

# THERE ISN'T NEARLY ENOUGH UNDERSTANDING

## Self care articles for the bereaved

True stories from the award-winning Grief Diaries series

### A SISTER'S JOURNEY

Christine's sister Elizabeth, 38, died by suicide in 2012

ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK,  
Grief Diaries: Surviving Loss by Suicide  
ISBN 978-1-944328-03-0



An iCare Aftercare™ resource  
International Grief Institute

INTERNATIONALGRIEFINSTITUTE.COM

---

### SUICIDE ISN'T SELFISH

The world looks different after you lose a loved one to suicide. We look at the world through very different eyes. Things that we used to not even notice now hurt more. Many things mean something completely different now. Saying things like "Hang in there,"

"That blew me away,"

"I'm dying to . . ."

"That kills me," or

"I'd rather die than . . ."

Such statements can upset survivors very much. We wince when we hear joking or casual references to blowing one's brains out or jumping off a bridge. Not to mention that we find pointing your finger at your head and pretending to shoot yourself downright offensive. Even songs have a different meaning, especially ones like "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

Suicide is not funny . . . ever. I don't know why the subject is on sitcoms so much, but I have to leave the room when it is. More and more I dislike the way the subject is treated on TV. The subject of suicide should be treated more sensitively. And when it's not, it demeans suicide survivors, suicidal people, and people who have died by suicide.

Most people who die by suicide are not selfish. It is extremely common for them to believe that their loved ones would be better off without them. That does not sound like selfishness to me. They are not cowards either. In order to die by suicide, you have to find a way to override our most basic instinct...survival. No coward can do that!



Language is very powerful. I never knew how powerful until after I lost my sister. For example, take terms such as “successful suicide,” and “failed suicide attempts.” What other subject do we talk about where success means someone has died, and failure means someone lived? That makes absolutely no sense.

Then there’s the term “committed suicide.” That implies a crime. It’s a carryover from the days when suicide was a crime. And it needs to be changed. We need to say that someone “died by suicide” instead of “committed suicide.”



Grief from death by suicide is more complicated than other deaths. We are more likely to struggle with unanswered questions, such as why it happened. Not that other kinds of death don’t have unanswered questions, but they are a special torture for those of us who are suicide loss survivors.

Suicide loss survivors also typically feel more guilt, blame and responsibility for the death of their loved ones than other grievers. The suicide of a loved one creates a feeling of utter helplessness for those of us left behind. In order to maintain a sense of control, we often blame the deaths of our loved ones on actions that we either took or didn’t take. Suicide is a different type of death. It is an act that one’s own loved one does. And I can tell you from personal experience that this one fact causes untold anguish.

Suicide loss survivors typically struggle more with feelings of rejection and abandonment by their loved one. Not that other grievers can’t feel like their loved ones left them. But at least they have the comfort of knowing that he or she didn’t leave voluntarily, and that he or she would have stayed if they could.

### **Suicide can happen to anyone.**

Given the right circumstances, any one of us can become suicidal. I believe it is a mistake to think that it can never happen to you. No one is completely immune. But at least with ourselves we have control over our actions.

It can happen to any family. Any family, even yours. Because suicide knows no boundaries. None whatsoever.

One thing that we need desperately in this world is understanding. Notice that I did not say “love.” There is a whole lot of love in this world. Go to any grief support group and you will see the evidence of an abundance of love. Do we need to express it more, and express it better? Yes, but our love is limitless.

### **Unfortunately, there is not nearly enough understanding. And yet we need understanding, too.**

It’s a great comfort to be understood. I think a big reason why we go through struggles is so that we can understand others with the same or similar struggles.

In my opinion, the people who give the best advice are those who have been there.