

## SURVIVING AFTER SUICIDE: Helping CHILDREN Cope with Tragedy



Understanding and coming to terms with suicide can be extremely difficult for children. Even older children often lack a firm concept of death as an irreversible process. Both children and adolescents can personalize the behavior of others, which can create feelings of responsibility for actions over which they have no influence, let alone control.

Children may feel grief, anger, confusion, and, often, abandonment. Some children strive to become "perfect," believing that it was their bad behavior that caused the deceased to "leave." Others may act out and behave badly as a way to express their anger or confusion.



SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL  
of St. Joseph County and Surrounding Areas

For more information, visit our website at  
[www.sjcsuicideprevention.com](http://www.sjcsuicideprevention.com)  
or call (574) 220-6381.

When dealing with children who have lost a loved one to suicide, keep the following suggestions in mind:

- Be honest about what happened. Use words like "dead" rather than "gone away" so there will not be any misunderstanding.
- Offer simple and honest explanations. If children ask you a question you cannot answer, admit that you don't know.
- Avoid saying anything that might imply that the death was their fault or that there was something they could have done to prevent it.
- Let them know that it is OK to be upset.
- Allow them to memorialize the departed by letting them participate in funerals and memorial services.
- Return to a normal routine as soon as possible. Encourage children to continue seeing their friends and engaging in social and recreational activities.
- Make sure that someone whom the children trust is always present.
- Get professional help for children if you think it is necessary, particularly if they display extreme behavior that lasts for an extended period of time.
- Notify their school of the suicide.

Crisis and Suicide Intervention  
National HOTLINE  
1-800-273-TALK

Local Help: Emergency Services  
(877) 234-0061 toll free  
(574) 234-0061 local  
*(operated by Madison Center)*