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of “Why? Why? WHY???” For right now, you may be frustrated that you don’t know the answer to the question. And you may never fully understand “Why?” But most survivors go through a long and complicated process of putting together the pieces of the puzzle that ultimately leaves them with at least some understanding of their loved one’s state of mind, plus a hard-won acceptance of the fact that the only person who could really explain this is now gone. And they begin to realize that they will have to learn to live with the painful but unanswerable questions that still remain. If you ask people whose loved ones have died from suicide (many call themselves “suicide survivors” - a term we will use often in this book) they will tell you that, with time, the intensity of the “Why?” question subsides. We will have more to say about your need to search for answers in later sections of the book.

Your Emotions – The Roller Coaster

Most people find themselves on an “emotional roller coaster” after a suicide. You are probably going through a whole host of feelings that can change from one moment to the next. Here are some of the feelings that you may be experiencing:

- **Anxiety & panic** - Your brain is shouting to you that “this is an emergency!” Intense fear, worry, and panic are going to be experienced by almost everyone at some point, usually early on in the process, and then periodically down the road. The “flashbacks” that we just described before are driven by this same intense anxiety.
- **Numbness and shock** – in a way, this is the opposite of panic – it is as if your mind cannot even grasp what has happened, so you “shut down.” Think of it as like the circuit breakers that protect the wiring in your house from overloading. Your “emotional circuit breakers” have been tripped, and so the lights have gone out and you feel like you are just stumbling around in the dark.
- **Confusion** – something that seems almost incomprehensible has happened, something that is difficult for many people to understand – a human being has taken their own life. When

you think about it, this flies in the face of what many of us just take for granted, which is that, “Of course, everyone wants to live as long as they can, don’t they?” Sorting out the confusion, and working to understand what has happened is part of the psychological work that you will need to do. Reading this book can be a step in that direction.

- **Relief** – for some people the word “relief” seems to be an odd reaction to the death of a loved one from suicide. For some, any feeling of relief would be considered unthinkable. Yet, for others, the suicide death of a family member means that there will be no further pain in their loved one’s life. It means that there will be no more calls at 3 in the morning, no more police involvement, no more arguments, and no more hospitalizations. It means that constant worry has been replaced with grief, uncertainty has given way to a final answer, a life of chaos has turned into a death where the suffering person is no longer living in anguish. If you are experiencing any of these reactions, we hope that you can see that feeling “relief” is certainly understandable. Relief is an entirely natural and human response to the end of suffering – your loved one’s, and your own.
- **Helplessness** - One of the most difficult aspects of a suicide loss is the sense of helplessness it produces in survivors. You may have felt helpless to control the psychiatric, personal, or financial problems of your loved one. Perhaps you saw the suicide coming, but were powerless to stop it. Perhaps your loved one resisted all of your attempts to help. Or perhaps you didn’t see it coming. Whatever the situation, you may now feel helpless in coping with your grief. For the time being, just understand that almost all survivors have these feelings at one time or another – **and that there really are limits to how much anyone can do to prevent a suicide.**
- **Anger** – you may feel furious about what has happened - a need to blame or punish someone for the suicide. Suicide seems to release a burst of “anger energy” in individuals and families, and many people feel a need to put that anger somewhere.