


Surviving the suicide of a loved one

**INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE
ON HOW TO OVERCOME GRIEF
AND REBUILD YOURSELF**



**FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC
AND LABRADOR HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES
COMMISSION**



Losing a loved one to suicide is a shattering, painful and overwhelming experience. In addition to the tremendous grief experienced in such a situation, the many questions that remain unanswered make grief extremely difficult to overcome.

While it is hard to imagine at this point, the pain eventually fades away. In time, it leaves a “scar” with which one must learn to live.

With courage, hope and support from your loved ones, healing, rebuilding yourself and getting through such an ordeal is possible.

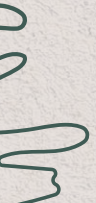
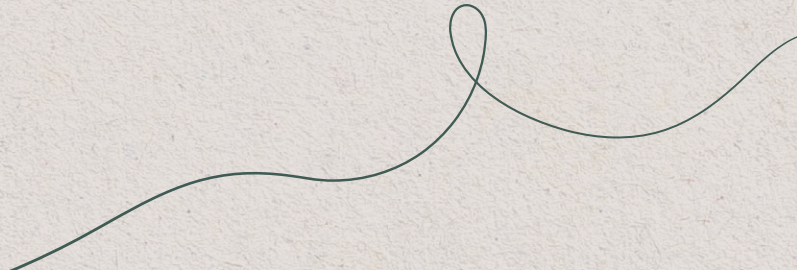


... But why?

When a loved one takes their own life, many of the questions we ask ourselves start with *Why?* These questions occupy our thoughts for months or even years.

Faced with such a sudden loss, it's only natural to try to understand what happened by reading over our last exchanges with the person, reflecting on our last interactions, trying to remember signals or clues to find a satisfactory answer...

Unfortunately, in most cases, no definitive answers are ever to be found.



WHY TAKE YOUR OWN LIFE?

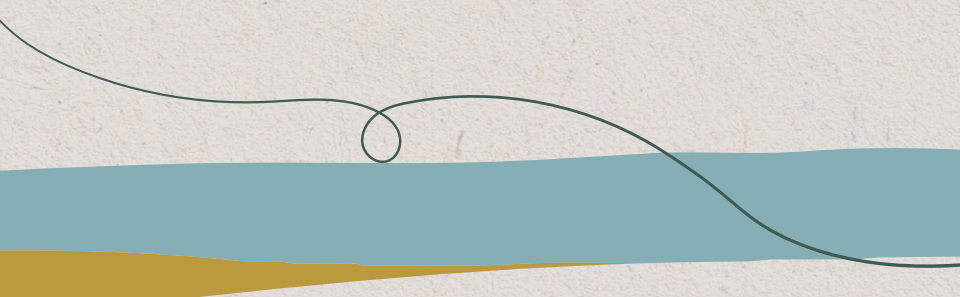
This difficult question usually follows the announcement of death by suicide. Most often, the loved one was not necessarily seeking to die, but rather to put an end to his or her suffering. The person was experiencing a situation that had become unbearable and found himself or herself out of options for dealing with it. Although the act itself may seem spontaneous, many factors may also have come into play in the process leading up to it: factors related to the person's past, trauma, mental or physical health, or perception of life in general.

With that in mind, we shouldn't be looking for someone to blame, or for a situation that precipitated the act. Suicide remains complex and is not easily explained.

WHY DIDN'T HE OR SHE TELL ME ABOUT IT?

Because there is a lot of stigma and fear associated with suicide, it is extremely difficult to disclose suicidal thoughts to loved ones. The person may be afraid of becoming a burden, of what will happen next, or may not trust available services. Maybe the person has shared their distress or suicidal thoughts with you, so you feel a lot of guilt right now. This is a normal feeling, but suicide is too complex to blame anyone or anything in particular.

It is important to continue to talk about it to encourage those who are suffering to seek help.



WHY DIDN'T I SEE IT COMING?

Each person has different ways of expressing distress and suffering. When they do occur, warning signs can be difficult to detect, and a person with suicidal thoughts may be able to hide them. Sometimes the person may even seem to be doing just fine.

While we all have a role to play in preventing suicide, the weight of responsibility for the loss of a loved one to suicide cannot be placed on anyone's shoulders, regardless of their relationship with the person. You may be thinking that if you had known, you would have done things differently, but you did what you could to help, consciously or not, and to the best of your ability.




What to expect when you are grieving


Grief is a complex process, unique to each individual, and the stages of grief do not necessarily follow a linear path. With many factors beyond our control, there is no right or wrong way to grieve.

Grieving a suicide is particularly traumatic and one can rarely prepare for it. There are many questions, and it can be difficult to put words on how you feel. Feelings of guilt can sometimes be overwhelming and affect our recovery.

Everyone deals with trauma at their own pace. In the early stages, the body and mind may be reacting in ways and with an intensity that we cannot understand.



While many aspects of grief are unpredictable, certain emotions, reactions or thoughts may arise after the loss of a loved one to suicide. Such reactions may persist, recur, intensify or subside over time. Here is an overview of possible reactions to the death of a loved one.



SHOCK

You may experience a state of shock for several days following the announcement of death. Nothing seems real or meaningful anymore. You feel numb. This is a normal reaction, which protects us from the pain. Other possible reactions include:

- Denial of the cause of death
- Inability to make decisions
- Prolonged and uncontrollable crying
- Rage, anger or misunderstanding
- Feelings of guilt or shame
- Loss of touch with reality
- Constant questioning


ONCE SHOCK IS OVER

It is normal for new emotions and reactions to develop or intensify over time. It may take a few days or even weeks to truly realize that the person is gone.

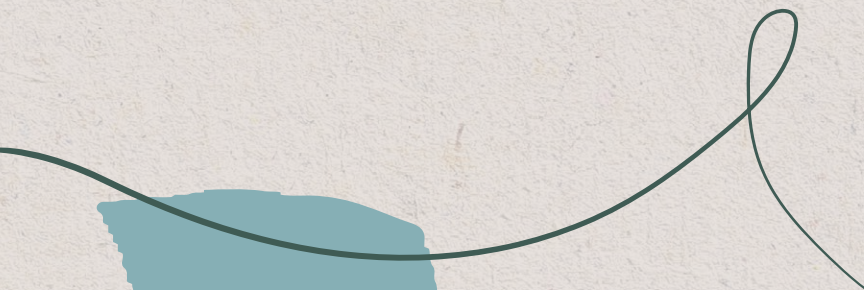
To numb the pain, people sometimes turn to harmful coping strategies, such as increased use of alcohol or drugs, or excessive focus on other areas of their lives (e.g., working out, excessive housework, workaholism).

Some may not be able to eat, sleep or function properly. Some lose interest in their activities, hobbies and surroundings. Other possible reactions include:

- Questioning our spiritual beliefs
- Interest in death or suicidal thoughts
- Loss of connection with spirituality, culture and traditions
- Feelings of betrayal or abandonment
- Feeling of helplessness



Never hesitate to seek professional help if the distress becomes too overwhelming and if suicidal thoughts arise.



OVER TIME

Some of us may try to find our departed loved one by sensing or looking for signs of their presence, perhaps by saying a prayer, talking to them, or meeting them in our dreams. Others may look for places, objects or activities that remind them of the deceased.

One can never fully recover from grief caused by suicide. One learns to live with the absence of the loved one and the suffering gradually subsides to become more tolerable. Although life may seem to return to normal, a memory, a word, a smell, a moment or a person may remind us of our loved one and revive the pain. That pain is a testament to how much we care about the person.

Whatever your emotions, they are legitimate and should be experienced without guilt.



Towards healing

The seven sacred teachings can guide you on your journey towards healing and help you gradually rebuild yourself.

THE CROW - HONESTY

Be honest with yourself

The emotions you experience may not be what you expect. For example, you may feel a sense of relief in difficult situations. You need to accept the coexistence of those sometimes contradictory emotions to be able to live them fully and make peace with yourself.

Make room for expressing your emotions in a way that feels good to you, without worrying about what might be expected of you or what you might see around you.



THE BEAVER - WISDOM

Give yourself the time you need

Recognize that healing is possible, and that pain will ease over time. Grieving is very demanding emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually. That is why you must be patient, supportive and resilient.

Give yourself time to think, pray, meditate, reminisce, or simply grieve.

THE WOLF - HUMILITY

Accept being vulnerable

Being humble means accepting that grieving is necessary. You will experience a range of emotions over which you will not always have control.

Grieving a suicide is devastating and can lead to thoughts of suicide. Be aware of that vulnerability, and don't hesitate to seek professional help.

You don't have to grieve alone. Acknowledge you need support and embrace the help that is offered to you. You may need it more than you think.

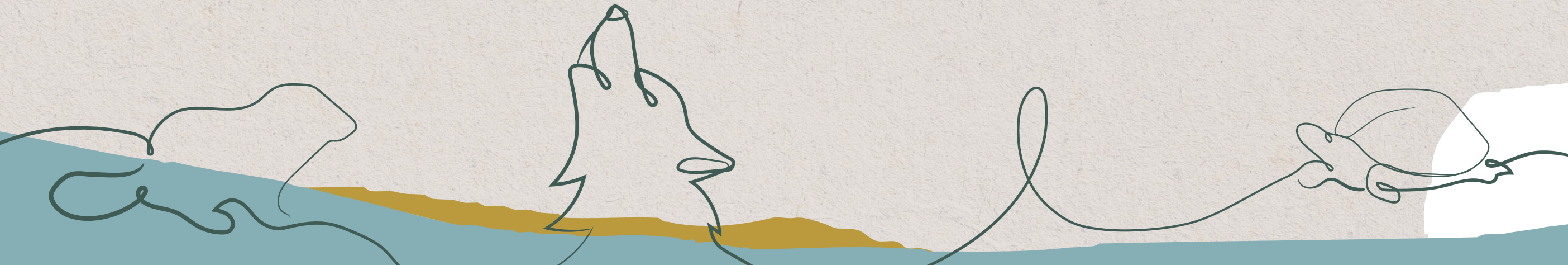
THE TURTLE - TRUTH

Don't be afraid to talk about your feelings

Be sincere. Share your experiences and don't be afraid to express your needs. Tell the truth if you need time or space. Voice your emotions and share your concerns with those around you.

As traumatic as suicide can be, it is helpful to tell it like it is. Talking openly about suicide can also open the door to expressing suffering and breaking taboos.

Talking about things openly can make it easier to deal with them and to make peace with the situation.



THE BEAR - COURAGE

Embrace the future with openness and confidence

The loss of a loved one will forever impact your life. Be brave in equipping and preparing yourself for difficult times ahead. Turn to your loved ones or seek professional care.

One day at a time, you will have to learn to live without the person you lost. Your resilience will be tested and you will discover inner strength and resources that were previously unknown to you.

Despite the hardships, have faith in the future and know there are better days ahead.

THE MOOSE - RESPECT

Honor the memory of the deceased

Keep a place in your heart for the deceased by observing meaningful rituals (such as a gathering, ceremony, activity or prayer). These rituals not only allow you to honor the memory of your loved one, but also give you space to refocus your emotions. Depending on your needs, you may want to repeat them annually, for example, but do not hesitate to stop or space them out if those rituals no longer provide the desired relief.

There are countless ways to celebrate the life of your loved one, and you are free to identify what helps you the most.

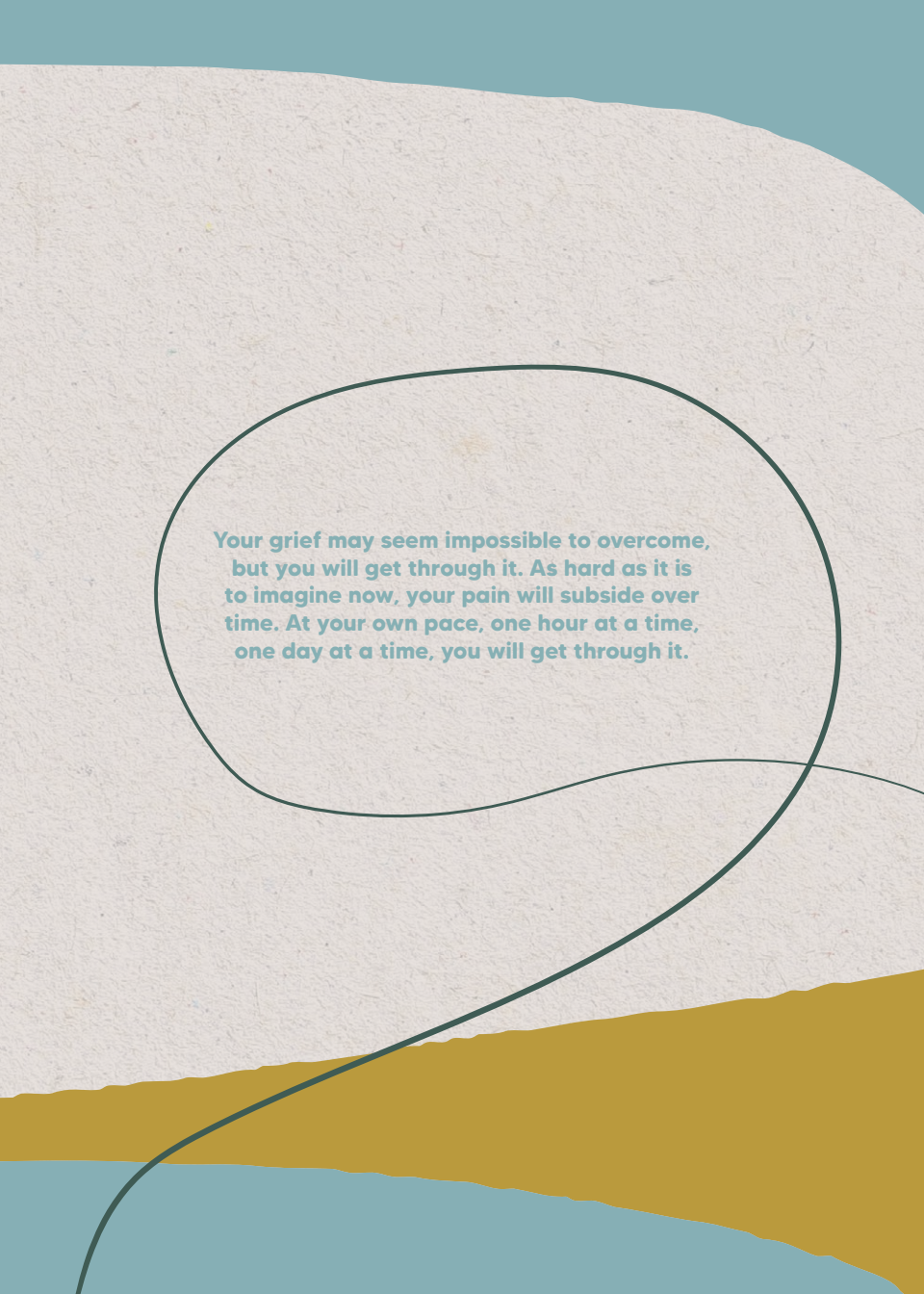
THE EAGLE - LOVE

Surround yourself with the love of those dear to you

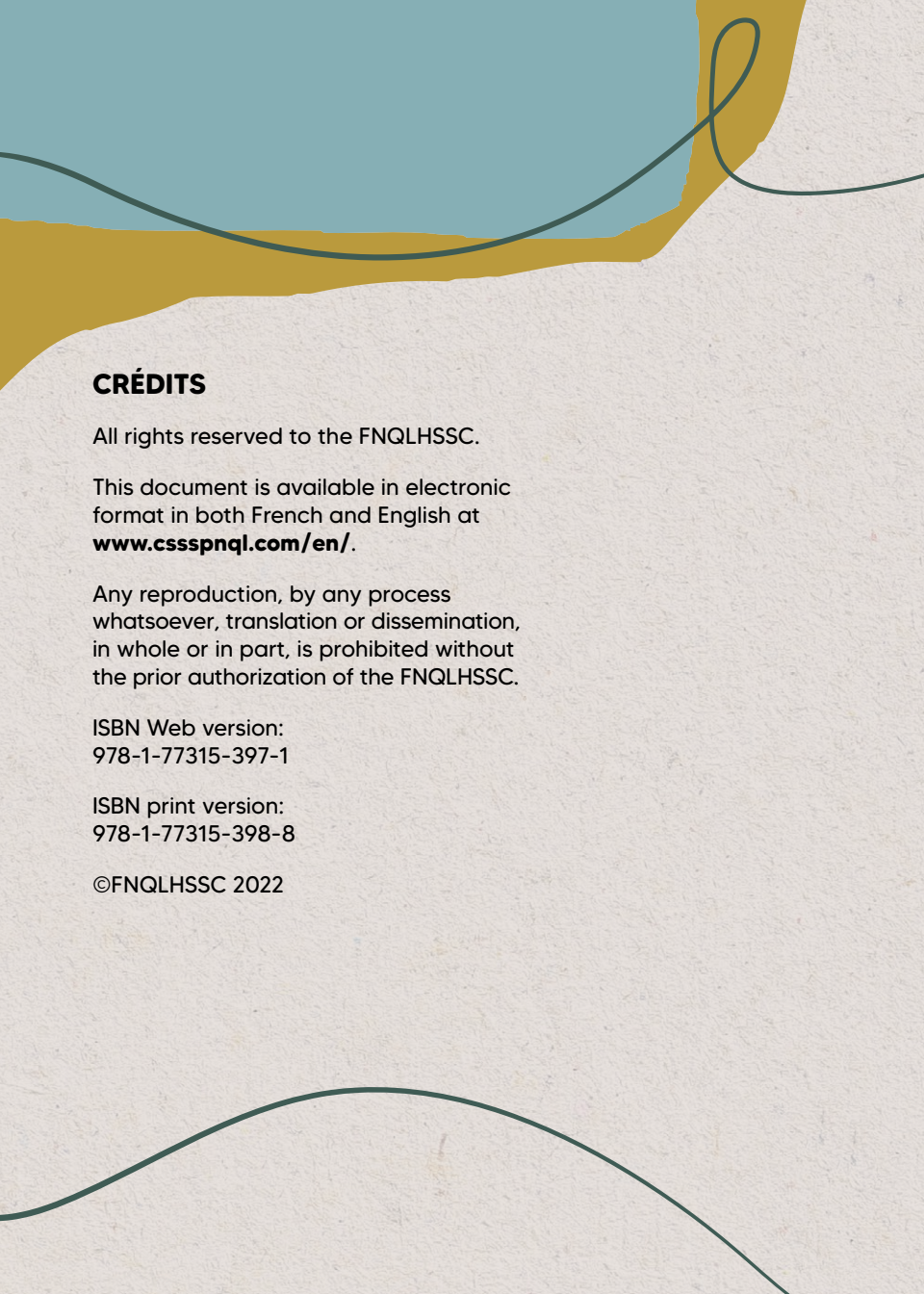
During this difficult time, it is important to surround yourself with people you trust. Don't hesitate to ask for your friends and family's company to break isolation and not be alone. It is only natural for you to need your social circle more than ever to get through those trying times together.

A broken heart needs even more love, support, listening and comfort.





Your grief may seem impossible to overcome, but you will get through it. As hard as it is to imagine now, your pain will subside over time. At your own pace, one hour at a time, one day at a time, you will get through it.



CRÉDITS

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Get help or information

Your community health and social services centre or other
community organizations

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line (24/7)

1 855 242-3310
hopeforwellness.ca

SUICIDE PREVENTION CENTRES (24/7)

1 866-APPELLE (1 866 277-3553)
Besoinaide.ca

Suicide.ca



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This tool was developed by the FNQLHSSC for the National Suicide Prevention Week. We truly hope that you will find it useful and comforting during this difficult time. Feel free to share this leaflet with anyone who might benefit from this information or help you.