

# THE PARENTS' CHAT ROOM

By: Dr. Maulik Trivedi

**Q:** Dear Dr. Trivedi,

*We are parents of a 19 year old girl who has been through a very difficult time. It was difficult for us too but we would like to share the story and we hope the other parents will take what happened with us seriously and not make similar mistakes with their children. Our daughter has always been very good in her studies and an overall a sensitive, kind and caring girl. She was away at college and met a boy whom she fell in love with. Much against our principles and values, without telling us, she decided to take the relationship with that boy to the next level and ended up becoming pregnant. The boy ended the relationship with her, we turned our back on her and are ashamed of that. To our shock one day we got a call from the police that our daughter had attempted to commit suicide and was in the hospital. Luckily she survived but we are full of guilt and feel terrible that we drove her to this point. Right now, we would do anything to make amends but she does not trust us anymore and does not think we genuinely want to make an effort to give her a good home, good parents and a good relationship. We admit our mistake but she is not ready to forgive us even though she is the one who made a mistake first. Please tell us how to get our message across to her?*

**A:** Your question probes at the heart of so many different areas of life. It is also the kind of question that has a unique answer for every family that faces such a situation. Therefore, I will try to answer the question with helpful suggestions that help you find the answer that is right for your family.

To start, please recognize that what you are out to accomplish will be a process. It is surely not the kind of thing that you will resolve over one conversation or one decision. Approach it with love and seek broader understanding about it in the process. Think of it as a journey that when embarked upon with patience and time will result in the right path revealing itself to your family.

Next, please consider involving a professional who helps people find their way out of intricate emotional situations including having helped someone who has tried to commit suicide. Life often lands us in circumstances that are clearly outside our capacity to safely find our way out of. Many a times, people attempt suicide in such circumstances. Having the proper guidance can save much time in healing and help you arrive much closer to your destination than trying to get there on your own. An experienced counselor or a licensed therapist in the field of social work or psychology can be an important guide in navigating the separate paths that you find your family members on and, at times, feel overwhelmed by.

Another point that you must be cognizant of is that when one has attempted suicide, it is almost certain that they are suffering from



the illness of depression. This illness does not manifest itself like illnesses that affect our physical body. There is no obvious bruise or bleeding. There's only inner suffering that is not visible to others. Therefore, depression often goes unnoticed while it's happening right in front of us. Depression manifests itself in our thoughts, which are manifested by changes in our outward behaviors. Knowing these patterns of thoughts and behaviors can help identify depression and lead to recovery through appropriate treatment. The most important thing I must tell you is that Depression is a very treatable illness in this day and age. Having your daughter evaluated, if you have not done so already, may be life-saving measure.

In your question, you mention feeling guilty and responsible for driving your daughter to this point. Your daughter is very likely facing similar emotional stress emanating from the circumstances. These negative feelings are natural and expected. Although, it is in your interest to move away from them as they can be a source of emotional drain. Instead focus on positive part of the healing process. Invest your time and energy in seeking and following steps towards a positive outcome to your circumstances.

It is also part of the healing process to identify and acknowledge the principles and values for your family that you refer to. Without engaging in a blaming game, have an adult conversation with your daughter about the values contained in the principles that your family follows. Also, spend some time considering principles that your family may not have considered or overlooked. A balanced approach that acknowledges your daughter's individual right to make independent choices will regenerate her self-esteem and prevent her from feeling guilty and blamed by this event in her life. With an open-minded approach, this exercise can advance your healing process by leaps and bounds.

Finally, know that your family's healing process will be paved with trust and understanding. This is often the shortest and quickest solution that is the most challenging for us humans. It requires committed effort from both sides; the effort must be made in the form of forgiveness and love from both sides. Daily practice will make this possible. You see, unfortunately, the unexpected event produces the exact opposite feeling within us, namely disappointment, and perhaps anger, that our expectations were not met. Under these circumstances, it is best to accept that unexpected outcomes in life situations are opportunities for learning. Open and non-judgmental communication will be the cement that binds your family on your way safely out of this situation. Thank you for your question.

*Dr. Trivedi is a Board-Certified Psychiatrist. He treats children, adolescents and adults.*

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