

depression, emotional illness, and other factors beyond our control—not our shortcomings as a partner.

**Siblings** often identify closely with one another, making the suicide of one especially painful for those left behind. It can be a reminder of our own mortality. Siblings may not receive the same level of sympathy or support as parents, children or partners. Parents may respond after the loss of a child by focusing uncomfortably on the surviving siblings or withdrawing from them. It's essential that families offer mutual support and share their feelings openly.

**Suicide “witnesses”** face the additional pain and shock of seeing the incident or discovering the body. Try your best to substitute that image. A photo, a memory, or even funeral viewing may help to replace it with one that more truly reflects your loved one.

**Accused**...survivors often face more than the judgment of others—they may face formal accusations of responsibility, either from fellow survivors or from the authorities. Bear in mind that law enforcement is compelled to treat any apparent suicide as a homicide until the facts are ascertained.

Source: “A Handbook for Survivors of Suicide” by Jeffrey Jackson, 2003; Adina Wroblewski, *Suicide: Why?* (1995)

## Benefits of Counseling

Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Reviewing the incident and processing the event can help you clarify what actually happened.
- Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies—allowing for the continuance of school, work or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network can help to decrease the negative physical, psychological and emotional effects that often result from grief.

You can utilize your grief as an opportunity to build confidence, reduce isolation, and develop protective instinct skills.

## Who can help?

The Travis County Sheriff's Office Victim Services Unit can assist you with information regarding your case status, Victims' Rights, Crime Victim Compensation, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to the appropriate community helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.



## Resources

### The Christi Center

512.467.2600

[www.christicenter.org](http://www.christicenter.org)

### Austin Center for Grief and Loss

512.472.7878

[www.austingrief.org](http://www.austingrief.org)

### Survivors of Suicide

[www.survivorsofsuicide.com](http://www.survivorsofsuicide.com)

### Integral Care

512.472.4357

[www.integralcare.org](http://www.integralcare.org)

### Travis County Medical Examiner's Office

512.854.9599

[www.traviscountytexas.gov/medical-examiner](http://www.traviscountytexas.gov/medical-examiner)

## Survivors of Suicide

### Victim Services Unit

5555 Airport Blvd  
Austin, TX 78751  
512-854-9709



Name/ID Number:

Direct Number:

Mailing Address:  
PO Box 1748  
Austin, TX 78767

Suicide can be one of the most painful ordeals that one may experience. In the weeks and months ahead, you may feel as if you are on an emotional roller coaster.

## Common Responses

Unlike “conventional” death, along with grief, many survivors of suicide experience:

**Guilt**...invariably a suicide survivor may feel that they might have, could have or should have done something to prevent the suicide.

**Stigma**...while other mourners usually receive sympathy and compassion, suicide survivors may encounter blame, judgment or exclusion.

**Anger**...feelings of anger toward the lost loved one, sometimes with surprising intensity.

**Disconnection**...losing a loved one naturally allows for happy memories to be retained. Suicide survivors may emotionally disconnect due to a state of conflict with the loved one.

## Why?

Although the answer to this question may never be known, it may help to remember that in most cases, the primary goal of a suicide is not to end life, but to end pain.

**“Why did they do this?”** ...Your thoughts will be occupied by this question for some time. And if you think you know the answer, you should think again. Because chances are, you’re only seeing part of the picture.

**“Is suicide really a choice?”**...Choice implies that a suicidal person can reasonably look at all of the alternatives and select among them. Suicide occurs when other choices aren’t seen.

Most suicides are accompanied by another event—the breakup of a relationship, loss of a job, or learning of bad news. Misconceptions arise when we mistake one of these isolated events for the cause of the suicide. Instead, it is more likely just the “straw that broke the camel’s back.”

## What’s Ahead

Some of the more difficult circumstances you might experience include:

- Having a few consecutive days where you feel better then a sudden return of sadness. Ups and downs in coping with your loss are expected.
- An expected reminder (a song, photo, scent) could bring on sudden sadness or a sensation of reliving the experience of the suicide. If this happens, stay calm and try to remove yourself from the reminder—focus on positive thoughts.
- Try to prepare for the honest truth that some friends and relatives may not offer the support you need. Try to lean on the people who are ready, willing, able and available to help you. Try to forgive those who cannot.
- People may make insensitive remarks to you. Suicide is generally misunderstood and people often feel inept at comforting you. Others may share their own opinions or thoughts. You have the right to excuse yourself from conversations.
- It’s common to project our own feelings of guilt onto others by assuming that they are judging us harshly in their minds. Try to give them the benefit of the doubt—you aren’t a mind reader.
- Your closest supporters may be willing to listen and share with you for a few weeks or months, but there’s likely to come a time when their thoughts move on. Consider outside support groups—fellow survivors may understand and empathize with you.
- Feeling bad about feeling good is also common. It’s okay to enjoy the positive aspects of life
- Holidays, birthdays, and the anniversary of the suicide are often difficult. Generally, the first year, with all its “firsts” will be the toughest, but these events may always be difficult times for you. Anticipation of these days is usually worse than the day itself.
- New milestones—accomplishments, weddings, births—may bring feelings of guilt. These events remind us that our lives are moving forward, without our loved one. Feelings of betrayal, as if

we are leaving them behind, may rise. We need to remember we have chosen to live.

- Entertaining thoughts of our own suicide may occur. This may be due to the fact that our loved one’s death has made the idea of suicide far more real in our lives. Suicide is often preceded by a history of depression. If you share this trait with your loved one, then you may consider seeking the help of your doctor or a professional counselor.

Time, support, and help from others will help. It might take years to restore your emotional well-being, but be assured, it will get easier.

## Special Circumstances

**Children** depending on their age, can be taught that the person who chose suicide had an illness inside their brain that made them so sad they didn’t want to live anymore. Avoid portraying your loved one as a bad person by making it clear that their choice was bad, so as to clearly teach the child that suicide is not an acceptable course of action.

**Parents** face the potential for unique forms of guilt. Parents may blame themselves for some perceived mistake made in raising their child. Parents need to understand that children — even young children — are not entirely of their parents’ making. Outside influences from friends, school, the media, and the world at large also shape each child. Our children are individuals who, by having the power to commit a violent act, are responsible for that act.

**Significant others** often suffer additional guilt over a perceived sense of responsibility for their partner’s suicide. Families members have also been known to direct some blame at the surviving partner. Significant others may feel a sense of abandonment and may come to judge their entire relationship in the light of their partner’s final act. Guilt may resurface when a significant other chooses to enter a new relationship. We must remind ourselves of the potential root causes of this tragedy—