



Feeling Happy After Suicide Loss: Letting Joy In Without Guilt

Many people who have lost someone to suicide feel a rush of guilt after a moment of laughter, rest, or joy, as if enjoying anything means they cared less. This handout draws on peer experience and grief research to explain why that guilt appears, what researchers say about taking breaks from sorrow, and small ways to let a good moment in. It is written for survivors, and it may also help clinicians and family members understand what a survivor is carrying. It may not fit the first days or weeks after a death, when a laugh can still feel impossible, or a relationship that was painful or ambivalent, and nothing here is a timeline or a standard to meet.

Why Joy Brings Guilt

- Many survivors feel a wave of shame, disloyalty, or fear right after a laugh or a good afternoon, as if enjoying anything means they cared less for the person who died.
- A 2020 [study by Feigelman and Cerel](#) found that people bereaved by suicide reported more feelings of blame than people grieving deaths from natural causes or accidents, which helps explain why a good moment can look like evidence against you.
- The reaction is fast and automatic, sometimes showing up first in the body as a tight chest or a sudden need to leave the room, and it is a reaction rather than a verdict on how much you cared.

What Grief Research Says

- Stroebe and Schut's [Dual Process Model](#) describes an ordinary pattern of grieving as a swing between facing the loss and turning toward everyday life, so a good afternoon can be the other half of how grief works rather than a lapse in it, though not everyone grieves that way.
- Dr. Jack Jordan, who has worked with suicide loss survivors for forty years, describes self-dosing (finding relief in manageable amounts) and reinvesting in living as two ongoing tasks, and a small moment of joy can serve both.
- One study of widows and widowers looked at spouses, not suicide loss, and shows an association, not a rule, but it found that laughter in the early months was linked to better functioning later, so nobody should force a laugh and nobody should hide one.

Joy and Your Bond With the Person You Lost

- Joy does not replace the bond. Many survivors find that a good day can carry the person with them, through a middle name or a family story, as described in Physics = Love.
- Feeling better is not the same as forgetting, and a person is not defined by how they died, so a lighter day can be one way of remembering the rest of their life.
- In many families one person laughs while another cannot, and each can misread the other, so it helps to remember that a laugh is not a statement about how much anyone is hurting.

Small Ways to Let Joy In

- Let the laugh finish and save the argument with the guilt for later, then say one sentence afterward such as "I can laugh today and still be grieving." The guilt may arrive hours later, after the good moment has passed, and it passes too.
- Take joy in small doses, like a walk or a favorite song, and before a gathering you expect to be joyful, tell one trusted person you may need to step outside, because knowing you can leave can make it easier to stay.
- If joy has not come back, or flatness and hopelessness keep you from daily life, a [grief counselor](#) can help, and if your thoughts turn to ending your own life, call or text 988 right away.

Source

<https://sunflowersaftersuicide.com/feeling-happy-after-suicide-loss/>