



FUNERAL CHAPEL

Dedicated To Those We Serve

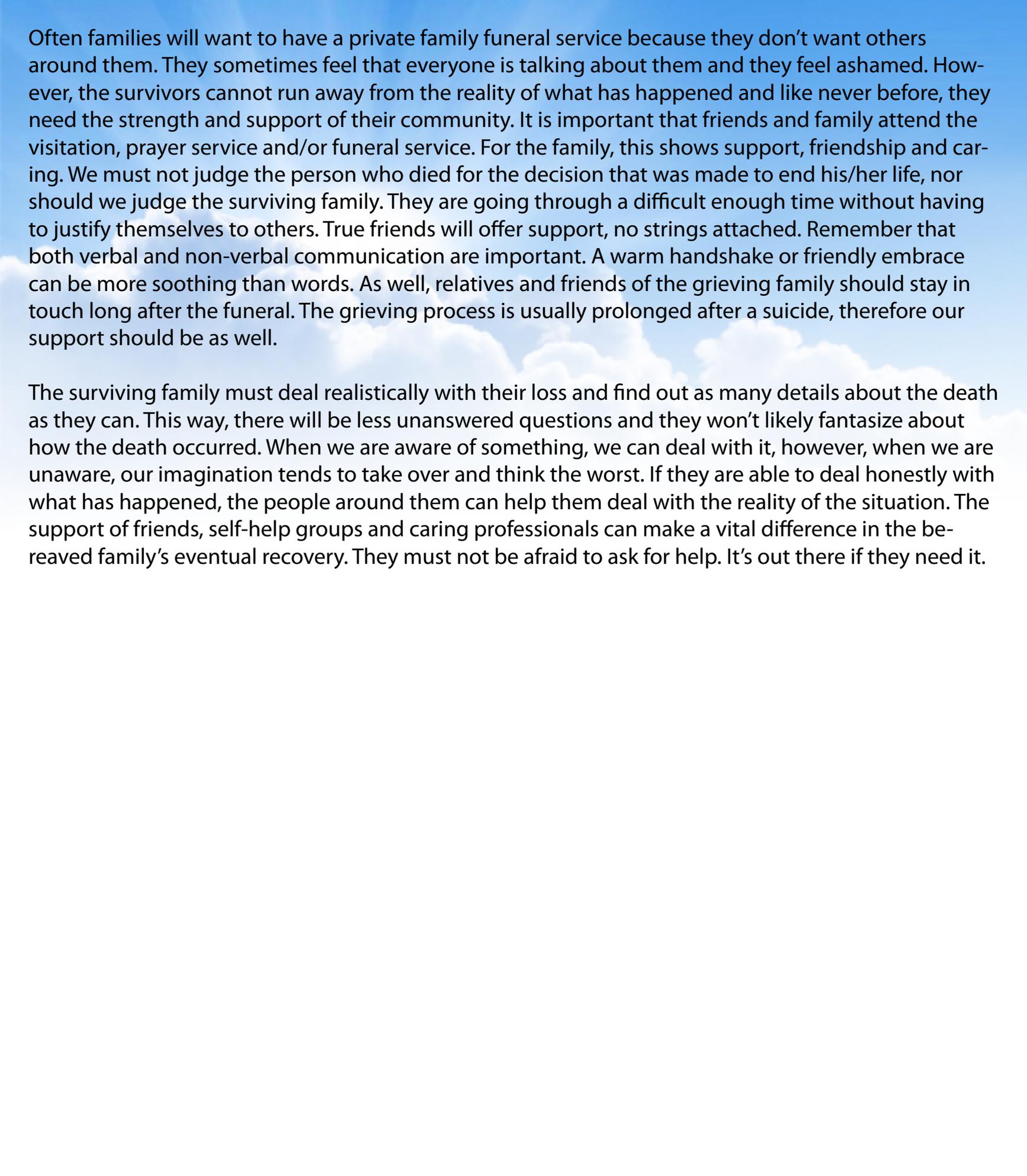
# *Caring Connections: Suicide*

**“Suicide is more common than most of us realize. It ranks among the ten leading causes of death in North America and is now the second most frequent cause of death among young Canadians between the ages of 15 and 30.”**

A person's sorrow over a death is always difficult to bear, but suicide places an unusually heavy burden on the survivors. The emotional reactions of family and friends are more extreme than they would be, had the person died of natural causes. There is greater shock, denial and numbness. Our society tends to attach a stigma to suicide which the victim's family must bear. Because of this, they may not receive the support they need. When someone dies as a result of suicide, our first question is why? While the person who committed suicide dies once, the surviving family dies a thousand deaths asking themselves why? Those persons that feel that they should have been able to prevent the death typically experience more prolonged and severe grief reactions. In situations like this, people often become very angry. They may be angry at themselves for not having been able to prevent the suicide or save the person or they may become angry at other people for not having helped. There is often even anger at the deceased person for doing this to us, for ruining our life. A person may also feel guilty. Guilt in that you should have been there, should have offered more help, or should have known something was wrong. Sometimes those left behind may identify with the victim and become preoccupied with the fear that they too may resort to suicide if life becomes very difficult.

Grief, complicated at the best of times, is even more so because of the wide range and power of the emotions experienced. Suicide is difficult for everyone to understand, however, children are often confused when they are told about a suicide. They will often question, “Didn't he love us?”, “Why did she want to leave?” or “Why were they so sad?”. Sometimes the child will even question whether the death was their fault, did they do something to make the person not want to live anymore. Even though death by suicide is complex, children still need to be told. “Family secrets” create further anger and abandonment when the child learns the truth.

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Often families will want to have a private family funeral service because they don't want others around them. They sometimes feel that everyone is talking about them and they feel ashamed. However, the survivors cannot run away from the reality of what has happened and like never before, they need the strength and support of their community. It is important that friends and family attend the visitation, prayer service and/or funeral service. For the family, this shows support, friendship and caring. We must not judge the person who died for the decision that was made to end his/her life, nor should we judge the surviving family. They are going through a difficult enough time without having to justify themselves to others. True friends will offer support, no strings attached. Remember that both verbal and non-verbal communication are important. A warm handshake or friendly embrace can be more soothing than words. As well, relatives and friends of the grieving family should stay in touch long after the funeral. The grieving process is usually prolonged after a suicide, therefore our support should be as well.

The surviving family must deal realistically with their loss and find out as many details about the death as they can. This way, there will be less unanswered questions and they won't likely fantasize about how the death occurred. When we are aware of something, we can deal with it, however, when we are unaware, our imagination tends to take over and think the worst. If they are able to deal honestly with what has happened, the people around them can help them deal with the reality of the situation. The support of friends, self-help groups and caring professionals can make a vital difference in the bereaved family's eventual recovery. They must not be afraid to ask for help. It's out there if they need it.