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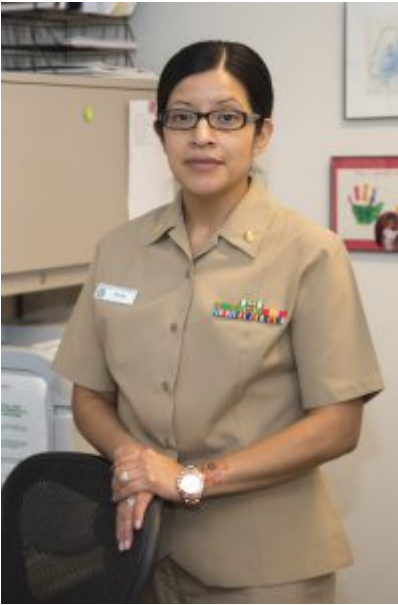
Written on September 27, 2016 at 7:18 pm by [Navy Medicine](#)

## [Healing After Suicide](#)

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*By Lt. Cmdr. Angelica M. Pucha, Naval Medical Center Portsmouth suicide prevention coordinator*

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Lt. Cmdr. Angelica M. Pucha serves as the Naval Medical Center Portsmouth suicide prevention coordinator.

The suicide of a family member, friend or co-worker often has a powerful and sometimes devastating impact on the people who are left behind. Grief is a complex, but normal and natural human response to the death of a person with whom you are close. When the death is sudden, unexpected, and potentially traumatic, as in a death by suicide, the grief process can become complicated. Some common reactions to death by suicide are:

- **Shock.** Disbelief and emotional numbness might set in. You might think the suicide couldn't possibly be real.
- **Guilt** and self-blame for not being able to prevent the suicide.
- **Anger** at the person who died for leaving you behind with so many unanswered questions, at yourself and/or others for missing clues about suicidal intentions, and at a higher being for not protecting the deceased from harming himself or herself.
- **Despair.** You might be gripped by sadness, loneliness or helplessness. You might even consider suicide yourself.
- **Confusion.** Many people try to make some sense out of the death, or try to understand why their loved one took his or her life. However, you may always have unanswered questions.
- **Feelings of rejection.** You might wonder why your relationship wasn't enough to keep the deceased from dying by suicide.

Our response to the aftermath of suicide is shaped by a number of things, such as past experiences with death and loss, other current life stressors, our mental health, our family cultural traditions, our relationship with the deceased (e.g., strength of bond, presence of conflict), the circumstances surrounding the death, our support system and our personality. For that reason, everyone's grief is unique. Some will find support groups helpful; others may rely on the support of friends. Some may turn to books; others may work with mental health specialist. Some may take weeks to get back to "normal life." Others may find that life as they remember it no longer exists, and they need to redefine themselves and establish new routines.

How do we help ourselves and each other cope following the tragedy of a suicide?

- Take each day as it comes. Losing someone to suicide is a tremendous blow, and healing must occur at its own pace. Don't be hurried by anyone else's expectations that it's been "long enough."
- Perform self-care, such as eating, sleeping, hydrating and exercising.

- Talk about the loss. Talking about suicide doesn't give a person morbid thoughts. Rather, it helps cultivate a culture that supports seeking help as a sign of strength.
- **ACT:** Ask – care – treat. **ASK** directly, “Are you thinking of killing yourself.” Show that you **CARE**. Get the **person** or yourself immediate assistance, **TREATment**.

Losing a shipmate or loved one to suicide is tragic. Just remember healing is possible, even though it may take time, work and support to assist in the recovery process.

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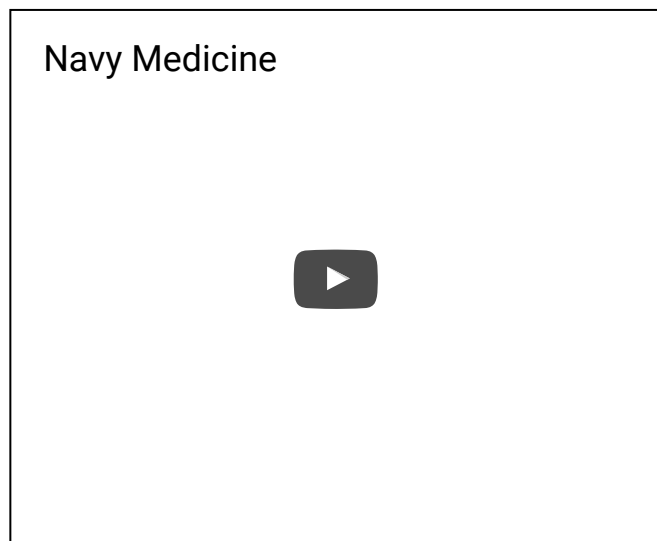
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