

Supporting a Friend or Loved One Through Suicide Loss

Someone who is grieving a death by suicide has experienced a profound and unexpected loss. They are managing a range of emotions including shock, guilt, deep sadness, and confusion. Further, they may feel shame and fear of others' responses.

Here are some thoughts on how to speak with a survivor of suicide loss, using active listening as a guide.

- Provide words of comfort and convey empathy
- Listen patiently and non-judgmentally
- Let your friend or loved one talk about the suicide
- Be willing to sit in silence
- Pay attention to verbal as well as non-verbal communication
- Do not claim to know how the person is feeling
- Avoid clichés. Statements like “He’s in a better place” or “At least you have other children” can be hurtful
- Do not assign or imply blame, or try to find reasons
- Avoid painful personal questions, such as “Why do you think he or she did this?”, “How did they do it?” or “Did they leave a note?”
- Do not compare this loss with your own experiences of loss
- Do not offer vague help with “let me know what you need” because mourners should not be expected to plan; rather, prepare/provide meals that can be frozen for a later date and take care of daily household needs
- Maintain contact with the mourners in the days and weeks following the loss and follow their lead regarding activity level

Visiting a Shiva after a Suicide

Shiva is a time to honor the life of the person who has died, with sensitivity, awareness and extreme kindness. Focus now on the needs of the mourners, and less on your own possible discomfort. Speak quietly, if at all. Offer condolences using gentle and considerate language. Let the mourners direct the conversation.

Survivors of suicide loss are dealing with a myriad of complex emotions, and may appreciate sitting quietly together, and hearing a personal anecdote you can share about their loved one, that they might not know.

After the shiva, the mourners continue to experience a difficult period of bereavement. Sending cards or electronic messages after the shiva has finished are thoughtful ways to maintain contact. Offering personal support, daily help and ongoing love and attention may be appreciated.

JCFS Chicago provides individual, couples, and family counseling, along with support groups that bring together members of the community who are mourning a death of a loved one. Our community chaplains are also available for emotional and spiritual support. Call 855.275.5237

No Shame On U is dedicated to eliminating the stigma associated with mental health conditions and raising awareness.

MISSD is a foundation dedicated to the memory of Stewart Dolin and provides education and training to prevent medication-induced suicide, also known as akathisia.



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No Shame On U
Mental Shift. End Stigma. Save Lives.

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JCFS Chicago, MISSD (The Medication-Induced Suicide Prevention and Education Foundation in Memory of Stewart Dolin) and No Shame On U are partnering to provide suicide prevention education and support in the Jewish community with support from JUF's Breakthrough Fund. JCFS Chicago is a partner with the Jewish United Fund in serving our community. We embrace diversity. Our commitment to inclusivity is woven throughout our services, programs and welcoming workplace.