Teens supporting teens when a friend or loved one dies by suicide

The death of a friend or loved one by suicide can be especially hard on the friends and family of the person who died. There are often lots of unanswered questions and wonderings. It is important to know that suicide is the result of intense psychological pain and hopelessness and there is usually more than one thing adding up to all that pain. Grief related to suicide is unique and there are some things to consider as you support your friends.

Because the loss is sudden, it can bring about a swirl of reactions and feelings. Sometimes this can feel overwhelming. There are some common reactions that teens have after a friend or loved one dies by suicide.

They may include:

- Guilt that you or somebody you know missed something that would have changed the outcome
- Shame around knowing about the struggles your friend or loved one was having
- Sleep problems: too much or too little or nightmares
- Watchful worry about friends and family who may struggle with mental health challenges
- Difficulty concentrating at work, or at school
- A desire to be with friends more than usual
- Blaming people, systems, or even God for the death
- Anger (even anger at your friend who died), sadness, anxiety, numbness

How to help a friend or peer:

- Reach out to your friend and let them know you care. Offer when you are available to hear how they are doing
- Reach out regularly-often support for those who are grieving slows down or stops after a few weeks.
- Offer choices when you ask them what would help: a visit, phone call, meeting up…
- Let them know you care with a visit, text, or card.
- Help them return to routine with flexibility. This means help them do the things they love but be gentle on days when it's too hard. Plans may change suddenly and that's okay.
- Offer to meet in-person to do something comforting or fun
- Pay attention to substance use changes and help your friend become aware of their habit change as a stress response
- Try to avoid talking about graphic details or any rumors about how the person died, these details can keep us feeling stuck and overwhelmed and don't change the fact that it's sad that our friend is gone

- Let your friend know that their grief responses and reactions are common and make sense and ask what has helped them in other times when they were overwhelmed with stress
- Look for a trusted adult to share your concerns with and someone who may assist your friend if needed (could be a coach, faith leader, caregiver, etc.)
- Remind your friend that they are not alone on their grief journey

Finally, make sure that you have support. Being there for a friend who is grieving is important and can be emotionally and physically tiring. Find a trusted adult to share how this impacts you so that you can continue to be there for your friend.

Dial **988** for immediate mental health support

Other resources include:
www.trevorproject.org
https://afsp.org/

**This tip sheet was created in collaboration with Marlene Kenney, MA, LICSW Marlene is a former Wendt Center clinician who now specializes in traumatic grief and suicide loss in Arlington, MA. Marlene is an EMDRIA certified clinician and consultant and centers EMDR Therapy in her trauma focused practice. She is available for organizational consultation and critical incident response following suicide loss or other critical incidents.

©2026 Wendt Center Wendt Center for Loss and Healing is the Greater Washington region's premier resource for restoring hope and healthy functioning to adults, teens, and children who are coping with grief, loss, and trauma.

©2026 Wendt Center Wendt Center for Loss and Healing is the Greater Washington region’s premier resource for restoring hope and healthy functioning to adults, teens, and children who are coping with grief, loss, and trauma.