Understanding Suicide for Kids and Teens

What is Suicide? Suicide is another way people die. Suicide is when someone makes their body stop working. When someone dies by suicide they have a brain that gets really sick. This is different than when our bodies get sick with the cold or flu because this isn't contagious – like the kind of sickness you can catch from someone else.

When the brain gets sick it has a hard time thinking clearly and making decisions. A sick brain can make someone feel like they are in a lot of emotional pain and really sad.

Another word for having a sick brain is mental illness. If the person’s brain gets too sick, they may think that making their own body stop working is the only way to relieve the pain they’re feeling. There are different ways people make their body stop working. Sometimes people with mental illness have a hard time seeing all of the help that is available to them.

Two New Words: Grief and Cope

1. Grief or Grieving: The thoughts and feelings you have after the death of someone.
2. Cope or Coping: What you do to feel better when you have heavy thoughts and feelings.

Will I ever understand WHY it happened?

You might have a lot of “WHY?” questions. Often, we don't have the answers to why our person died by suicide. This can be very upsetting and you might think about these questions for a long time. If these questions become overwhelming or if you find these questions taking up a lot of space in your mind, it may be helpful to talk to an adult you trust.

I feel like it was my fault. It’s hard not to think back on things you could have done or should have said or not said to your person who died. These thoughts can make you feel like you had a part in your person’s death. This is called magical thinking. You feel that your words or actions have enough power to influence someone to suicide. These thoughts can be very harmful to you. If you feel this way, please talk to someone you trust. It is VERY important to remember that your person died because their brain was sick and not thinking clearly. Many factors play into why someone would choose suicide and no single factor caused the death.
I have a bunch of feelings that keep changing.

- Sad
- Mad
- Guilty
- Shocked
- Numb
- Fear
- Excited
- Relieved
- Concerned
- Lonely
- Disbelief
- Tired
- Sick
- Hurt
- Scared

1. Feelings can happen all at once or by themselves.
2. These feelings can last a long time or for a short time. They can come and go.
3. Everyone’s grief will look and feel different from yours.
4. It’s helpful to find ways to express your feelings, like playing a sport, listening to music, making art, or calling a friend.

I feel like I am the only one going through this.

You might be the only person you know to have someone die by suicide. The truth is – there are a lot of people just like you who had someone die by suicide. They might be at your school or even in your class. Coping with grief can feel lonely at times, and it is helpful to know who can connect with for support. You can connect with other kids that have experienced a suicide at a grief group, online, at a grief camp, or maybe your school counselor can connect you with another student at your school.

My family and friends have changed.

When a suicide happens, you might notice your family getting closer or moving apart. Your friends might do the same. These changes could last for a short time or for a long time. You might feel sad, happy, or upset about the changes. Connecting to your support system of trusted adults to discuss your feelings can be helpful.

Sometimes I hear people say things about suicide that are different from what I believe.

People have strong thoughts on suicide. You might hear things like “it is selfish” or “it is a sin”. These comments are not helpful and can hurt your feelings. Just remember that not everyone around you will feel the same way you do about suicide. Make sure you find an adult that you trust to share your frustrations with when you hear comments that you don’t agree with. Talking about it will help you understand your beliefs better and make sense of other peoples beliefs.
I might need extra help, what should I do?

Grief is hard. You might have feelings that are too heavy for you to deal with by yourself. Reach out to trusted adults, friends, family members or a grief group to find support. There are a lot of helpful books, activities, games, websites and songs that talk about grief. Getting support will help you cope with the death of your person.