

# Kaleidoscope

## Explaining Suicide

Suicide is a difficult topic to talk about and hard to understand. When explaining suicide to children or adolescents it is important to remember that they will cope better when they are able to talk openly about the subject. Remember that misleading children, evading the truth about how someone died can do more harm than good; if they happen to hear the truth from someone else, their trust in you can be difficult to regain. Not knowing can be terrifying and hurtful.

Whatever approach is taken when explaining suicide to children, they need to know they can talk about it and ask questions whenever they feel the need. Children also need to know that they won't always feel the way they do now and that they will be loved and cared for no matter what.

### Some Common Feelings after a Suicide:

- Abandonment; that the person who died didn't love them.
- They may feel the death is their fault
- Afraid that they will die too
- Sadness, embarrassment
- Numb-can't feel anything
- Angry at the person who died, at God, at everyone
- Confused
- Denial-pretend like nothing happened

### Starting the Conversation:

- First, find a place where you can sit down and talk openly and quietly without interruptions
- Tell the truth
- Talk in a calm, straight forward manner and use age-appropriate language.
- Children and adolescents may experience a multitude of feelings at the same time or feel nothing at all. Whatever their experience, it is important that they understand it is okay and that they have permission to share or not share their feelings.
- Very young children (3 and younger) do not understand the permanence of death. They may ask what happened to their loved one repeatedly and for a long period of time. This is a normal process. You can say "Daddy has died and I am sad. I will take care of you."
- From 3 to 6 years old, you can provide more information. "Daddy has died and I am very sad. That's why you see me crying. Dead means that daddy can no longer eat, talk, or feel. His body has stopped working and cannot be fixed."
- After children learn that the death was by suicide, one of their first questions might be, "What is Suicide?" You can reply, "Daddy died by suicide, which means he killed himself." Continued conversations will depend on your child's response. That may be enough information at the time. Here are some possible answers:
  - ❖ He had an illness in his brain (or mind) and he chose to make his own body stop working.
  - ❖ The brain is an organ in the body just like the heart or kidneys. Sometimes the brain can get sick, just like the other organs.
  - ❖ He had an illness called depression and it caused him to make the choice to die. Please stress that only some people die of depression, not everyone who has depression.
  - ❖ A more detailed explanation might be: Sometimes a person's brain can get very sick-the sickness can cause a person to feel very badly inside and they cannot think clearly. Some people cannot think of any other way of stopping the hurt they feel inside. They don't understand that they don't have to feel that way, that they can get help.