

Bewilderment

“We did not know, and the professionals we dealt with did not know she was sick until she died!” “We never knew anything was wrong till he died.” Only in suicide death are survivors put in this ludicrous position. Taboo and stigma have prevented public education about suicide, and depression. It is little wonder that you may be feeling that you loved one was a perfectly healthy person one minute, and the next dead by his or her own hand? It is no wonder you are left feeling there were no clues, and that the death mysteriously came “out of the blue?”

It is popular to say that “Why?” is the one question that will never be answered about suicide death. There are two aspects of the question “Why?” The first we can know; that is, “Why did they die?” The simple but truthful answer is that the person we loved so much got so sick (usually with depression) that they died, and the way someone dies from depression is by suicide. The chemicals in their brains that affected how they thought, felt and behaved were out of balance, causing them to view the future and their world as places they could no longer live – places where it was too painful to live.

The “why?” that we won’t know is why they decided that, after all the pain they’d been through – after all the things they had tried to make their pain go away – after all that others had tried to do for them – *now* was the time for them to die. On the day that my daughter killed herself, what made her decision after lunch that *now* was the time when absolutely all hope was gone? That is the “why?” I will never know.

When people talk about grief they often mention “acceptance.” Acceptance is that sought-after goal when we are “over” the pain. In suicide death acceptance is more difficult because of the bewilderment felt about the cause of death. Sometimes early, sometimes later, we almost always remember things that scared or troubled us when our loved ones were alive – that now seem to make so much sense. We remember all the many things we could or should have done. We remember all the times when we could have acted better or done more.

Among all the blaming it is perhaps most potent when we blame ourselves. Survivors need to remember all the times harsh words were exchanged when the person did not kill him or herself, or how many times a teen had been grounded after which he or she did not kill themselves. If breakups of relationships were a cause of suicide, there might be no one left on earth.

It’s painful to look back. We see clues that seem so obvious now. Because her or she wrestled death from nature’s hands, and left us no defenses, we alternate our wonder with anger and bitterness. “Why did our loved one give us a second chance?”

Whatever your past with someone you loved, you must now build the future without that person. It seems impossible to pull yourself from the past, which is the only place your loved one still lives. But part of suicide grief is to reconstruct the past, without assigning yourself the role of villain. The hard task of grief is to begin to pull yourself back to the present from the past where everything seems so clear now. Reconstruction and acceptance mean we put the past in better perspective. We have to remember the past accurately – that many times we walked the extra mile- that we *did the best we could with what we knew at the time.*

An excerpt from *Suicide: Survivors A Guide For Those Left Behind*
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