

HELPING THE HURTING

Practical Suggestions

- 1 Get the names of anyone on the scene who might be able to supply further information about the victim of suicide for the family at a later date: policeman, doctors, medical examiner, witnesses, etc.
- 2 Keep a list of visitors, those who call, send food, etc. Offer to make needed calls.
- 3 Keep a list of medications administered to the survivors, complete with dosages.
- 4 Offer to help with official papers, i.e. police reports, insurance claims, etc.

TO HELP, PLEASE DON'T

- Say meaningless platitudes like, "I know how you feel." You probably don't, or attempt to alter their feelings in order to make you feel more comfortable.
- Treat them as incompetents or invalids.
- Preach to them or explain that it was "God's will...."
- Offer help that's insincere such as, "Call anytime if you need anything."
- Try to sedate them with drinks or non-prescription drugs.
- Ask about doing helpful errands—just do them.
- Try to stop them from talking about the child.
- Alter the child's room in any way.
- Don't try to find the silver lining in the death of their child. Remember it's a tragedy.
- Don't find fault with home life, medical care, conduct of police, etc.

Few people can imagine the intense suffering experienced by surviving family members in the wake of a suicide. The shock and grief are so profound that those who feel it themselves are known to be more vulnerable to suicidal thoughts.

One national organization, recognizing the need to give special care to survivors, has compiled material well worth summarizing. For a more complete treatment of this subject, you may wish to contact Compassionate Friends, P.O. Box 3696, Oak Brook, IL 60522.

Survivors of suicide often experience severe grief, anger, shock, guilt, confusion and painful reactions — an emotional barrage so powerful, it's important for them to know they can survive.

Typical symptoms might include:

- An overwhelming feeling of emotional numbness or unreality
- Loss of memory, time disorientation
- Inability to concentrate
- Fear of mental or emotional breakdown
- Hyperactive, racing mind
- Undeniable panic
- Guilt when you catch yourself laughing or smiling

Here's what a friend might do to help.

- Surround them with love and understanding; but, don't smother or over control.
- Listen compassionately and attentively. Give them a chance to think out loud and sort out their grief.
- Give special attention to brothers and sisters of the youthful victim. Allow them to express their grief openly. Encourage them to remember the good things.

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

- Lack of interest in immediate surroundings
- Physical complaints: hypochondria
- Insomnia or excessive sleeping
- Appetite disorders:
- Excessive eating or dieting
- Sexual disorders
- Fear of insanity or nervous breakdown

Sometimes depression will be manifested by active defiance rather than passive neglect. These "acting-out" behaviors or "masked" symptoms of depression, are extremely common in teenagers. They may appear in addition to, or in lieu of, other more widely recognized symptoms of depression listed herein.

- defiance
- rebellion
- disobedience
- delinquency
- running away
- drug abuse
- truancy
- academic or social failure
- sexual promiscuity

UNDERSTANDING YOUR GRIEF

- Remember that
- Grief is a time for healing and restoring balance. Don't try to rush it.
- Crying can be healthy and therapeutic. Go ahead.
- Grief may have physical symptoms such as eating disorders, sleep loss, sexual difficulties, loss of energy or ability to concentrate.
- Alcohol and drugs are dangerous when combined with grief or depression. Use sparingly, and only according to the advice of a competent physician.
- Guilt, real or imagined, is sure to make an entrance. God forgives. You should forgive yourself.
- Grief is highly individual. Don't try to live up to others' expectations about how you should express grief.
- Children often grieve silently, inwardly. Don't forget to extend concern and love to them at a time of need.
- Grief clouds rational thinking. Put off major decisions when possible for as long as possible — at least one year.
- Grief diminishes with time. Seek only the courage and strength you need for this moment. Let tomorrow take care of itself.
- You're not alone. Many share your pain. Many have endured similar personal loss, only to find the grace to enjoy life once again in a future better time.