

# Gone Too Soon Helpsheet



## Surviving Suicide - Jenni Trent Hughes

Someone recently compared the topic of suicide to what the topic of cancer was 50 years ago. You didn't talk about it. If it happened in your family it was whispered about briefly and then erased from the collective memory. The person's existence was wiped from the history of the family and often future generations either weren't told of their existence or aspects of their death were shrouded in secrecy.

However the last decades and advances in medicine and psychology have taught us that suicide is often the result of a desperate need to stop a pain that can either be psychological or the result of medical imbalance. A person comes to a place where they feel they just cannot continue under this pain and any act no matter how drastic that can halt the pain is the choice to take. Does that make it any easier for those left behind to bear?

Quite often the answer to that question is a resounding 'No!'.

'What could I have done?'

'Why didn't I see this coming?'

'How could he do this to us?'

'How will I tell people?'

'What will I tell people?'

'Will everyone blame me for this?'

'I feel so ashamed...'

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Until not that long ago suicide was considered a criminal act; or you were 'insane' - and it most definitely was a sin. There might be some who still harbour these attitudes but in general we now regard suicide as a desperate act from someone who was suffering an unbearable pain. Often the person is suffering from one form or another of clinical depression, which by the nature of the illness renders them unable to make rational judgements. All they can feel is this overwhelming pain and because of their condition they are unable to countenance the possibility of any sort of solution or way out of it. Think of a pressure cooker, or a volcano that is about to erupt – once the temperature gets past a certain level an eruption or explosion seems almost inevitable.

That is often how the suicide victim feels. We know this because of conversations that are had with people who attempt suicide and fail. We often read it in the notes that are left behind – 'I couldn't bear it any more'. It is also quite common for the person committing suicide to believe 'You would all be better off without me'.

Many believe that we should try to avoid the term 'committing suicide' as the word 'committing' is usually associated with criminal behaviour of one sort or another. It is now generally believed that the phrase 'took their own life' or 'died by suicide' holds slightly less emotive connotations.

It is helpful to take on board the thought that suicide – while it is an action taken – is not as it seems, a totally random choice. We often never know what led the person to take this decision but it usually is in the context, or at the end, of a long and usually convoluted thought process. Often the person was ill, and many times not in a way that could have been observed or easily identified.

When something originates in the mind we can't see it. It isn't like any other type of illness that is on the outside – a rash to notice, a lump or swelling to prod.

Seeing inside someone else's head is almost impossible and quite often they are too close to their own situation to see their issues clearly. If you are suicidal you aren't seeing clearly. You are unable to get a proper distance and perspective on your situation and it is the inability to gain proper perspective that causes you to also be unable to find a way out of it.

The fact that your loved one chose to take their own life is not about you. This is not about what the person thought of your place in their life. There was no lack of value in your relationship that made staying in your company just not worth it.

While you are left behind, bearing the almost incomprehensible range of emotions that this situation brings, you must remember that the action that was taken was taken by your loved one-and for their own reasons. Not against you – but sadly for them and them alone.

## SUPPORT GUIDE:

Hold a memorial service for the person who is now gone. Hold your head up high and honour their memory.

They did not commit a crime or a heinous act, it was a very sad choice made by someone in pain.

Find a support group for suicide survivors. Being with other people who have been through or are going through this very particular experience will usually be immeasurably helpful. They understand. It also provides you with a safe space to discuss things you might not be comfortable discussing anywhere else.

Consider taking an anger management course. You may not feel angry right now but chances are you soon will. The frustration and anger can sometimes take over your life and halt the necessary grieving process so learning how to deal with it effectively will usually prove invaluable.

Tell the person who is now gone exactly how you feel. Most survivors say that the worst part is 'not having their own say'. Buy a journal, put a photo of the person on the inside covers – and use the pages to write everything you feel the need to say. The good, the bad, and even the ugly. You will be surprised at how helpful this can be.

Understand that you cannot avoid this pain. It hurts and it hurts badly; but you have to go through it.

Trying to hide from it, avoid it, circumnavigate it – will only be detrimental in the long run. If you need counselling to help you then go for it. Reach for a helping hand – there is no need to walk down this dark road on your own.