

# IN THE WAKE OF SUICIDE

BY DIANE KAULEN

## Book Description & Reviews:

### Book Description

Losing someone to suicide is a tragic and traumatic experience, particularly for children. The enormity of difficult issues surrounding such an untimely death often leaves even adults questioning their faith. All who experiences the heartbreaking ordeal must proceed through their own grief process, trying to gain understanding of their loved one's death. This is doubly hard for a child. The purpose of this book is to help children touched by suicide find solace and to aid in conversation with their supporting adults. The story leads to discovery of God's everlasting presence and His promises to bring joy in the midst of sorrow.

IN THE WAKE OF SUICIDE is the journey of a young boy living with a depressed father who eventually commits suicide. Through Max's eyes, we pray our readers realize they are not alone. They see how the tragedy changes his life, the gamut of his emotions run wild, and his constant questioning. Is he to blame? How much more could his mother or the doctors have done to help his dad? And where exactly is God in all this? His father's act shakes the very core of his family's Christian faith, but Max learns how he can draw on God's strength and His Word to help him survive and find his way through darkness and despair back into God's light. We pray this same lesson also comes alive for our readers for there is no greater place to be than in the Father's arms.

### Reviews

- The death of a parent by suicide is a tough issue for a child to deal with. It is especially hard to help them understand how God still loves them and their parent who committed suicide. This book helped my children deal with the fact that their father is still loved by God. It helped them understand that God can help them through ANY tragedy that they may face in their lives. Not only did it help them--it helped me answer questions about suicide and religion. This book is a wonderful tool to encourage communication about suicide and God. Laura Somwaru—Mother of 3 Children whose father committed suicide.
- In The Wake Of Suicide may be "A Child's Journey", but it can be of exceptional benefit for anyone seeking to understand and accept a terrible event in their lives! It's a great tool for a parent experiencing grief and having to "try" and help their child get through such a tragedy. God Bless

Mrs. Kaulen for simplifying such difficult circumstances. She takes the pain of a child and demonstrates vividly how "We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us!"

John Baxter, LCDC, NCACH, CFBCC  
(in other words, a learned Christian Counselor)

- Through the eyes of young Max, the reader witnesses the unmanageable and overwhelming pain and confusion of parental suicide. A taboo topic that affects far too many people, suicide and its repercussions are seldom addressed as honestly, kindly and graciously as is accomplished in this small book. In spite of the sorrow, guilt and anger, the healing Voice of a tender, merciful and loving God speaks into this darkest night of human experience. *In the Wake of Suicide* is a must-read, not only for children trying to cope with the reality, but for anyone who has suffered through the doubts, questions, rage and hurt, as well as for those who provide care and support following a suicide.

(the Rev.) Elizabeth Moreau  
United Methodist minister  
Texas Annual Conference

Cover of Book  
Purchasing/Donating

## Author Bio:

Diane Kaulen earned an undergraduate degree in Child Development and Family Studies and a master's degree in Early Childhood Education. Losing many close people in her own life she has felt passionate about the grief process and helping others through this difficult time. As a Certified Child Life Specialist, she has worked with children and families through loss of a loved one. She has developed and led bereavement support groups, initiated programming and provided training on helping children cope with death. She has taught child development courses at a local college and is now currently teaching and running a teen-parenting program.

After tragically losing a family member to suicide Mrs. Kaulen found that there were few children's books available to help children deal with suicide and no books available to help bring these children closer to God. She woke up one night with a call from God asking her to write this book. This book is dedicated to her nephews and it is her heart's desire that other survivors of suicide come to learn about how God can help them through their grief.

Diane is available for speaking engagements. To contact please email her at [growingfaith@inthewakeofsuicide.com](mailto:growingfaith@inthewakeofsuicide.com)

## General Grief Information and Children:

Realizing that parents often don't have a lot of time when they have to tell their children about the death of a loved one. Here is a quick reference for you. The information below provides general information about grief and most children. Some information may or may not pertain to your child. Remember this is generic to all children. For more information about grief that is related to your child's developmental level, go to the above link for grief and development. For information about how specifically to help your child, please seek the support of a counselor.

- ❑ It is easy to be afraid to tell children how the person died. Suicide is a difficult concept to explain to a child. It is best if they hear the information from their surviving parent or a close family member. They need to hear the information in a safe time and place.
- ❑ If you don't feel strong enough to tell your child about the death all by yourself, it is okay to ask for support from counselors, ministers, funeral directors, etc. to be there for support.
- ❑ It is important to tell children the truth in simple terms that they can understand. Children will often ask questions to get answers that they really want to know; respond truthfully. It is easier to find out this important information in a safe way, from a person they trust following the event, than finding it out from some one else much later.
- ❑ When talking about death be concrete and uses specific terms. Explain what death means and what it means to die by suicide. Avoid using abstract words like "passed away." Say, "grandpa died". The children's book [When Dinosaurs Die](#), by Marc Brown is a great resource to help explain death in simple terms in a way young children can understand. The book even discusses suicide as a way in which someone can die.
- ❑ There is a link between depression and suicide. Depression is a sickness of the brain and can lead people to do things that they would not normally do.
- ❑ When talking to your children, you don't need to hide your feelings. Children are very perceptive and often can sense your feelings. It is better to be truthful than dishonest.
- ❑ Every person responds to grief differently. Allow children to grieve in their way.

- ❑ Typically when a person copes with the loss of someone important, they must go through a healing process. This means people have to experience a variety of feelings at different times. Even children have to experience these difficult feelings to heal. Parents can't protect the child from these tough feelings, like anger, sadness, guilt, etc.
- ❑ Sometimes it is easier to cope with death if we find something "good" about it. For example, "Aren't you happy he is not suffering anymore?" Children need to discover their own good, rather than us telling them what we think is good.
- ❑ Children all cry differently some cry and others do not. If your child does not cry or seems more interested in playing, this is normal and don't worry. If it continues for a long period of time, you may want to get the support of a grief program or counselor.
- ❑ Young children cannot typically tell people how they feel. Children's true feelings are shown through changes in their behavior.
- ❑ Give yourself permission to cry in front of children. You are modeling positive ways to handle emotions. Tears are a positive way to deal with difficult emotions.
- ❑ Children are often good judges of what they can handle and what they cannot. So if you wonder if your child should go to the funeral, you may want to ask them what they would like to do. It is a good idea to have someone the child trust, like a family friend or teacher who can sit with the child, so if they want to leave, they can.
- ❑ If you're overwhelmed with grief, get emotional support for yourself. Be careful to remember you have surviving children that need you.
- ❑ Children can't grasp that in the future they will feel better, they can only focus on the here and now. Deal with the present issues.
- ❑ Once children understand that someone can die, they may be afraid that other people who are close to them will die. Don't promise YOU won't die. You can say, "I think I will live until I'm very, very old," and explain what you are doing to take care of yourself so you won't die, like wearing seatbelts in the car, going to the doctor, eating healthy, etc. Let them know if you do die, they will be taken care of.
- ❑ Keep the person's memory alive, talk about them, celebrate their birthday, and keep pictures of the loved one around.

- ❑ Children will not always want to talk about the death. Children can only handle, “bits and pieces” of grief at a time. Allow them to set their own timetable.
- ❑ Keep routine for children. Just because they are grieving does not mean they don’t need rules and structure.
- ❑ Children may grieve over different things. They may not physically show their grief from the loss of their parent, but openly grieve the loss of a class pet. It may all be related.
- ❑ Give lots of hugs and touches.
- ❑ Save special items from the deceased to give the living child later.
- ❑ It is okay to share your faith; your child may like hearing your beliefs.
- ❑ Tell the child he did not cause the death. Many children will think they caused it, even if they know they did not.
- ❑ Allow children to select the play activities they need to work through their grief.
- ❑ Give the child something to do. It will help combat his helplessness.
- ❑ Expect them to regress a little, i.e. sleep with a nightlight.

## **Developmental Levels of Grief (Age of your child and behavior you might see):**

It is important to know that no two children and no two people grieve alike. Grief is unique to individuals. Children can only grieve what they are able to understand. Below you will find basic information on children’s developmental understanding of grief and issues that impact them at their stage. Although children may be in one developmental stage, their grief may look like another stage. This is okay. It is important to read all stages to have a better understanding of your child’s potential needs.

Grieving is a process that does not happen all at once and takes time to go through. Children will often grieve again and again as they gain a better understanding of what death is and what suicide means. The loss from suicide is a unique and difficult loss. Surviving loved ones face their own challenges. Seek support from grief programs, and counselors to help make this difficult process smoother.

Children do not have a good understanding of their own feelings and cannot always or consistently talk about their feelings. It is important to be good observers of their behavior, their words and their artwork. Ask teachers at school and at church, as well as friends to help observe. Get help from a grief counselor or a grief program for help with your child's specific needs.

Family dynamic will ultimately change after the death of someone. Be aware of the changes and allow your children to be a part in making some of the changes. Hold them, touch them and support them as best as you can. When you need help for yourself and for them get the support from a professional.

#### Infants/Toddlers:

- Children from Birth to age two are beginning their language development. They often understand more than they can say, especially for children ages one-two. Be simple but specific when talking about death to children. Even though it is a hard word to say use the word died. It is concrete and cannot be confused with other meanings.
- Children at this age have no understanding of death and think only in the present here and now. So they will often think about the person coming back. Gently remind them that this person has died and they cannot see/touch the person anymore. But you can look at pictures and talk about memories.
- Infants and toddlers thrive on an environment that is governed by routines and constant support of a regular caregiver. If they lost one of their primary caregivers spend time each day building trust and attachment. You cannot spoil young children; they need the extra attention. Keep their routines as consistent as possible.
- Expect the children to be more fussy or cranky, especially if primary caregiver was the one who died. Be patient and soothing to them. It is impossible to keep everything totally the same. When you are emotionally drained ask for help from friends and family
- Children at this age often take on the emotions of their primary caregivers, even if you think you are hiding them. It is okay to cry in front of them.
- They are egocentric and can only think about their own immediate needs. They can't think about the future or understand waiting for things. Be patient with them.
- Children often regress to an earlier stage. Children, who stopped sucking their thumb, often begin again. Children, who were potty trained, often stop. This is normal and will get better with time.

#### Preschool Children (ages 2 1/2 - 5):

- Children at this age do not understand death is irreversible or permanent. They think someone who dies can come back to life. They will talk about this person coming back and it is normal. Simply remind them their loved one is dead and we won't be able to see them again. As the children get older, they will begin to understand this concept.

- Children at this age are very concrete and words can confuse them. Using words like “died” or “made himself die” is concrete and will be less confusing. Avoid words like passed away, sleeping, gone to be with the Lord, etc. Suicide is an abstract term for children; help them understand what this word means. For survivors, it is hard to use the word “died,” but is important for the children.
- Children are egocentric which means they think the world revolves around them. They often think that they caused the death or the death relates to them in some way. You will need to help them and reassure them they did not cause this, not just once, but several times.
- Children at this age experience magical thinking. This means they may think up “strange” explanations for things. They often cannot separate things that they saw in a dream and things that are real. If a child comes up with things that don’t seem to make sense, this is normal. Simply remind them of what the truth is.
- Children at this age often regress to earlier behaviors like bedwetting, thumb sucking and waking up night. This is also very normal and will get better with time.
- Allow children to talk about the death. They may want to talk about it at what seems like inappropriate times as well as tell everyone. This helps them understand the finality of death.
- Children at this age may want to avoid the body or explore and touch the body. Allow them to do what they are ready for. Children at this age have a good sense of what their ready for. If they do not want to go near the body respect that. If they want to constantly touch the body, this is okay because it helps them understand death.
- Children need to be prepared for what to expect. Explain in simple terms what will happen during the funeral and events to come.
- When one person dies in a child’s life it opens up the realization that others can die. If the child asks about your death, reassure them about what you are doing to stay alive, and what will happen to them if you do die. Reassure them they will be taken care of.
- Children will usually ask questions to issues that are bothering them, be sure to answer their questions in the most honest and simple way you can.

#### School Age (6-12):

- Since this age range is so wide it may help to read the grief reactions of the preschool child and/or the adolescent child, depending on the age of your child. Many reactions depend on the age, maturity and life experiences of the child. Please read all three areas and apply specifically to your child.
- Peers become increasingly important for children at this age. They do not want to be different from their friends. Children at this age will keep feelings inside in fear that they may be laughed at. This in an even bigger concern when their loved one committed suicide. Help children decide on how they want to deal with their friends and help them do this.

- Children at this age will often go to their friends for support, rather than parents. This is difficult for the same age peers to know what to do and say. Be aware your child maybe seeking support and not getting good support.
- They will often need to release feelings often by using physical means, like hitting the pillow, screaming. They are still gaining understanding of their feelings and what to do with them.
- Children at this age may think that they had something to do with the death, especially if someone has said things like “you’re driving me crazy,” or “you make me mad.” The child could have just simply done something wrong prior to the death and then felt like they were part of the reason.
- Children at this age often ask a lot of questions or say strange things in order to help them understand grief and death. They often become interested in the specific biological process of death. They will often ask questions to help them understand this process. Some children will not talk or ask questions at all, but does not necessarily mean they don’t want to understand.
- Remember this is a difficult time for all children of this age, not just children who have lost a loved one. It gets even more complicated when you have lost someone to suicide. Be patient and seek help from a licensed counselor for help.

#### Adolescents:

- A grieving teenager is still a teen. All behaviors which teens often exhibit like showing risky behaviors, exploring with sexual activity, pulling away from parents continues to exist. When a teen is grieving, especially grieving the loss of someone to suicide, these behaviors often become more intense.
- Teens have an adult understanding of death and are flooded with emotions that they often do not have the maturity to understand and deal appropriately with. They probably feel numb and don’t know what to do. Help them find an appropriate person who can help them deal with these emotions. This person may be a family friend, a minister, a youth group leader, a neighbor. If this person can emotionally support your child in an appropriate way, it is okay to encourage this. If you do not have someone like this, you may need to find a counselor and you may need to go to several before finding one that your child can connect with.
- Children at this age need time to deal with their feelings and to do it in their timetable.
- Peers are very important to teens and they will most likely seek support from their peers. They may not be getting the best of support from their peers who may be at a loss on how to help.
- Teens need to be in control of whom they tell about the suicide and when they tell. Work with your teen on how you are going to handle the question “How did your loved one die?” Support your teen in his response.

- Find a place where your teen can go if they need to be alone or talk to someone. There needs to be a place at home and at school.
- Be aware that roles at home may change and teens may be asked to take on more responsibility than they are ready for or can handle. If a parent dies teens may be asked to take on some of the parenting roles. If a sibling dies, a teen may struggle with their place in the family as well as helping fill in family chores while the parents are actively grieving.

## How the Christian Faith Can Support You:

By Dianne Thornton

June marks the month of the summer solstice, when, on the longest day of the year, the rays of the sun shine in celebration of the new life that spring produced – green grass, flourishing trees, blooming flowers, fluttering butterflies, and singing birds.

But, there is a cost. Spring storms are some of the most intense of the year. Yet the results reveal the Creator's constant presence and providence, using the sun, rain, and wind to create the beauty we now enjoy.

Recently, a pair of Mourning Doves moved into the loft of an overgrown bougainvillea bush outside the kitchen window of my backyard. Eventually, two small, white eggs appeared. The male and female diligently incubated their eggs – enduring spring's tumultuous storms. Each devotedly nourished and fiercely protected their young. At times, they all enjoyed a warm nap on a sunny day.

Observing the life of these doves this spring allowed me to reflect on lessons for family life and faith. One day, with the approach of a cold front, the winds blew so forcefully that the shrub was in constant motion, swaying two to three feet at a time. The doves never left the nest; instead they provided constant protection and care of their treasures.

Sometimes life is a raging storm, threatening to destroy everything we hold dear. Yet healthy relationship can provide comfort, safety, and refuge in the midst of a storm, allowing a person to live without fear of judgment or rejection. The Bible tells us that God cares and provides for the birds; it also reminds us that He values us more than He values them; and likewise, we have His care and protection. One-way God supplies this is through the family – a place to celebrate and cultivate life, and a place to receive protection and comfort. God's family design reflects His best desires for us in an imperfect world.

After the raging winds of the storm, one dove immediately began to repair the nest, gathering and weaving twigs together to add support to its frail construction. The other dove remained focused and faithfully incubated the precious eggs.

The doves appeared to take the storm and its affects in stride. But humans suffer additional complexities, and the raging winds of life can often injure people and their relationship. While God offers His healing, it is often a cooperative work that requires effort on the part of all family members. One may need gentle honesty. Another may need grace and encouragement. Forgiveness should be afforded to all.

The mature doves provided nourishment for their young and opportunities for them to develop strength in their wings, which would ultimately prepare them to leave the nest. Parents nurture children in many ways, such as teaching and modeling values, so that they become healthy, independent adults with a strong sense of personal worth and identity.

Families who center their lives on God and His Biblical principles gain the ability to see His heart for us through everyday events in the world. While this family of doves will move on, its loft will remain – a simple bougainvillea reminding out family of lessons on life and faith.

## Suicide and The Bible:

Following the death of a loved one, faith naturally comes into question. When your loved one dies due to suicide, faith becomes an even bigger issue. How could God not reach our loved ones and save them? How could He let this happen? These are torturous feelings that can overcome anyone who lost a loved one. Parents are left not understanding their own emotions, let alone knowing how to handle the emotions of our children. But our gracious and loving God is reaching to you and has provided a book to help you get through this difficult time. God realizes that depression can lead to suicide. Anger, despair, hopelessness, loneliness, uncontrollable sadness are difficult feelings which could lead someone to want to end their life. God discusses this insurmountable pain and suffering that can come to a person and their extreme desire to want to die. In fact, there are seven people who commit suicide in the Bible. (See list below for a list and verses) God does not put emphasis on their death, only their life. He wants us to choose life, rather than death. He discusses this pain throughout the Bible.

Job suffered one difficulty after another. He couldn't manage the suffering he was enduring. He said, "I'd rather choke to death than live in this body. Leave me alone and let me die; my life has no meaning." (Job 7: 15-16)

Jonah ran from God, he did not want to follow him. He prayed, "Lord let me die! I'd be better off dead." (Jonah 4:3)

Moses was desperate, he told God, "I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now." (Numbers 11: 14-15)

Paul agonizes between choosing life over death, “If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.” (Philippians 1: 21-23)

All of these men chose life; they chose to follow God. God puts a great deal of emphasis on their pain and their choice for life. He wants us to follow Him and the Bible tells us how. One characteristic of someone who chooses suicide is because they have known someone who died by suicide. It is important as parents to reach to our children and let them know God created them to live and to follow God. This is the essence of this book, *In The Wake of Suicide: A Child’s Journey*. It is an avenue to help you begin these discussions about their loved one’s emotional pain and suffering and how it would cause them to want to die. Ultimately this book encourages each one of these children to choose life with God for themselves.

When discussing suicide and the Bible, questioning the salvation of those who choose suicide is an important discussion. The Bible never comes out and says these individuals will or will not spend eternity in Heaven. But the Bible states “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned.” (John 3: 16-18) It is faith in Jesus Christ that allows us to have eternal life in Heaven. We all sin and God does not separate good sin, from bad sin. As stated in Roman’s 3: 23-34, “God treats everyone alike. He accepts people only because they have faith in Jesus Christ. All of us have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory. But God treats us much better than we deserve, and because of Christ Jesus, he freely accepts us and sets us free from our sins.” Once we have freely accepted Jesus Christ as our savior, we have been given the free gift of God’s love. “Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus or Lord.” (Romans 8:39) An important aspect of our confession that Jesus Christ our savior is realizing that we all sin and his sacrifice on the cross paid the price for our sins. We must realize that we are sinful to fully accept Christ as our savior. “If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin, but if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 1:10- 2:2) Due to the numerous scriptures in the New Testament that discuss that our sins are forgiven upon the acceptance of Christ Jesus in our lives, *In The Wake of Suicide: A Child’s Journey*, takes the stance that a person who dies from suicide will spend eternity in Heaven if they have accepted Jesus Christ as their savior.

May this children's book be a resource for parents to begin the discussions of how God can give you strength and help you heal from this terrible experience. May God be with you.

### **List and Verses of Biblical figures that died by suicide:**

King Saul and his soldier: (1 Samuel 31:2-6) The Philistines closed in on Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua. The fighting was fierce around Saul, and he was badly wounded by enemy arrows. Saul told the soldier who carried his weapons, "Kill me with your sword! I don't want those worthless Philistines to torture me and make fun." But the soldier was afraid to kill him. Saul then took out his own sword; he stuck the blade into his stomach, and fell on it. When the soldier knew that Saul was dead, he killed himself in the same way. Saul was dead, his three sons were dead, and the soldier who carried his weapons was dead. They and all his soldiers died on that same day.

Ahithopel (2 Samuel 17:23) When Ahithopel saw that his advice had not been followed; he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order and then hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father's tomb.

Abimelech (Judges 9:54) Hurriedly he called to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and kill me, so that they can't say, "A woman killed him." So his servant ran him through, and he died.

Zimri (1Kings 16: 18) When Zimri saw that the town was captured; he ran into the strongest part of the palace and killed himself by setting it on fire.

Samson (Judges 16: 29-30) Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.

Judas (Matthew 27:5) So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

## **Family Activities at Home:**

No two people in the same family are going to grieve alike. But keeping your family members memory alive and supporting one another can help everyone.

Here is a list of activities that you can do to remember your loved one and support each other.

- Make each child their own memory box that they can decorate and put their own special memories of their loved one in it.
- Frame a picture of your loved one and around the mat boarder, cut out pictures in magazines that remind you of that person
- Celebrate that person's birthday by having a party in their honor
- Go to that persons favorite restaurant
- Launch balloons with a message to your loved one
- Make a quilt of your family members pictures and old clothes
- Make a scrapbook of your loved one
- Make a memorial website

## Websites

1) Survivors of Suicide

[www.survivorsofsuicide.com](http://www.survivorsofsuicide.com)

2) American Association of Suicidology

[www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)

3) Surviving Suicide

[www.survivingsuicide.com](http://www.survivingsuicide.com)

4) Siblings Survivors

[www.siblingsurvivors.com](http://www.siblingsurvivors.com)

5) My Uncle Keith (Another great children's book for suicide survivors)

<http://thegiftofKeith.org>

6) the Grief Blog (Make a blog about your loved one)

[www.thegriefblog.com](http://www.thegriefblog.com)

7) Music for the Soul (CD for survivors for suicide)

[www.musicforthesoul.org/chaos.html](http://www.musicforthesoul.org/chaos.html)

8) American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

[www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)

9) Memorial Websites (Make a website to remember your loved one)

[www.memorialtribute.com](http://www.memorialtribute.com)

10) The Dougy Center (a grief program and has related groups all around the country)

[www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)

11) Healing Hearts Press (Author and book to help parents help their children deal with suicide)

[www.healingheartspress.com](http://www.healingheartspress.com)

12) Christian Answers (get more biblical information about Suicide and the Bible)

<http://www.christiananswers.net/9-dml/dml-y038.html>