

# #RealConvo Guide

---

## How to Talk to a Suicide Loss Survivor

Here are some tips to help you navigate  
these conversations.



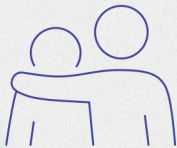
American  
Foundation  
for Suicide  
Prevention

## **Be a patient, nonjudgmental listener.**



**Be a safe person for the loss survivor to share their anger, frustration, fear, relief, sadness, or any other emotion they may feel. Or just be there with them – the reassuring presence of someone who cares may offer a lot of solace.**

**Refrain from saying, “I understand what you’re going through.”**



**Suicide loss is not like other losses, you cannot truly understand how the loss survivor is feeling. That’s okay, and it’s okay to acknowledge. It is okay to say something like, “I don’t know what to say, but I’m here to listen to you or help with whatever else you may need.”**

**Do not ask intrusive questions about how the person died but don't be afraid to talk about the person who died.**

**Offer a no-pressure invitation to talk about their loss. Say their name as you would after any other loss. Give them an opportunity to reminisce about the person they loved. If the loss survivor does not bring up the suicide method, assume they would prefer not to talk about it.**

## **Avoid pat advice and hurtful clichés.**

**Remind the suicide loss survivor to take care of their basic self-care needs. Refrain from offering unsolicited or any direct advice; there is no one right or wrong way to cope with a suicide loss. Some of the common phrases for expressing our sympathies may be hurtful and minimize the magnitude and nature of the suicide loss survivor's grief.**

## **Do not assign or imply blame.**

**Be careful not to say things or ask questions that might suggest the loss survivor is responsible for the suicide. In trying to answer the question of why, suicide loss survivors often place blame on themselves. Stray away from asking questions similar to “Did they miss any warning signs?” or “Was there something they did to upset the person?”**

# Be proactive about offering help.



**People often find it hard to ask for help, especially in the shock of the early days following a suicide loss. Offer help repeatedly and specifically. What everyday things might be adding stress that you can help with in the short term? Making concrete suggestions shows that your offer to help is genuine, and will make it easier for the loss survivor to accept.**



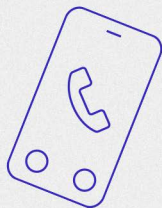
# Be patient.



**Don't place a timeline on the loss survivor's grief; healing after a suicide loss is a lifelong journey. Well-intended though they may be, frequently heard phrases such as "This too shall pass," and "You need to move on" can make the loss survivor feel pressured to "get over it."**



## Stay connected.



**Continue to check in with the loss survivor and let them know you are thinking of them, and that you're there for them. Remember that the weeks and months following the funeral, when the initial shock wears off and the full reality of what has happened sinks in, may be the toughest for the loss survivor.**

*Talk*  
away  
the  
dark



American  
Foundation  
for Suicide  
Prevention