

FRIENDS CAN HELP

(Written primarily for the friend)

Often, immediately following a suicide death, friends rally around and show support. But over time they may appear to be less concerned and their contact may become less frequent.

Remember the following:

- Generally, friends are well meaning and they want to support and help. But they may not know how. They may be afraid that they may say the wrong thing, or overwhelm you by talking about the death. They may think that you want to be alone.
- It may be necessary for you to guide your friends. You may have to make the first move – to reach out for the support and understanding that you need.

Keep in contact with your friends. People who talk out their feelings are usually the people who recover best from a loss by suicide. Your friends are probably more than willing to listen and to help in any way they can.

As a friend, what should I do?

- Treat your friend as you would treat anyone else who has lost a family member.
- Do not ignore a person who has suffered a suicide in the family.
- Try to understand and be patient with the grieving friend.
- Do not try to accelerate the process of bereavement. It can take some people a long time to completely work through the grief and deal with their feelings. Be patient.
- Be available to listen and to help out with the tasks at hand.
- Never blame anyone. Suicide is a decision made by one person and judgements should not be made about the family.
- If needed, encourage your friend to consider outside help – from a support of counselling agency such as SOBS or CRUSE.
- Contact your family doctor or minister, your cultural or spiritual leader, a work or school counsellor.

Some Do's and Don't s for Friends:

- Do visit your friend and ask what you can do to help.
- Do attend the funeral and any other occasion. Your presence with a hug or handshake will bring more than all the rehearsed remarks you could imagine.
- Listen without judgement. Let them tell the same story over and over again.
- Do not assign blame. Let their words be your guide. They have the right to feel the way they do. Be reassuring and supportive.
- Beware of inappropriate comments including 'You have other children', 'You must forget him', 'You'll get married again', 'It was God's will'. Such comments can be **very** hurtful.
- Try to avoid the term 'committed suicide' it has the connotation of a criminal act and it would be better to say 'he took his own life' or 'she died of suicide'.
- Offer to help in practical ways – baby-sitting, make a meal, shopping, phoning and fixing things.
- Share positive memories. They may fill in gaps that the survivor wants to know about. You may be able to have a laugh and a joke if you feel it is appropriate.