

### ***Surviving your child's suicide...***

- The normal grief reactions of shock, guilt, and anger are exacerbated when a child has died by suicide. Though painful to acknowledge, a feeling of relief may accompany the child's death if the relationship within the family had become conflicted. This feeling of relief may cause a parent to further judge themselves.
- Other painful questions may arise: "Was my love not strong enough to save my child?" "Am I now being judged as a failed parent?" Try to remember that you did what you thought best. No parent is all-powerful and all-knowing.
- Suicide is not inherited; however, the suicide of a family member can have a profound influence on others in the family. Be patient with yourself and them. Seek professional help and family counselling if necessary.
- Cultural and religious interpretations of an earlier day are responsible for the stigma associated with suicide. It is important that you confront the word "suicide." Keeping the cause of death a secret will deprive you of the joy of speaking about your child and may isolate you from others who offer support.
- Anger at your child, at God, the world and yourself for your inability to save your child are normal emotional reactions and must be confronted and expressed in order to heal.
- Feelings of guilt, and phrases of "if only" are frequently expressed. The survivors ask WHY?, need to ask WHY?, and more often than not, there are no clear answers. Intense soul searching and periods of guilt may be necessary in order to move forward and to know that you are not responsible. Perhaps even the child who took their own life could not give you the answer.

*"I don't know why  
I'll never know why  
I don't have to know why.  
I don't like it.  
I don't have to like it.  
What I do have to do  
is make a choice about my living..."*

From a longer poem in Iris Bolton's book,  
*My Son... My Son...*

In memory of her son, Curtis Mitchell Bolton,  
who died by suicide at age 20.

**For support in your area contact:**



#### **THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF CANADA**

##### **National Office**

Toll-free: 1-866-823-0141

Website: [www.tcfcanada.net](http://www.tcfcanada.net)

Email: [NationalOffice@TCFCanada.net](mailto:NationalOffice@TCFCanada.net)

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## **My Child Died by Suicide**



## **THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF CANADA**

An international peer support  
organization for bereaved parents and  
their surviving children

## About suicide...

*"Before my son's death, whenever information about suicide would cross my desk, I'd casually read it and then file it away. My belief system, then, was that my kids came from a loving home. I wasn't worried about them.... "*

— Margaret Erickson  
(Lethbridge, AB) Steven's mom

- The final act of taking one's life is never entirely predictable by anyone. There comes a point at which no human can stop someone who is intent on killing themselves.
- There are not always signs to warn of a child's intentions, and often these are not discernable, even by professionals.
- Intense feelings of loneliness, worthlessness, helplessness, hopelessness and depression are feelings that are often experienced prior to a suicide. Even if these are expressed or detected, they are not easily medicated away.
- Most people who attempt suicide do NOT want to die. Suicide is an attempt to stop the pain; at the time it seems to be the only possible option. In almost every case, a person considering suicide would choose to live if they could find another solution.
- Talking to a person about suicide will NOT make them try it. Talking about suicide lets a person know they are not alone, that you care. Most people are relieved after finally being able to talk about their feelings. Ignoring feelings will NOT make them go away.

## Reasons why children need to know...

- Children are very sensitive to change and will pick up that something is happening in their family that they don't know about.
- Children may overhear misinformation or scary stories by their friends and neighbours. This removes control from a caring parent or other adult who would ensure that they are told in a sensitive and appropriate way.
- An important part of the grief process is knowing how the person died. Not having this information can interfere with a child's grieving and long-term healing.
- Children rely on receiving factual information from their parents and other adult caregivers. Trust is an important family value. Distorting significant information about the death of a loved one may negatively affect that trust.
- Parents often express great relief that they have spoken to their children about suicide. Many fears that caregivers have about causing greater distress for their children are not realized, as most children, even very young children, take the news in a very matter of fact way.
- There may be concerns children will copy suicidal behavior, particularly if they appear sad or worried. Encourage your child to talk about feelings and worries. Help children to develop their own ideas about positive ways to solve problems.
- Children need to be told clearly that they are not responsible for the person's suicide. This may seem obvious, but children have said that it is important for them to be reassured of this often.

## Suggested words to use when explaining suicide to a child...

- "When someone dies their heart stops beating; they can no longer move and play."
- It's important to ask your child what they understand about what "being dead" means.
- One way to define suicide is "when someone makes their body stop working."
- It's important to check out what your child understands and perhaps even what they have heard about suicide.
- Being up-front with children is helpful because truth can dispel misconceptions they may have about suicide.
- Children usually ask only what they need to know and are satisfied with simple, clear information.

## A change in the language of suicide...

"Died by suicide" or "died of suicide" are terms that have been officially adopted by the TCF National Board of Directors (2002), replacing the commonly used "committed suicide," which gives implications of criminality, or "completed suicide," which implies earlier suicide attempts.

*"...to think about the final act of taking one's own life, I believe is an act of desperation. For me, it is not about being politically correct...it is honouring the family and the person who died by saying, 'died by suicide.' They were in pain and they died, and we loved them and will always miss them."*

— Linda Woods (TCF Kelowna, BC)

Linda's son, Greg, died by suicide at age 13