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Grief after being Exposed to Suicide

The experience of bereavement following a suicide can be intense and overwhelming. There may be a wide range of feelings and thoughts that are difficult to understand and to manage. The aftermath of a person's suicide can be physically and emotionally exhausting. As you work through your grief, it is important to also be mindful and protective of your own well-being.

Keep in touch. Reach out to loved ones, friends and spiritual leaders for comfort, understanding and healing. Surround yourself with people who are willing to listen when you need to talk, as well as those who'll simply offer a shoulder to lean on when you'd rather be silent.

Grieve in your own way. Do what's right for you, not necessarily someone else. There is no single "right" way to grieve. If you find it too painful to visit the person's gravesite or share the details of that person's death, wait until you're ready.

Be prepared for painful reminders. Anniversaries, holidays, and other special occasions can be painful reminders of the person's suicide. Don't chide yourself for being sad or mournful. Instead, consider changing or suspending family traditions that are too painful to continue.

Don't rush yourself. Losing someone to suicide is a tremendous blow, and healing must occur at its own pace. Don't be hurried by anyone else's expectations that it's been "long enough."

Expect setbacks. Some days will be better than others, even years after the suicide — and that's OK. Healing doesn't often happen in a straight line.

Consider a support group to share how you are doing. Sharing your story with others who are experiencing the same type of grief might help you find a sense of purpose or strength. However, if you find going to these groups keeps you ruminating on the person's death, seek out other methods of support.

Some activities that can be helpful

- Find ways to look after yourself.
- Spend time alone to think, remember, pray, meditate, mourn.
- Talk to a trusted 'other' who will listen with understanding to your thoughts and feelings.
- Develop a resource list, phone numbers of people and places to contact when the going gets tough.
- Find distractions to provide time out from the pain.
- Collect information, read simple books about surviving suicide, or about life enhancement, when you are ready.
- Use physical nurture, massage, spa baths, early nights, and get some fresh air by going for short walks.
- Keep treasures, a memory box, journal photo album.
- Eat a healthy diet, and frequent small amounts of nutritious, easily digested food.
- Exercise to use excess adrenaline.
- Prioritize daily tasks. Do only what is essential.
- Sometimes reject calls. Choose who you will talk to.
- Write notes to relatives and friends when you need to tell aspects of your story, or to express feelings.
- Keep a journal to record your thoughts and feelings, especially if you are unable to sleep.
- Spend time with nature.
- Review pictures and mementoes.
- Rearrange and store the person's belongings.
- Attend individual counseling or a support group.
- Find ways to honor the life of the person who has died.

Know when to seek professional help

If you experience intense or unrelenting anguish or physical problems, ask your doctor or mental health provider for help. Seeking professional help is especially important if you think you might be depressed or you have recurring thoughts of suicide. Depending on the circumstances, you might benefit from individual therapy — either to get you through the worst of the crisis or to help you adjust to life after suicide. Unresolved grief can turn into complicated grief, where painful emotions are so long lasting and severe that you can have trouble resuming your own life. Short-term medication can be helpful in some cases, too. Please think about contacting You&Me Psychological and Consultation Services (YPCS: 02-6929-3014, www.ypcskorea.com, email: ypckorea@gmail.com). G.O.A.'L members can receive therapy for a discounted fee.