable torment — not as a "choice."

Suggesting that a person in such psychological pain was trying to hurt those left behind shows a profound lack of compassion and understanding of mental illness.

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What to say

- "Tell me a good memory you have of my loved one."
- "I can't imagine how much pain you're in. We hurt, too, because we loved him."
- "I love you, and my prayers are with you."
- "What a terrible loss for your family."

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What to say

- "He had value; he will be missed; he was a good person."
- "Focus on the way they lived and loved, not the way they died."
- "How can I help you today?" (Following through with errands, grocery shopping, cleaning, going to church with them, etc.)

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What to say

- I'm here for you and the family
- I am so sorry for your loss but words fail me now
- Sometimes the best thing anyone could have said was “NOTHING AT ALL”!
- Many survivors mention that the best reaction they received was not words at all, but a hug. They talk about being comforted by the caring presence of friends, and the assurance that others were praying for them.

Dealing with Suicide

The best advice to anyone who wants to comfort a suicide survivor is: "Show up, let them see you care, and respect the griever's right to feel bad for a while (guilt, anger, sadness, etc.). Too many survivors reported "friends" who avoided them altogether after their loved ones' suicides rather than to risk saying the wrong thing. Please don't do that, because that hurts most of all.

Questions???