



Suicide Grief Support

Grief following suicide is a complex and often overwhelming experience. Often, a **survivor's** (*someone who has lost a loved one to suicide*) first reaction is shock. After the initial shock there may be feelings of anger, guilt, and of course, sadness. Suicide results in many unanswered questions. Sometimes friends are uncomfortable talking about the death, leaving survivors feeling uncertain about what and who to tell. This booklet was designed to give you some useful information and resources to help you at this difficult time.

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Alliance for Suicide Prevention of Larimer County

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www.AllianceforSuicidePrevention.org

Help and Support Is Available in Larimer County...

SUICIDE GRIEF SUPPORT PROGRAMS: *We are beginning 2 additional monthly support groups in October of 2012. Please check our website for details.

www.AllianceforSuicidePrevention.org

Alliance for Suicide Prevention of Larimer County

- Heartbeat – monthly drop-in grief support group for individuals who have lost a loved one to suicide. Volunteers facilitate this group. This group does not replace therapy. The healing achieved within this group is the result of understanding, encouragement, and caring. Privacy and confidentiality are respected. No registration required.

TIME: 6:30-8:30pm

DATE: 3rd Wednesday of every month

**PLACE: Pathways Building at Pathways Hospice
305 Carpenter Road
Fort Collins, CO**

- Outreach – grief support for families in crisis after a suicide. Volunteer Support Teams are available to provide help and support to family members and friends following the death of a loved one by suicide. These volunteers are available to visit by phone or in person.
- Heart to Heart Class – a structured eight week educational and support class for people who have lost a loved one to suicide. Registration is required.
- Lending Library –books, videos and research materials on many topics, including grief and suicide.

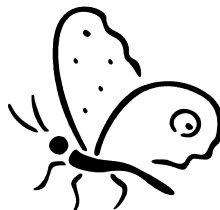
Pathways Hospice of Northern Colorado

- Grief Counseling (Group, Individual, and Family) Contact Hospice at (970) 663-3500 for further information.

We understand, we accept, we support...

It helps to talk, it heals to share...

*We cannot take away your pain,
but we can share it in an atmosphere of
love and acceptance.*



“Many survivors that come to the group tell us that this is the first time they have a safe place to talk about the unique grief of suicide with other people who understand”.

-Maxine French, Grief Outreach Coordinator and Heartbeat Support Group facilitator
Alliance for Suicide Prevention

Your donation will help us support those in need. Please call (970) 482-2209 for more information.

How Support Groups can be Beneficial:

(Link Counseling Center, Reprinted from: LEGACY, Ogden/Layton, Utah, September, 1994)

- **Verbalizing** thoughts and emotions helps to connect people with their feelings (no matter how “crazy” those feelings seem).
- **A forum is provided** for airing grief and seeking direction and support.
- **Grieving persons learn** that all of us have resources within for helping ourselves and others.
- **Members** have the opportunity to become friends with people who have suffered similar losses. This reverses the tendency toward isolation and provides a sense of belonging and community.
- **It is a relief to learn** that we are not going crazy, we are just grieving. These feelings, no matter what they are, are normal. It may be the only place where survivors feel understood. There, true feelings of anger and/or guilt can be expressed without judgment.
- **It helps to realize** that no one is alone in grief.
- **The longer-bereaved** survivors can be models of hope.
- **There is a sense** of doing something positive about grief. Grief can’t be ignored.
- **This is a place to meet** people who truly care about you. Everyone needs hugs and a support group is a good place to get them.
- **The self-esteem** of a grieving person can be very low. Studies show that based on a scale of 100, an average person’s self-esteem is in the 70’s, whereas a grieving person’s self-esteem ranks in the teens. Self-esteem is enhanced by being able to help others which happens in support groups. By providing support and suggestions for coping, you receive a sense that you are of value to others. Other people in the group provide assurances that they too have faced similar grief experiences and yet survived.
- **Being able to speak** to others about problems without encountering rejection reinforces feelings of self-worth. Support groups provide the opportunity to volunteer. Grieving persons feel worthwhile when they realize that even though they are grieving they can help. The process of learning to be of help to another person can develop self-esteem and self-confidence.



Grief

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Every person grieves in his/her own way. At different times, people may feel: sadness, denial, relief, guilt, tired, loss, anger, shame, fear, disconnected from reality. After a while, a person may feel like things are going ok and then they experience feelings of grief again. This is normal. There is no time limit to grief.



Grieving: What to Expect When a Loved One Has Died from Suicide

(Link Counseling Center)

Know that this may be the worst pain you will ever feel. You may experience many different emotions, some of them all at one time: denial, shock, confusion, guilt, anger, and PAIN – this is very normal. It is important to know that you can SURVIVE the pain. There may be times when you don't think that you can, but it is possible.

Some common things you may experience are:

1. Continuing to ask WHY.
2. Pain.
3. Feeling numb – thinking that nothing else could ever hurt you.
4. Not being able to remember things, such as what time or day it is.
5. Not being able to concentrate.
6. Feeling sometimes that this is not real; it didn't really happen.
7. Thinking you are going crazy because of what you are thinking or feeling.
8. Your mind won't shut off sometimes. It seems to race all over the place and settle nowhere.
9. Feelings of panic – wanting to run away. You don't know where – you just want to run, to give up, to escape what has happened.
10. Feeling guilty when you catch yourself laughing or smiling at something.
11. Fearing you can't go on living in this pain.

Some Ways in Which You Might Help Yourself: (Link Counseling Center)

DO:

- *Be patient* with others who may not always understand, say or do the right thing. Most people really do care.
- *Steer clear* of people who want to tell you how to feel. They mean well, but that may not be helpful to you at this time.
- *Learn to say NO*. Don't set yourself up by agreeing to something you are not ready for.
- *Learn to ask* for help when you need it. Ask for what you need.



- *Be patient* with yourself. Go at your own pace, but allow those around you to do the same.
- *Remember to take it* one day at a time or, as someone very wise once said, one moment at a time.
- *Know that* you need to talk. It can help to get it out instead of keeping it all locked inside you.
- *Call someone*.
- *Know that there* are groups that can be helpful, such as the Heartbeat groups or other bereavement support groups. Check for referrals in your area.

DON'T:

- *Isolate yourself*. You may want to – but don't.
- *Be surprised* when after a couple of weeks or a month the calls stop and people don't come by. Life does go on and sometimes people get tired or scared of trying to deal with feelings they can't understand. Perhaps you can help them to understand.
- *Be surprised* if you don't have the energy to buy groceries or to do laundry. It's common.
- *Be disappointed* if just when you think you have things under control a wave of grief comes back.

Take Your Time

By Therese Goodrich, Executive Director, Compassionate Friends

The one phrase we hear more than any other is “It will take time for you to get over your loved one’s death.” We know that this is spoken with care and love. But little do we know at the beginning of our grief just what time means: the first time, the day time, the night time, the last time, all of these times. The one thing we can say is “take it.” Take all the time you need. Grief is hard work, and we need to take that time for all of the aspects we talk so much about and really work through it.

Take the time to feel: it is hard but worth it. We can’t just push those feelings aside because they are part of who we are, how we have managed, and the life we have had. All of our experiences combine to affect our feelings.

Take the time to talk. Talk to anyone who seems to care about you. Ask your friends and family if they will take the time to listen.

Take the time to read. When you read the experiences of others, you will realize that you are not alone. Maybe a special book will help you understand what is happening to you during this time we call bereavement; take the time to read and re-read the paragraphs or chapters that help.

Take the time to take care of yourself physically. If you like to walk, jog, or run, go out and use that time to help you feel better. Get enough rest, take the time to sleep late some days, or go to bed earlier if you need to. Sleeping may be an escape, but if it helps you, take the time for an extra few hours. Take care of yourself by eating better. Try to understand that food gives you some energy and that food helps to satisfy unmet needs. Food is always better for you than drugs or alcohol, and a small weight gain or loss is not unusual. Take time to understand what is happening to your body.

Take the time to be angry or guilty without letting these feelings ruin your life. You may think that your life is ruined anyhow and who cares, but anger and guilt turned inward can destroy your self-esteem faster than anything. Take time to sort through these feelings and acknowledge them, than let them go.

Know that when someone says, “It will take time,” we can nod and try to accept that as part of our getting through these days, months and years.

Remember that someday you will take the time to help someone else, and that time will be the most satisfying time of all.



Beyond Surviving: Suggestions for Survivors

By Iris M. Bolton, reprinted with permission from *Suicide and its Aftermath*
(Dunne, McIntosh, Dunne-Maxim, Norton and Co., 1987)

1. Know you can survive. You may not think so, but you can.
2. Struggle with “why” it happened until you no longer need to know “why” or until you are satisfied with partial answers.
3. Know you may feel overwhelmed by the intensity of your feelings but all your feelings are normal.
4. Anger, guilt, confusion, forgetfulness are common responses. You are not crazy, you are in mourning.
5. Be aware you may feel appropriate anger at the person, at the world, at God, at yourself. It’s okay to express it.
6. You may feel guilty for what you think you did or did not do. Guilt can turn into regret, through forgiveness.
7. Having suicidal thoughts is common. It does not mean that you will act on those thoughts.
8. Remember to take one moment, or one day at a time.
9. Find a good listener with whom to share. Call someone if you need to talk.
10. Don't be afraid to cry. Tears are healing.
11. Give yourself time to heal.
12. Remember, the choice was not yours. No one is the sole influence in another’s life.
13. Expect setbacks. If emotions return like a tidal wave, you may only be experiencing a remnant of grief, an unfinished piece.
14. Try to put off major decisions. Give yourself permission to get yourself professional help.
15. Be aware of the pain of your family and friends.
16. Be patient with yourself and with others who may not understand.
17. Set your own limits and learn to say no.
18. Steer clear of people who want to tell you what or how to feel.
19. Know that there are support groups that can be helpful.
20. It is common to experience physical reactions to your grief, e.g., headaches, loss of appetite, inability to sleep.
21. Call on your personal faith to help you through.
22. The willingness to laugh with others and at yourself is healing.
23. Wear out your questions, anger, guilt, or other feelings until you can let them go. Letting go doesn’t mean forgetting.
24. Know that you will never be the same again, but you can survive and even go beyond just surviving.



Ways to Help Someone Who has Lost a Loved One

(Hope for Today, adapted from Link Counseling Center)

Everyone handles grief in his own way. It is a very personal thing. A spouse, a mother, a father, a brother or sister, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends and neighbors. Each will grieve individually. It is helpful to keep this in mind. When there is a death of a loved one by suicide, be aware that there will be a depth and range of feelings. It is important to honor and respect the needs of the survivors in the days, weeks and months following the suicide. Often you may feel helpless in this situation.

Here are some helpful suggestions.

- Surround them with as much love and understanding as you can.
- Let them talk. Usually they are not looking for answers or advice, but just want to voice their thoughts, feelings...
- Allow them to express their grief.
- Be prepared to listen to their anger and pain.
- Allow them to talk about their loved ones freely.
- Encourage the family to make decisions together.
- Expect them to tire easily. Grieving is hard work.
- Give them private time.
- Offer to help make or receive phone calls. Or assist with bills, mail, people who call, bring food...
- Continue to provide help and support in the days and months ahead.
- Don't be afraid to ask how a person is doing, even months or years later. It doesn't "remind" them, it opens the door for them to talk.



How Children Respond to Grief

(Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt PhD, conference on Understanding Children and Teens Who Grieve, 10/28/02)



Children grieve differently than adults. The age of the child affects the child's response to death. Each child's personality will also play a role in their grieving process. Some of the responses that children might have are: shock/lack of feeling; regression; disorganization; panic; explosive emotions; acting out; hyper-maturity; physiological changes; fear; guilt/regret/self-blame; loss/emptiness/sadness; relief.

Because a child's world is mostly "play", they tend to mourn in "doses". This can sometimes make adults feel uncomfortable at funerals when they see children playing and not acting sad. This behavior is common to children. It is normal for children to express their grief through their play.

Explaining Death to Children

(Hospice of Larimer County)

- When talking to children about death it is important to give them accurate and clear information that is appropriate to their age of understanding.
- Use the words death and dying to explain what happened. Children need to connect the correct word with the event.
- Use of terms like "deceased" or "passed away" are confusing to children. Explanations such as "grandma went to sleep," may cause a child to fear sleeping.
- It is helpful to talk about four concepts that explain death:
 - Death is permanent. "Dead people do not return to life."
 - All living things will die someday. Talk about a personal experience, such as the death of a pet.
 - When someone dies, their body stops working. Give them concrete examples, such as "Dead people do not breathe; their heart stops beating; they don't feel anything; they don't eat anymore."
 - Talk to them about what causes death. Be honest and accurate. Give age appropriate facts.

Suggestions for Explaining Suicide

We don't always know why someone dies from suicide. Sometimes, people may kill themselves because they feel so hopeless and have so much emotional pain that they think dying is the only way to escape their pain. They are wrong, but sadly the person who died had something wrong with his brain that kept him from thinking clearly. There is help. There is always another way.

Including Children in Memorial Services and Funerals

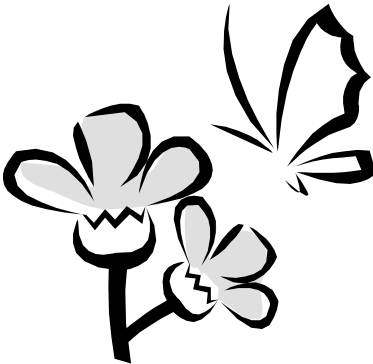
(Hospice of Larimer County)

- Talk to children about the reasons we have funerals and memorial services.
- Explain what takes place at these rituals and what they might expect to see. You may choose to talk about why people send flowers and sing songs. You may talk about the casket. Let them know if the body will be viewed.
- Let them know that some people will be crying. Explain that people cry because they are sad and miss the person. Explain that you will be sad and probably cry, and it's okay for the child to cry too.
- After you have talked to them about what to expect, ask them if they want to attend.
- Children may want to participate in some special way by writing a letter to the dead person, making a drawing, lighting a candle, or bringing a flower.

Poetry

I Don't Know Why...

*I don't know why.
 I'll never know why.
 I don't have to know why.
 I don't like it.
 I don't have to like it.
 What I have to do
 Is make a choice about living.
 What I want to do
 Is accept it and go on living.
 The choice is mine.
 I can go on living,
 Valuing every moment
 In a way I never did before,
 Or I can be destroyed by it
 And, in turn, destroy others.
 I thought I was immortal.
 That my family
 And my children
 Were immortal too.
 That tragedy happened
 Only to others.
 But I know now that
 Life is tenuous.
 So I am choosing to
 Go on living,
 Making the most of the time
 I have, valuing
 My family and friends
 In a way never possible before.*



-Iris M. Bolton

From My Son...My Son...

A Guide to Healing after Death, Loss or Suicide

Remember

*When you remember me, it means that you have carried something of who I am with you.
 That I have left some mark of who I am on who you are.
 It means that you can summon me back to your mind
 even though countless years and miles may stand between us.
 It means that if we meet again, you will know me.
 It means that even after I die, you can still see my face and hear my voice and speak to me in your heart.*

-Frederick Buecher, *Whistling in the Dark*

Fond Memories

*Fond memories.
One occasion still fresh in my mind.
Memories of time spent-now gone,
And activities shared-no more.*

*Fond memories...
Of joy and, yes, of sorrow,
The reminiscing of your presence in my life,
Remembering the quiet times when words failed.*

*Memories of just being together
In a bond that felt as though it would last forever.
Fond memories.*

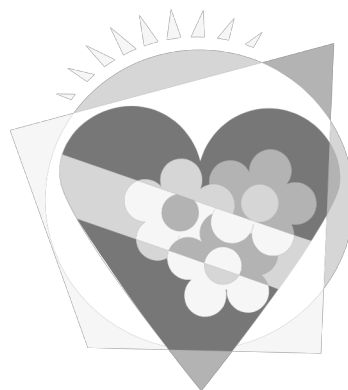
*Once laced with the pain of the loss.
Memories once flavored with the taste of my own tears,
With the sorrow that chased away my sleep,
Leaving me only with the pain
That felt as though it would last forever.
Fond memories.*

*Now peaceful with the acceptance of your absence.
A gap no longer filled with deep despair,
But with the joy of having known you,
And of having loved you
In a way that feels should last forever.
Fond memories.*

*Now not of your death, but of your life.
Reminiscent of the fun we shared,
Animated with the mental image of your smiling face.
The sound of your laughter recorded in my memory.*

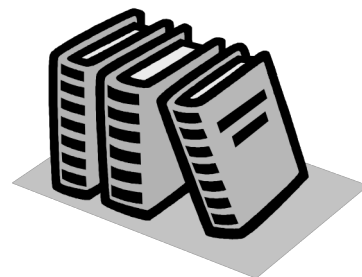
*In celebrating our time together
That special time now preserved in these memories,
Fond memories that will stay in my heart forever.*

-Bill Birch



Book List

Depression/Mental Illness



Conquering the Beast Within By: Cait Irwin. Publisher: Three Rivers Press
A teenage girl describes her battle with depression. Irwin gives hope by showing how she won and gained back her life. Easy to read, fun illustrations.

Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness By: William Styron. Publisher: Vintage Books

Styron's descent into madness and eventual recovery. The author tells his story with candor and precision. Offers insights into depression and its gentle roots. Gives hope for recovery from mental illness.

The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression By: Andrew Solomon.

Suicide

After Suicide Loss: Coping With Your Grief By: Robert Baugher.

After Suicide By: John H. Hewett. Publisher: Westminster Press
A practical guide for those having to cope in the aftermath of a suicide. Presents ways to deal with guilt, anger, bewilderment, and shame. Includes how to live as a survivor, how to explain suicide to children, and how to reconcile with religious beliefs. An Anniversary memorial is included.

My Son, My Son: A Guide to Healing After Death By: Iris Bolton. Publisher: Bolton Press
The author takes the reader on a journey beginning with her son's suicide. A beautifully written book that helps the reader understand suicide, grief, survival, and hope. This book is a helpful resource for those experiencing loss through suicide and demonstrates turning tragedy into triumph.

Night Falls Fast; Understanding Suicide By: Kay Redfield Jamison. Publisher: Alfred A. Knopf

Silent Grief: Living in the Wake of Suicide By: Christopher Lukas and Henry M. Seiden, PhD. Publisher: Bantam Books

Offers practical advice and emotional support on overcoming the guilt, anger, despair, depression and fear that follow in the wake of suicide. Survivors will learn how to confront, understand, and share their grief, and regain control of their lives from the author's helpful suggestions and illuminating interviews with other survivors. This authoritative, inspiring book pierces with a brilliant ray of hope the shrouds the subject of suicide. Helps survivors to understand and accept the past and lighting the way to a new future.

Stronger than Death: When Suicide Touches Your Life By: Sue Chance. Publisher: W.W. Morton & Co
Speaks to survivors of suicide and to those who have contemplated suicide. Weaves the author's personal account of her son's suicide with practical information about reactions among suicide survivors. A good book for suicide survivors containing steps toward recovery.

Words I Never Thought to Speak; Stories of Life By: Victoria Alexander. Publisher: Lexington Books

Grief Literature for Children

Books for children 3-9 years:

Alex, Marlee & Ben, Grandpa and Me. (We learn about death)
 Barker Peggy, What happened When Grandma Died, Concordia Publishing House.
 Grollman, Earl, Talking About Death: dialogue between parent and child, Beacon Press, 1990.
 Hammond, Janice M., When my Dad Died, Cranbrook Publication Co.
 Johnson, Joy and Marv, Where's Jess?, Centering Corporation, 1992. (Brother/Sister)
 Pristine, Joan Singleton, Someone Special Died, Price, StEM, Sloan, 1987.

Books For Children Ages 9-12:

Barker, Peggy, What Happened When Grandma Died, Concordia 1984.
 Jampolsky, G., Straight From The Siblings: Another Look at the Rainbow, Celestial Arts, 1982.
 Johnson, Philip E., Goodbye, Mom, Goodbye, Welch Publishing Co.
 Koch, Ron Goodbye Grandpa, Augsburg Publishing House.
 Kremantz, Jill, How it Feels When A Parent Dies, Alfred Knop, 1983.
 Lovre, Cheri, When Somebody Special Dies. (Children talking about siblings or parents who have died

Books For Children 13 and Over:

Gootman, Marilyn E., Ed D., When a Friend Dies: A Book for Teens About Grieving & Healing, Free Spirit Publishing, Inc., 1994.
 Grollman, Early A., Grollman, Sharon H., Talking About Suicide, Char Koosta Printing.
 Kremantz, Jill, How It Feels When A Parent Dies, Alfred Knopf, 1983.

Books on Children/Teenager Grief:

After a Suicide: A Workbook for Grieving Kids, The Dougy Center for Grieving Children www.dougy.org
 Fitzgerald, Helen, The Grieving Child: a parent's guide, Simon & Schuster, 1992.
 Gaffney, Donna A., The Seasons of Grief: Helping Children Grow Through Loss, Penguin Books, 1988.
 Jackson Edgar, N., Telling a Child About Death, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993.
 Ingpen, Robert and Mellanie, Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children, Bantam Books, 1983.
 Schaefer, Dan and Lyons, Christine, How Do We Tell the Children? A Step-By-Step Guide for Helping Children Two to Teen Cope.
 Wionokuer, Howard, How to Help Children Handle Death, To Life.



Internet Resources

NATIONAL LINKS

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - www.afsp.org

Learn about suicide prevention efforts, research and education, and about the underlying mental illnesses responsible for suicide.

American Association of Suicidology - www.suicidology.org

Dedicated to the understanding and prevention of suicide.

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill - www.nami.org

With more than 220,000 members, NAMI is the nation's largest organization dedicated to improving lives of persons affected by mental illness.

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance - www.dbsalliance.org

Dedicated to improving lives of people living with depression and bipolar disorders.

Suicide Awareness / Voices of Education - www.save.org

The mission of SAVE is to educate about suicide prevention and to speak for suicide survivors.

Parents of Suicide - www.parentsofsuicide.com

Online support group for parents of suicides.

Families for Depression Awareness - www.familyaware.org

This site is intended to help raise awareness about suicide through education and support.

LOCAL LINKS

Connections - www.healthinfosource.com

Mental health and substance abuse resources for Larimer County, Colorado.

Pathways Hospice of Northern Colorado – www.pathways-cares.org

Grief counseling, education, and support.

Office of Suicide Prevention for the state of Colorado - www.cdphe.state.co.us/pp/suicide/

Alliance for Suicide Prevention of Larimer County – www.AllianceforSuicidePrevention.org



Community Resources

INFORMATION AND REFERRAL FOR COMMUNITY RESOURCES

FirstCall 211 or (970) 407-7066
www.firstcall211.org

LOCAL GRIEF SUPPORT

Alliance for Suicide Prevention – suicide prevention through education and awareness, and grief support (970) 482-2209
www.AllianceforSuicidePrevention.org

Pathways Hospice of Northern Colorado – grief and loss counseling, education and support (970) 663-3500
www.pathways-care.org

THERAPIST REFERRAL

Connections (Fort Collins) (970) 221-5551

THP Loveland Counseling Connections (970) 461-8944

EMERGENCY (24 hours)

Hospitals
Poudre Valley Hospital (970) 495-8090
McKee Hospital (970) 669-4640
Estes Park Medical Center (970) 586-2317

National Suicide Hotline CRISIS LINE 1-800-SUICIDE
(1-800-784-2433)

Emergency (police, ambulance, fire, etc.) 911

LOCAL MENTAL HEALTH RELATED RESOURCES

Touchstone Health Partners (THP) (Fort Collins) (970) 494-4300
(Loveland) (970) 494-9870
(Estes Park) (970) 494-9959
(Child & Family Services) (970) 494-4200

Connections (Fort Collins) - Mental health and drug/alcohol abuse (970) 221-5551

Therapist referral, pro-bono therapy www.healthinfosource.com

THP Loveland Counseling Connections - Therapist referral, pro-bono therapy (970) 461-8944

