



## **Suicide Death**

Coping with the death of someone by suicide can be especially difficult. Unfortunately, social stigma still surrounds suicide and mental health, and many families feel uncertain about how to talk about it. We encourage you talk about it as candidly as you are able.

- Expect competence, but you might need to define a few unfamiliar terms. Be prepared to explain that suicide means that a person ended their own life and that there are many reasons that people die by suicide.
- If the autistic adult experiences depression, association of depression with the rationale for the suicide can generate fear that they will behave similarly. For this reason, be cautious about associating a cause with the suicide. Similarly, if the suicide is assumed to be related to a break-up or loss of a job, it is important to be clear that taking one's life is not a usual response to these events. Emphasize that the autistic adult has support if they become upset or worried and name the people who can help.
- Repeat facts clearly and honestly while acknowledging the unknown. It's okay to share that you don't know exactly what happened or why.
- While it's important to use clear language, with a suicide or violent death, it may be best to avoid specific details about the death, unless the individual asks about them. If the circumstances of the death are something that the person with autism may have already learned about, that reality should be acknowledged. Hearing about someone who overdosed on drugs may cause anxiety around taking medication. The mechanism of death may create a graphic image in the mind of the autistic adult.
- Reiterate that there is no blame with suicide. It is likely that no one could have changed the situation. Ultimately, it was the choice of the person to die by suicide. People who may have been aware of the potential for it may have tried to help, but it doesn't mean the outcome would have been prevented.
- Different faiths have differing approaches to what happens in the afterlife for a person who has died by suicide. If your family is struggling with spiritual or religious questions, we encourage you to take things one step at a time, focusing on the basic facts of the death. Draw on your faith community's resources; you don't have to go it alone. Share the resources in this website with others. The section for clergy and professionals may be helpful to members of your faith community.

It is important to know that suicide is a leading cause of premature death for autistic people. The suicide rate for autistic people is more than three times higher than in the

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***Communicating the News of a Death***

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general population. Having a candid conversation with your autistic loved one about whether they are having or have ever had suicidal thoughts may be a good idea after they have experienced the suicide of someone they knew.