

After a Suicide

Research literature estimates that once a suicide happens the chances of another death by suicide increases dramatically in the adolescent and young adult population. The following suggestions are intended to guide parents during this difficult time.

[Supporting Your Child](#)

The aftermath of a youth suicide is a sad and challenging time for a school and a community. The major tasks for suicide post-prevention are to help youth manage the understandable feelings of shock, grief, and confusion and to prevent further suicides.

How to Talk to Youth After a Peer Dies by Suicide

Do not be afraid to bring up the topic. Research has shown that talking about suicide does not implant thoughts of suicide.

"I heard about the suicide of your classmate. I am so sorry this has happened. Teenagers shouldn't have to say goodbye to a friend and not this way."

- **"How are your friends dealing with this? How are you dealing with this?"**

Suicide is a shocking death and it can make grief feel more complicated. The way people react is also connected with how close they were to the person or even what they are going through in their lives at the time of the death.

- **"Suicide is very complicated and can feel very confusing."**

We can have many feelings after someone takes his or her life. We may feel confusion, anger, anxiety, sadness, guilt, or even just feel numb. We may have trouble getting our mind off the person and not able to stop thinking about the way he or she died. Sometimes our bodies express our feelings and we could have trouble sleeping or have nightmares. We may not feel like eating, have headaches or stomachaches, or just feel tired all the time. We can have trouble concentrating and focusing, and may not feel like being with anyone or doing the things we usually like to do.

After a suicide we can even begin to worry that someone else we care about will take his or her life. These thoughts and experiences are normal right after the death and even for some weeks. However, if these feelings don't begin to lessen as time goes on or they feel even worse, it is time to tell someone who can help you.

■ **“Have you or any of your friends ever had thoughts of suicide? What kinds of thoughts have you had?”**

If you ever did begin to have those kinds of thoughts it would be important to tell me or another adult that you trust about them so you can get help. Depression can trick people into believing the bad way they feel now will never go away and the only way to stop the pain is to kill themselves. That is so untrue; depression and thoughts of suicide can be treated like any other medical illnesses and the person can get better.

■ **“I want you to always remember that there is no problem that we can't solve. There are people who love you and can help you. Suicide is never, ever an answer.”**

Life is sometimes hard and it's important to have an “A” team walking through it with us. Let's figure out who your “A” team is. If you were struggling with depression or thoughts of suicide or any other serious problem, who would you go to for help?



Commonly Asked Questions by Youth and Appropriate Responses

Why did he or she die by suicide?

We are never going to know the answer to that question as the answer has died with him or her. What we do know is that 90% of people who die by suicide have a mental health disorder at the time of the death. Things like depression, anxiety, or substance abuse are examples of mental health disorders. These disorders can feel very overwhelming and can make a person believe these feelings will never go away and the only way to stop the pain is to kill yourself. The truth is these disorders are very treatable and people get well and feel better. The feelings of everyone left behind to make sense of it is the focus now.

What method did this person use to end his or her life?

How he or she died isn't important. (If a person is insistent about knowing, answer specifically with brief information as to the method such as, he or she died by hanging or used a gun. Do not go into explicit details such as what was the type of gun or rope used or the condition of the body, etc.).

Didn't this person make a poor choice and is it okay to be angry with him or her?

Yes, this person did make a very poor choice. The suicide was a very big mistake and the person could have solved his or her problems in a better way. It is very normal to have feelings of anger and many other feelings in the aftermath of suicide. You can care about someone very much, but still be angry about something this person has done, or feel angry she or he left you, or didn't give you a chance to help.

How can I cope with this suicide?

It is important to remember what or who has helped you cope when you have had to deal with upsetting things in your life before. You can turn to the important adults in your life for help and share your feelings with them. It is important to maintain normal routines, proper sleeping and eating habits, and to engage in regular exercise, and avoid drugs and alcohol. They may seem to help in the short run, but can make grief and even depression worse. Resiliency which is the ability to cope with adversity is a learned behavior. Everyone does the best when surrounded by friends and family who care about them by engaging in healthy activities, and by accessing physical and mental health care when needed.

What is an appropriate memorial to a suicide victim?

The most appropriate memorial is a living one such as becoming involved in suicide prevention efforts. The American Association of Suicidology cautions that permanent markers or memorials such as plaques or trees planted in memory of the deceased, dramatize and glorify the action. Anything that glorifies the suicide victim will contribute to other teenagers considering suicide. Reaching out to the victim's family and attending the funeral are also appropriate in coping with grief.



What are the warning signs of suicide?

The most common signs are:

- making a suicide attempt,
- verbal and written statements about death and suicide,
- fascination and preoccupation with death,
- giving away prized possessions,
- saying goodbye to friends and family,
- making a will,
- and dramatic changes in behavior and personality.

What should I do if I believe someone to be suicidal?

Listen to him or her, give support, and let your friend know he or she is not the first person to feel this way. There is help available, and mental health professionals such as counselors and psychologists have special training to help young people who are suicidal. Do not keep a secret about suicidal behavior even if your friend asks you to. Get an adult to help you; this is too big a responsibility and keeping a secret about suicide is not a fair request of a friend.



Student Services-Guidance and Counseling
469-633-6583

www.friscoisd.org

Adapted from material by Traumatic Loss Coalitions for Youth Guidelines written by Scott Poland, EdD., and Richard Liberman, MA. LEP; Rutgers University Behavioral Care and Center for Diseases Control and Prevention.