

Questions most often asked when a family member or friend commits suicide

WHY ...?

- did we not notice any signs
- did it happen to us
- did he/she not talk to someone

HOW ...?

- do we cope with this situation
- do we face our family and friends

The tendency of those left to grieve is to feel very guilty. It can be very hard to accept that a loved one has gone down this path because apparently events in his or her life have been seen as too hard to manage.

Medical literature indicates a strong link between suicide and depression. Depression can take on many 'cloaks' and may be hard to discern. Signs of intention are not always visible – the reality is that a person becomes very good at hiding the signs of the intention to take his or her life. Even experienced health professionals can miss diagnosing depression and find it difficult to assess the risk of a person attempting suicide.

The guilt factor quickly takes over in the minds of the bereaved and reasoning 'goes out the window' in the immediate days following the loss of a loved one in this way. Feelings of shock and disbelief, anger and confusion, despair and loneliness are usual at this time. Some people feel overwhelmed, unable to cope, as if nothing can offer comfort. Life can feel like a long emotional roller-coaster before it begins to have meaning again.

What do we say to the grief stricken family and friends? Sometimes it is wise not to say anything – usually the words just come from the bereaved expressing hurt and distress that they have been left to cope with this seemingly senseless tragedy. Waiting and listening can lead them into talking, at a time when the family or friends want to talk.

Whether the bereaved are from a non-Christian or Christian background initially seems to make little difference. The guilt feelings and the sense of helplessness tend to be the same.

One point to remember is that we have all been given the ability to make choices. The deceased person had that ability too. Perhaps their thinking was clouded by depression and their decision was not rational, but they still came to a choice of their

own making. It was their decision to take their life that has caused distress to those close to them.

To be with someone who is suffering through this grief is perhaps God's way of giving us the listening ear and the opportunity to show God's love for all of His children. Sorrow can be seen as a part of this life, and God gives us the strength to show love and comfort to the sorrowing. We have to be prepared to walk alongside the bereaved as they work through the grief process and slowly come to terms with what has happened.

Persons involved in counselling may also find help in the LCA's *Rites and Resources for Pastoral Care*, pages 1 to 11.

Links:

['Coping With Suicide' – a statement from the LCA's Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions](#)

[T W Kowald's 2004 article *The Church and Suicide – one snapshot*](#)

<http://www.teenchallenge.org.au/>

<http://www.beyondblue.org.au/>