

SUICIDE, HEALING AND HOPE

How to be a friend to someone who has lost a loved one to suicide.

By Marissa Widdison
Church Magazines

Jess remembers her younger brother as a super smart guy with a kind heart. She remembers the last funny sitcom they watched together and how he was laughing and seemed to be having a good time. And she remembers standing in front of their home just a few days later, watching the paramedics, realizing that her brother had just died from suicide.

“I felt everything from complete shock to devastation beyond anything I can explain to pure disbelief that this was even really happening,” she says. Their family, now grief-stricken, hadn’t realized he was in such pain.

It’s been years since that happened, and Jess now has a husband and children of her own. She still has unanswered questions and struggles every day with the consequences of her brother’s death.

But over the years, she has found some peace. And she’s seen firsthand how the teachings of the gospel and love from other people help in healing.

If you know someone like Jess who has lost someone to suicide, it’s important to understand: everyone grieves differently. What will help one person may not be as helpful for another person, and that’s OK. Here are some ideas that can help you as you prayerfully ask Heavenly Father how to support those you care about.



SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINES

Nearest Location

Worldwide

USA

Suicide Prevention Lifeline
Crisis Textline
Native Youth Crisis Hotline

Canada

Distress Center
Kids Help Phone

UK and Ireland

Australia

Beyond Blue
Kids Helpline



TALK TO THEM AND LISTEN

Sometimes after hearing about a suicide, people don't know what to say or worry they'll say the wrong thing. But avoiding the grieving person can be worse.

"It feels very lonely when that happens," Jess says. So instead, just say something—even if it's just something little like, "I'm thinking about you and your family."

Mental health experts recommend talking about the person who died from suicide like you would talk about a person who died from any other cause. Remember the good times together, remember how much you loved the person, and express how much they will be missed.

"I loved hearing good memories about my brother," Jess says. Some people even wrote down those memories and gave them to her family. "Anytime someone brought him up, I felt relief."

Even so, it has been a long process trying to mentally and emotionally sort out what happened. Because of that, Jess has been grateful for people who would listen to her, even if she was rehashing something that had already been said.

"It helped and still does help me get through harder moments."

BE COMPASSIONATE

Jess says it was difficult when people made opinionated comments about her brother's death or said he "wasn't going to be in a good place" because of what he did. Mental illness, she points out, is as real and vicious as any other disease. It was also hard when people said they knew exactly what she was going through.

"No one knows what it was like to lose my specific brother with the specific relationship I had with him—except the Savior," she says. "But even though we may not know exactly what a person is feeling, there are many ways we can support one another."

HELP WHERE YOU CAN

If you are helping someone who is recovering from a suicide loss, ask yourself if there are any small daily things you can help with. Can you help make meals, do chores, or study schoolwork together? Inviting someone to an activity, even if they repeatedly turn down the offer, lets them know you care.

THINGS WILL GET BETTER

Over time, peace can come. "I would love to say that the ache in your heart goes away, but it doesn't," Jess says. "But Jesus Christ's Atonement has healed me in ways I never thought possible." Reading scriptures, praying, and attending church help her see the light at the end of the tunnel. Through those small things, she's received revelation for other ways that she can find help, such as meeting with a professional counselor. Now she takes things "a minute at a time" and tries to fill her day with gratitude and service.

"I have a strong testimony that our Heavenly Father loves every single one of His children." **NE**

| Phone Number | Web Address |
|---|---|
| | preventing-suicide.lds.org befrienders.org / iasp.info/resources/Crisis_Centres |
| 1-800-273-8255 Text START to 741-741 1-877-209-1266 | suicidepreventionlifeline.org crisistextline.org save.org/airesources |
| 403-266-HELP (4357) 1-800-668-6868 | distresscentre.com kidshelpphone.ca/Teens |
| 116 123 | samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/contact-us |
| 1300 22 4636 1800 55 1800 | youthbeyondblue.com kidshelpline.com.au |

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY GETTY IMAGES