



Losing a Parent to Suicide

When the Grief Gets Minimized

What This Loss Is

Losing an older parent to suicide, a mother or father in their seventies, eighties, or beyond, carries a grief that polite society generally avoids. It is not the sudden shattering loss of a young person. It is not the ordinary grief of a natural death. It sits between those categories and tends to get very little specific attention.

Many survivors find their grief minimized by others who reach, however kindly, for the framing that the parent was old, had been struggling, that perhaps it was a mercy. Your grief is real. It does not require anyone else's approval.

What the Statistics Show

Society has built its conversation about suicide prevention around teenagers and young adults. The data tells a different story.

- Adults 85 and older have the **highest overall suicide rate** of any age group in the U.S.
- Men 75 and older face the highest rates among males, roughly four times that of women.
- An 85-year-old man is more than three times as likely to die by suicide as a teenage boy.
- These older adults are rarely the focus of awareness campaigns or prevention resources.

The Silence That Follows

Families often reach for socially acceptable language after this loss. “He was in a lot of pain.” “She had been struggling for years.” These things may be true, but when they replace the real cause of death, they also replace the grief. When we hide a cause of death, we often end up hiding our grief with it.

Research confirms that stigma and secrecy are a distinctive feature of elder suicide grief. Relatives report feeling unable to speak openly and describe the suicide as a taboo topic that intensifies isolation.

What to Tell the Grandchildren

Children do better with honesty than with silence. When families conceal the cause of death, children often sense something is being withheld and fill the gap with self-blame.

- **Young children** need simple, clear language. It was not their fault, and the grandparent's mind was very sick.
- **Older children and teenagers** can handle more, including a clear explanation of the cause of death.
- The truth tends to find its way to children. If they learn it from someone else after you chose silence, the loss of trust becomes its own wound.
- You are allowed to say “I don’t know.” Honesty matters more than having all the answers.

Losing a Parent to Suicide (continued)

The Guilt of Knowing

For many people, a parent's mental health struggles were not new. Years of hypervigilance, of watching for signs, of making calls and coordinating care, can leave a grief layered with things that are hard to name. Relief is one of them. Relief after years of fear is a human response, not a betrayal.

Guilt tends to run hard here because the background knowledge of a parent's struggles makes the mind run backward through every visit, every decision. But knowing about someone's suffering is not the same as having the power to change how that suffering ends.

Loneliness, Even in a Full Room

One of the most frequently cited risk factors for suicide in older adults is a deep loneliness, not always the loneliness of living alone, but the sense of being disconnected from life's meaning, of feeling like a burden. Research consistently identifies the death of a spouse as one of the most significant risk factors for suicidal thinking in older men.

A person can be surrounded by family and still be deeply isolated in ways neither they nor you can always describe. That is not your failure to love them enough.

The Role Model Wound

After a parent's suicide, many people find themselves asking things they would never say aloud. What does this mean for me? Is this how my family handles pain? These questions are not disloyal. The death was not a message about you. It was the outcome of suffering that exceeded a person's capacity to bear it at that moment.

Your Own Fear About the Future

Suicide loss survivors carry an elevated risk of suicidal thinking themselves. This is one of the most important reasons to connect with support, not just to process the loss, but to keep yourself well in the middle of it.

- **988 Lifeline:** call or text 988
 - **AFSP Healing Conversations:** afsp.org/healing-conversations
 - **Alliance of Hope:** allianceofhope.org (online survivor forum)
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You Are Still Standing

Fifteen years of sitting with survivors has taught me that survival is not about getting over anything. It is about learning to carry what we carry with a little more ease, a little more breath, a little more room for the moments of actual living that are still happening around the grief.

Source

<https://sunflowersaftersuicide.com/losing-a-parent-to-suicide-when-the-grief-gets-minimized>