

When a family loses someone to suicide, every member enters grief at the same moment but on a different path. Parents, siblings, spouses, and children often grieve in strikingly different ways, and that difference can create painful distance between the people who need each other most. This handout draws on peer experience, clinical research, and fourteen years of support group facilitation to help families find their way back to each other.

## The Same Loss, Not the Same Grief

- Research calls it "differential grief": people in the same family grieve the same death in completely different ways. Some need to talk openly; others cope by staying busy. Both are real, and neither is wrong.
- These differences create real friction. Silence gets read as indifference; action gets read as avoidance. Naming the difference gently, even once, can begin to shift things.
- Surviving siblings are often called "the forgotten mourners." Their grief is real but easily overshadowed by a parent's or spouse's pain. Make clear their grief counts, and that protecting you is not their job.

## Staying Connected When Grief Pulls You Apart

- Keep communication open even when words feel impossible. Sit together, allow tears or silence, and listen for what is beneath the words, not just the words themselves.
- Physical touch matters more than many expect. A hand on a shoulder or a quiet hug sustains connection during stretches when conversation is out of reach.
- Find one small shared practice: a weekly dinner, a walk, a visit to a place that mattered. See the [Ritual and Remembrance](#) post for more.

## Individual and Family Counseling: Why You Need Both

- Individual counseling gives each person a space to grieve without managing anyone else's reactions. For children and teenagers especially, this space can be lifesaving.
- Family counseling helps the family develop a shared language for the grief and opens conversations that feel too hard to have at home. See [Suicide Loss and Therapy](#) and [Finding a Grief Counselor After Suicide Loss](#) for guidance on choosing the right clinician.
- One family member's resistance to counseling should not delay help for others. Both approaches serve different needs, and many families benefit from both.

## Where to Turn for Help

- The [AFSP survivor resource hub](#) offers support programs and a searchable directory of suicide loss groups nationwide. The [AFSP Healing Conversations program](#) connects newly bereaved survivors one-on-one with trained volunteer survivors.
- The [Dougy Center](#) provides grief support specifically for children and teens. The [Alliance of Hope survivor forum](#) is a peer community where family members across all stages of loss can connect with others who truly understand.
- Support groups give each family member their own space to grieve, surrounded by people who truly understand, without having to manage someone else's pain at the same time.

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### Source

<https://sunflowersaftersuicide.com/surviving-suicide-loss-as-a-family/>