

## Maine Suicide Prevention Program

# How You Can Be Supportive after a Suicide

### 2022

---

In the aftermath of a death by suicide or other traumatic death, we often struggle on how to best support a family member or close associate who is grieving the loss. “Suicide Survivor” is a name given to people who are deeply impacted by the suicide death of someone close to them. This includes family members, close friends, and other significant relationships. The hesitation and awkwardness present after many deaths is further heightened by a loss to suicide, a subject that is still taboo for many people. We all will know someone who has experienced a suicide loss; if you wish to support someone grieving this loss, here are some general suggestions that might help.

- **Acknowledge the loss:** Suicide survivors often feel that people avoid them; that there is an awkwardness that leads friends and associates to not be as available as they were before. The person may fear that if they acknowledge the death they would upset the person and perhaps cause them to cry. If you have a relationship with the person, acknowledge the loss and express your support for them during their grief. If you are unsure of the right things to say, begin with “I am so sorry for your loss”. If it is your habit to bring over a casserole or baked goods, this is a time to do that.
- **Use the name of the deceased:** Survivors are in the process of letting go of a beloved person. Your use of the person’s name is often seen as you connecting with the loss and really acknowledging the person’s life, as well as their death, This is especially important if you knew the person who died.
- **Share your presence:** Grief after any type of loss is not something that anyone can fix. Grief is a process whereby we come to terms with our feelings and the reality that someone close to us is no longer part of our life. If the death was by suicide, the feelings are both powerfully strong and often conflicted. We grieve by telling our stories and by working through the complicated feelings. Sharing your presence is a powerful aid to someone grieving. It can be sharing a cup of coffee, a lunch, or taking a walk together; it can be a phone conversation where you listen as they talk.
- **Share a special memory/story and acknowledge the good things:** We are all so much more than the manner in which we will die. Sometimes that can get lost following a suicide where the manner of death is so powerful. Find a way to acknowledge the person through how they lived their life. Share memories and stories of the person’s life and how you knew them in happier times.
- **Stay in touch:** The grief after any death often lasts longer than most people acknowledge. After a natural death at the end of a long life, the period of grief generally lasts at least a year. The nature of a death by suicide makes the grief process more complicated and generally it takes much longer to come through the grief. A parent will tell you that their grief never ends. Stay in



SuicidePrevention  
at  
NAMI Maine

Maine Suicide Prevention Program  
mspp@namimaine.org  
800-464-5767, ext. 2318  
[www.namimaine.org/suicideprevention](http://www.namimaine.org/suicideprevention)

## Maine Suicide Prevention Program

# How You Can Be Supportive after a Suicide

### 2022

---

touch with the person. This can be especially important at anniversary dates of birthdays, holidays and the date of their death. Be patient with their struggles and the inevitable moments of emotional overload. Allow them to grieve in their own way. For one person, the process of getting back to work is an important way to bring some sense of order to their life. Someone else may need time off before they can return to the normal schedule of their life. If in doubt, ask the person how you can support them during this difficult time. And then follow through with your actions and your support.

- **Recommend Grief Support Center, grief support groups:** Many suicide survivors have found that seeing a grief counselor or finding and attending a grief support group or a suicide survivor group can be an important step in healing after a loss. This is a difficult journey and is best done with supportive company. You can be part of that support.

#### **Resources: I've Lost Someone to Suicide; What Do I Do Now?**

This booklet was created in partnerships with survivors of suicide who shared information and advice that they found helpful. It is a resource for anyone in the immediate aftermath of a loss by suicide. It includes information about grief and what to expect, support for suicide loss survivors and resources for more information and help. Available in print from MSSP, NAMI Maine or online at <http://www.maine.gov/suicide/docs/Postvention-Survivor-Booklet.pdf>

Your support of someone in grief after a suicide loss is vitally important as a message that grief after a loss is normal and the powerful grief after a suicide loss is normal and best facilitated with support.



Suicide Prevention  
at  
NAMI Maine

Maine Suicide Prevention Program

[mspp@namimaine.org](mailto:mspp@namimaine.org)

800-464-5767, ext. 2318

[www.namimaine.org/suicideprevention](http://www.namimaine.org/suicideprevention)