

## How Suicide Affects Children

Children go through a similar grieving process to that of adults and it is quite different as well. Children also have issues related to their development, their reliance of information from others and their vulnerability to external influence.

*It is not always predictable how a child will react to suicide.* Children in the same family could act quite differently.

*Most children will have many questions, some they will repeat over and over again.* If they do not ask questions, you should draw questions out of them, though respecting their feelings as well. Children do not need all of the gory details, though they do deserve honesty.

*Many children do not cry openly as a response to death.* A natural defense mechanism towards bad things is to engage in other activities. If a child wishes to do these “normal” things like go to school or watch television, take this as a natural sign of healthy coping.

*Talk openly about your lost loved one but try not to blame or idealize them.* Children learn from you. In being honest and fair to yourself, you are teaching your child to do the same.

*Children may feel their own safety is at risk.* They may fear the loss of other loved ones in their lives or they may fear that they will complete suicide. An adult can be helpful in regards to problem solving and talking about the child’s fears.

*Children often wonder what they are going to say to their friends and teachers.* Children can be cruel. They may say hurtful things to the child who has lost a loved one. It may be a good idea to “rehearse” what they are going to say and do in certain situation. Tell them it is ok for them to tell you what people are saying. This can help you help them.

*Children may feel that the pain and hurt will last forever.* It is important to explain to them that there will be a beginning, middle and an end. They need to be told that it will [probably take some time but that that is ok.

*Suicide is a very unusual thing for a child to deal with.* Most children benefit greatly from speaking with a professional. Having the join a group with other grieving children can be very helpful as well.