



## **Advice for Parents on Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour in Young People: Like Searching for a Needle in a Hay Stack**

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As the parent of teenagers, I had the experience several years ago of my son losing a close friend to suicide. For our family, this came out of the blue as our worst nightmare. Within the space of a few short hours we moved from travelling away on a weekend holiday to we, as parents, sitting outside an interview room at the Police station while our son was interviewed. The nightmare continued for months as our son and other close friends grappled with their tragic loss.

At an early stage, I sought as much advice and guidance as I could to support my son as best I could. Skylight Trust was a great source of useful resources, as was the Mental Health Foundation. Things got better for our family with time, and our son received amazing support which helped him deal with the feelings of guilt (for not being able to “save” his friend) and abandonment he suffered.

Just a week ago, I came to hear of another tragic suicide of a young person, impacting on a number of families we know well from a different school community to our own. Parents were contacting me to ask what helped us. I pointed them to the help resources we found useful and encouraged them to talk to other parents of young people in the peer group and work together in supporting the young people collectively. I also shared that with our experience, we found it useful to avoid comments like “at peace” / “better place” or any talk which glorified the decision of the young person to take their own life, and instead focus on the tragic choice made in the face of other options for dealing with the problems which the young person was facing, and the help sources available to the peer group.

I was keen to find some research relating to the role of parents in supporting peers of young people who have lost their lives to suicide, but was struck in my search by a lack of such research, at least in an open source form. It would be great to see more resources developed specifically for parents of young people affected by a suicide in their peer group, to help them navigate this scary journey. My own experience was a thirst for such a resource, and the recent experience showed me that other parents share this desire for information that will help them respond in the best way that they can to support their child / young person through difficult times.