

I FELT ABANDONED WHEN HE DIED BY SUICIDE

A SISTER'S JOURNEY

Laura's brother Brian died in 2010 at age 35

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GRIEF STAGES CAN HAPPEN IN ANY ORDER

If there is one thing I have learned, it is that there is no right or wrong way to grieve the loss of a loved one. Everyone is different, and what worked for me might not work for another. But sooner or later it does need to be dealt with.

I met a woman in the support group one evening who had lost someone close to her to suicide fifteen years earlier, but had never really allowed herself to grieve. She continued to push her feelings aside year after year, and eventually ended up hospitalized after having a nervous breakdown. She shared with us that she wished she had addressed her feelings years earlier.

There's also no set timeline for grief. The five stages of grief outlined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) can happen in any order, and in combination with one another. I still find myself experiencing all these stages, sometimes all in a single day, even years later. I want people to know they should never force themselves, or anyone else, to move through grief any faster than what feels natural to them. There is never an appropriate time to tell someone, "You should be over it by now." The thing is, you don't ever get over it.

You get through it and you get better at dealing with it, but you never get over it.

Having my brother choose to die left me feeling abandoned. I once asked him, knowing full well how deeply he was suffering, to promise me he wouldn't leave me. He told me he couldn't promise that. In hindsight, I regret asking, because I know that had that same question been posed to me in the middle of a suicidal episode, I'd have been unable to promise it myself and would have resented anyone who asked it of me. But having been left behind like this, I've become increasingly afraid of abandonment and am working on that as it has certainly complicated some of my relationships and, sadly, even ended a few.

I began going to support group meetings for suicide survivors only two weeks after Brian's death, not only because I really needed to talk openly about it, but also because all of my family and closest friends were miles away. I needed to be around others who understood what I was going through. It was so important for me to find a support group specific to suicide, because I don't think I could have been nearly as open about my feelings about my brother's choice to end his own life while surrounded by people who were grieving those who fought valiant battles against cancer or were tragically killed in an accident.

Death is death, but there was something so valuable to be shared among a group of survivors who had to deal with the fact that their loved ones chose to die.