

You Are Not Alone.

For every suicide—almost 32,000 annually in the U.S.—there are an average of six survivors left behind to cope with complex feelings of shock, grief, anger, guilt, and the terrible question “Why?”

In fact, experts rank the trauma of losing a loved one to suicide as “catastrophic,” similar to surviving a concentration camp experience.

If you are one of the 5 million Americans who have lost a loved one to suicide, you may ask yourself how you will get over it. The truth is, you won’t. But you can get through it in your own time and in your own way. You can begin to live your own life again and restore your emotional well-being.

Reaching out to people who can help you is an important first step in healing. In fact, often the longest journeys begin with a single step. Don’t go through it alone.

Most health insurance policies cover the service of MFTs so long as the services are “medically necessary.” This typically includes coverage for face-to-face sessions for a diagnosable mental health problem. Such coverage may be limited. Please contact your health insurance company for detailed information about the coverage available to you and your family.



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FINDING PEACE AFTER TRAGEDY:

Self-Care for the Suicide Survivor



Brought to you by the
California Association of
Marriage and Family Therapists



IS SUICIDE A CHOICE?

Suicide is different from other deaths because the person we love seems to have chosen death over a wealth of better alternatives. In reality, the goal of suicide is release from pain, not release from life. But this ultimate choice—based on the victim's distorted perspective of the problems—leaves survivors with overwhelming feelings of grief, helplessness, and powerlessness.

What You May Be Feeling

- 1** **Guilt.** *"Shouldn't I have been able to prevent the suicide?"* The answer is no, you are **not** to blame in any way. Repeat this to yourself again and again and write it down. In truth, the victim is the only person responsible for the suicide. Guilt is a barrier to healing.
- 2** **Anger.** *"How could he/she do this without warning or asking for help?"* Rage is the deepest part of the five stages of grieving (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.) For suicide survivors, it's even more confusing because the person we have lost is also the murderer of the one we have lost.
- 3** **Isolation and disconnection.** It's easy to retain happy memories when a loved one dies a natural death, but as a suicide survivor we are often left to deal with conflicted feelings alone. That's why it's important to reach out for help.
- 4** **Stigma.** Because suicide is so misunderstood, people may make insensitive remarks, judge, blame, or fail to mourn with you, the way they would for other deaths. Ignore them and lean on people who care.

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- ❑ **Confront your pain.** Let out your feelings. Cry as often as you need to and talk to anyone who is willing to listen with a compassionate ear. Pain grows silently when it is buried, often coming out years later in devastating ways. Work through your pain now.
- ❑ **Attend a support group.** Other suicide survivors know what you are going through. They are compassionate and can help you heal. (The American Association of Suicidology maintains a list of California support groups by city.)
- ❑ **Accept your "backslides."** Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays...even coming across a special photo...can trigger intense feelings. This is normal and expected, but also temporary, so keep backslides in perspective.
- ❑ **Take care of yourself.** Guard your physical and emotional health. Making a commitment to ease your pain and that of those around you is the one way you can still help the person you have lost.
- ❑ **Find a therapist with grief training.** A qualified therapist can travel through your pain with you towards healing; assess whether medication will help with sleep or depression; and connect you to resources for recovery.

OFFERING EXTRA SUPPORT About Marriage and Family Therapists

Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) are relationship experts. They work with individuals, couples, families, children, adolescents, and the elderly, providing support and perspective as patients struggle with life's challenges.

Licensed by the State of California, MFTs are psychotherapists who are uniquely trained and credentialed to assess, diagnose, and treat a wide range of issues so individuals achieve more adequate, satisfying and productive relationships and social adjustment.

The California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (CAMFT) is an independent statewide non-profit organization made up of over 28,000 practicing Marriage and Family Therapists. CAMFT is dedicated to advancing marriage and family therapy as a healing art, science, and mental health profession. In fact, CAMFT sponsors TherapistFinder.com so Californians can gain access to qualified local experts who can help.



Seeking a Marriage and Family Therapist or other mental health professional to assist with life's difficulties is a sign of courage and a step in the right direction. Always ask about a therapist's special areas of expertise (e.g. grief counseling, children's issues, relationship counseling) before you engage them to ensure it's the right fit for you.

TherapistFinder is a California-wide interactive, online directory that is user-friendly and searchable by name, location, and area of expertise. It's your introduction to one or more qualified psychotherapists who hold a California license.

