

# Coping with loss after a suicide

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# COP 2 COP

No one knows the deep inner reaches of another person's mind and for that reason, suicide is often misunderstood. Too often, those left behind begin pointing fingers so that feelings already shattered by grief are only exacerbated.

After a suicide, we are all fearful that somehow the catastrophe is going to be attributed to us. But doing the blame game doesn't accomplish anything.

To avoid it, we at Cop2Cop teach suicide prevention through a program called **QPR: Question about suicide, Persuade to get help, Refer to the appropriate resource**. The free, two-day training can be administered on site at any department, and last year, 1,200 officers took advantage of the offer.

**1-877-Cop-2Cop is a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week helpline offering free confidential services to law enforcement officers and their families. Peer counseling is provided by retired cops and trained cop clinicians. Additional services include clinical support, assessments and referrals, and critical incident stress management. Cop2Cop is a service of University Behavioral HealthCare, offered through partnership with the New Jersey Department of Personnel.**

I have learned after counseling many officers who attempted suicide and lived, that suicide can be regarded as a "solution" to end suffering. The truth within that belief is that mental illness can cause extreme suffering, which in some cases leads to suicide. So when you hear that common stigma that "only weak people commit suicide," don't believe it.

The aftermath of a suicide can raise mixed and uncomfortable feelings. As a cop, you are trained to bury your feelings and move on. After all, the police department must keep going. But if you're feeling anxious, uncertain, guilty or even shamed, remember, it's normal to feel that way.

An officer who commits suicide brings into focus just how vulnerable we all are to the stress and strain of the job, and to personal life. If someone

from your police family has chosen to take their own life, try to use these tips for your own survival:

1. *Wear out your questions.* For law enforcement professionals, asking questions is second nature. Don't let this time be any different. Ask your friends how they're feeling, ask others if you can share your feelings with them.

2. *Call on your personal faith.* Turn to clergy for support and understanding.

3. *Give yourself time to heal.* There is no timeline for feeling better. Just as you would in an investigation, give yourself time to sort out the feelings and clear your head.

4. *Expect setbacks.* Don't panic if it looks like everyone else has moved on and you haven't. Sometimes a small reminder will bring you back to the feelings you thought you

put away.

5. *Know you can survive.* You may not think so now, but you are strong and your police and personal families still need you.

6. *Struggle with why it happened.* If you can work it out in your own mind, it will give you a sense of peace.

7. *Don't be afraid to cry.* As long as you are in an emotionally safe, confidential place, express your emotions.

8. *Give yourself permission to get professional help.* It takes courage to help others; it takes more courage to help yourself.

9. *Be patient with yourself and others.* Everyone heals in their own time. Memorializing your fellow officer may be what you need while others may feel differently.

10. *Don't let anyone tell you how to feel.* Find support groups where you can feel safe expressing your feelings. ★



*Cop2Cop counselors formed their own team in the "Solidarity Walk for Suicide Victims and Their Families," held Oct. 1 in New Brunswick. The event was a fundraiser for the New Jersey chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.*

*Members of the Cop2Cop team, shown from left with their banner, are Tom Baber, Joe Orgo, Fred Mitchell, Bill Ussery, Cherie Castellano, Pam DeMassi, Audrey Stelman, and Louis Kleeman.*