

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND TEENS AFTER A SUICIDE LOSS

Gentle guidance for survivors of suicide loss

Children and teens need truthful, age-appropriate information, steady care, and repeated chances to ask questions after a suicide loss. Their grief may appear in play, behavior, sleep, schoolwork, physical complaints, or brief bursts of emotion. They do not need every detail, but they do need reassurance that the death was not their fault and that caring adults will remain present.

USE CLEAR, HONEST LANGUAGE

Simple words reduce confusion. Explain only what the child is ready to understand and revisit the conversation over time.

- Say the person died; avoid euphemisms such as “went to sleep”
- Use “died by suicide” when developmentally appropriate
- Do not describe graphic details
- Say honestly when you do not know an answer

EXPECT GRIEF TO LOOK DIFFERENT

Young people may move in and out of grief quickly or express feelings indirectly.

- Play and ordinary activity can be healthy
- Anger, clinginess, withdrawal, or worry may appear
- Questions may return at new developmental stages
- Teens may lean on friends as well as adults

OFFER CHOICE AND SECURITY

Predictability and appropriate choices can restore some sense of safety and control.

- Keep routines as steady as possible
- Offer choices about memorials and remembrance
- Tell them who will care for them
- Let school staff know what support may help

KEEP SUPPORT GROWING

Children should not have to protect adults by hiding their own feelings.

- Invite questions without forcing conversation
- Model honest emotion and healthy coping
- Connect with child-focused grief resources
- Seek professional or urgent help for safety concerns

A GENTLE REMINDER

A child may understand this loss differently as they grow. Keep the door open, answer with care, and remind them again: this was not their fault.

Your grief is real. Your questions are welcome. You do not have to carry this alone.

