

How Survivors Heal

By LDS Family Services

When someone chooses to end their pain with suicide, a complicated and uniquely painful grieving process begins for loved ones left behind (typically referred to as survivors). Feelings of confusion, guilt, abandonment, rejection, and anger are intensified. The unanswered questions of Why? What did I miss? Why didn't I receive a prompting? How will this affect eternal rewards? etc., can cause tremendous turmoil as well as thoughts that perhaps they were somehow responsible for their loved one's death.

There is a tendency for survivors to withdraw from others in shame because of fears of blame, judgment, and stigma. Survivors might also feel trauma-related reactions, especially for someone who discovers the body. Survivors can even develop suicidal thoughts themselves in their grief.

Notwithstanding such deep pain and anguish, our Savior "descended below all things" (see D&C 88:6; 122:8) "that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:12) so "that we may . . . find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

To those who are grieving:

- Don't blame others, especially yourself.
- Take care of yourself spiritually: Trust in the gift of agency, allow for unknowns (see 1 Nephi 9:6), and trust in the Lord's power to heal and provide peace (see Philippians 4:7).



- Take care of yourself physically: Maintain a routine of good diet, rest, and exercise.
- Reach out for support from those you trust (family, friends, bishop), and let others help you through this crisis.
- Engage in healthy activities that provide distraction.
- Talk with a professional counselor and/or attend a suicide support group.
- Be patient in your healing process.

To those caring for someone who is grieving:

- Be compassionate and do not blame or judge. Understand how "the Lord . . . suit[s] his mercies" (D&C 46:15).
- Reach out and ask the survivors how you can help even in simple tasks, or accompany them in activities.
- Be patient, listen, and accept the feelings they share at their pace.
- Avoid clichés and false assurances such as "It'll be OK," "It could be worse," "I know how you feel," "I understand," "It's God's will," "Time heals all wounds," and so on.
- Don't try to provide answers to their unanswerable questions.
- Don't compare their grief to yours even if it was related to a suicide.
- Talk to them about their loved one in similar ways as you would about someone who died in another manner.
- Reassure affected children that they are not responsible.
- Offer to help them find additional resources for their grieving (counseling, support groups, etc.). ■