



Grief after suicide

Grief after suicide can be complex and complicated. It is affected by the elements of traumatic loss as well as the impact of sudden death. To begin, let's take a closer look at what trauma is about.

In our conversational language, we often treat the words 'grief' and 'trauma' as synonymous. However, the fact is **trauma** is about the **event** and how we interpret and experience it. You might have been caught up in the same frightening event as someone else and have a completely different reaction.

The following definition of death as a traumatic event is centered on the nature of the death:

 *A death is considered traumatic if it occurs without warning; if it is untimely; if it involves violence; if there is damage to the loved one's body; if it was caused by a perpetrator with the intent to harm; if the survivor regards the death as preventable; if the survivor believes that the loved one suffered; or if the survivor regards the death, or manner of death, as unfair and unjust.* 

Source: Watman & Latack 2015 <https://whatsyourgrief.com/traumatic-loss/>

Questions

With traumatic and suicide deaths, it's common to mull over questions and to search your mind for answers that make sense of what seems a senseless death. It's fortunate when you find answers which ease the pain, but for some, their questions will never be answered satisfactorily and even if they find the truth, it might not give them the peace they are looking for. You could be asking:

- Why did this happen?
- Was it instant or did they suffer?
- Were they afraid?
- Could this have been prevented?
- How could God let this happen?
- What is the meaning or purpose of all this?

Guilt, blame, inadequacy

Survivors commonly blame themselves in an effort to make sense of this. They think or say:

- *I should have seen this coming. Why didn't I see the signs?*
- *If only I was there for him/her. I let them down.*

Anger

Directed at yourself for things not said or done and frequently there is anger at the person who died. "How could they do this to us?" is a common question asked by survivors - they can feel rejected by the person.

Shame and isolation

There may be a stigma felt by survivors around what others think about their family, how could they have not prevented this and found help for their loved one? Some survivors may find that in their family or friendship group the word 'suicide' is just too hard to talk about. It conjures up fear and anxiety and so conversations about what happened are avoided and the griever is left feeling alone and unsupported.

Relief

When mental health issues have been apparent and possibly previous suicide attempts, survivors often describe their relief at not having to live in fear of the police knocking on their door or 'walking on eggshells' as they witness ongoing conflict or helplessness to find the right solutions to address the situation. Often, relief stems from no longer having to witness your loved one's struggle as well as your own anxiety and ever-present distress. Relief can also come from your belief that the person is now at peace and free from their own emotional pain. Sometimes this relief can be met with feelings of guilt. It's important to remember the relief does not diminish your love for that person nor will it cancel the grief that you will feel over their death.