

# What Survivors of Suicide Want You to Know

## What does it mean to be a survivor of suicide?

Suicide affects millions of people each year. The phrase 'survivor of suicide' can have several meanings. Someone who lost a loved one to suicide is referred to as a survivor of suicide loss.

Someone who has survived a suicide attempt is referred to as an attempt survivor.

## There are many myths about suicide that still exist.

**Myth: Someone who is going through or has experienced a suicidal crisis cannot help others.**

**Reality:** Helping others can be part of healing from crisis. It is important not to make assumptions about what a survivor of suicide can or cannot do. Instead, approach survivors of suicide by listening, asking questions, and providing empathy and support.

**Myth: A person who attempts or dies by suicide is selfish.**

**Reality:** When someone attempts or dies by suicide, they often have experienced a disruption in their social connections. To assume someone who attempts or dies by suicide is selfish, assumes that the person did not consider how their decision would impact those around them - which is often untrue. People who attempt or die by suicide usually do think about how the decision will impact those around them, but their thinking is usually incorrect. People thinking about suicide often feel like a burden to those around them and (incorrectly) think their loved ones would be better off with them no longer around.

**Myth: A person who attempts or dies by suicide is weak.**

**Reality:** Remember the saying, "Don't judge someone before you walk a mile in their shoes"? The problem is, when we try putting ourselves in someone else's shoes, we usually bring our brain too; meaning, we view their situation from how we would think or respond to it, not how that person might think or respond to it. It is important to remember that everyone experiences things differently, thinks about things differently, and responds to things differently.

**"The shadows to you  
are monsters to me."**



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# After a Suicide Attempt or Suicide Loss

**Talk about it.** A suicide attempt or suicide loss can start a conversation about mental health within a family, friend group, or community.

**Listen.** LGBTQ+ individuals may choose to talk about their identity with friends or family members after a suicide attempt or loss.

**Process your thoughts and feelings.** It is normal to have questions after someone close to you attempted suicide or died by suicide. A common question might be, "Why didn't they tell me they were struggling?" or "Could I have done something different?". Suicide loss can bring up feelings of shame and guilt for friends and family members. If you need support processing a loved one's suicide attempt or death, counseling can be a safe space to work through your thoughts and feelings.

**Not being okay is okay.** Communities can raise awareness about mental health and suicide by having conversations about mental health and suicide. Messages can include encouragement to seek help when needed and remind people that they are not alone.

**Healing is a non-linear and lifelong process.** Each day, survivors of suicide cope with their grief. Coping strategies may change over time and some days may be better than others.

**How can I help?** It can be hard to know what to say to someone who has lost someone to suicide or attempted suicide. Sometimes, not knowing what to say can feel overwhelming and that might cause people to say nothing at all. Even though it might feel uncomfortable, the best thing you can do is to reach out and offer support. Listen to the person and ask "What do you need from me right now?".

## Resources

**National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI)**

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

**Survivors of Suicide**

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

**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention**

[afsp.org/find-support/ive-lost-someone](http://afsp.org/find-support/ive-lost-someone)

**American Association of Suicidology**

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



Information for this fact sheet was compiled from MD-SPIN's webinar, "What Suicide Survivors Want You to Know".

[health.maryland.gov/suicideprevention](http://health.maryland.gov/suicideprevention)