



Grief Support

Following Suicide Loss

A Resource for Suicide Loss Survivors



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Start with You

notes from fellow loss survivors

We are sorry for your loss and we are glad you found us. Many loss survivor's hands and hearts have touched this booklet, alongside professionals, in an attempt to share practical information and resources to help you navigate the complex grief journey that is suicide loss.

Taking care of yourself during times of grief and loss can sometimes seem overwhelming and impossible. Below are some tidbits from this book in case you need a little help getting started.

- Your journey is your own. Dr. Wolfelt's Mourner's Bill of Rights, on page 04, is a beautiful and a gentle reminder that your grief journey belongs to you, and that you have the right to grieve in the time and space you need. No two journeys are exactly the same.
- Tending to your needs. Eat, sleep, drink water, and move your body as often and regularly as you are able. Grief can be just as much physical as emotional and your body needs to be taken care of as much as your heart. See page 10 for more helpful 'do's' for grief.
- Finding wellness. Page 14 walks you through a wellness plan, so that on the days when your emotions are overwhelming, you will know what to do.
- Honoring your loved one. Whenever you want, whenever you are ready, we have a list of ways to keep your lost loved one close to your heart, here on page 09.



**Schedule a
coffee with a
fellow loss
survivor today**

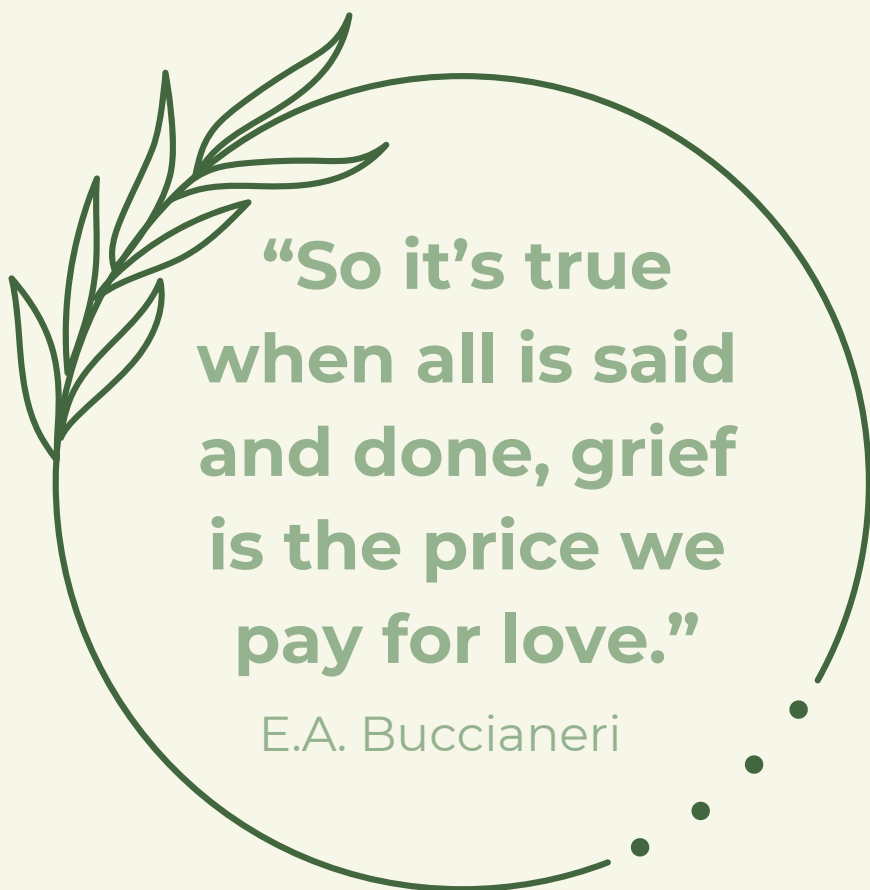


A letter from a loss survivor:

This loss is unlike any other. People are going to say things in an attempt to be comforting that are hurtful or not helpful. People may stop checking in after the celebration of life. This loss may impact your day-to-day functioning and it's going to be hard to see how you're going to get through this time. This is a loss that is actually impossible to "move on" from. We may only move forward with our broken hearts. We eventually learn how to put the pieces together through the support of community and other resources listed in this book. The bad and beautiful news is, that your grief will always be this big. Grief is our love extended. Through time and proper support, our capacity to hold this grief may only grow. Some days your capacity shrinks and your grief becomes that entire moment. One day, you'll reflect on your week and realize you got through without crying or you were able to complete your everyday tasks without crumbling. You will move forward in a way that is fitting for you, and your grief will be integrated into your life. Every journey is unique and there is a community of other loss survivors that are waiting and ready to hold space for you. You do not have to go through this alone. The waves of grief are inevitable and I have found that having support in the process of mourning and healing was exactly what I needed.

I have said to many clients and my support groups that grief is like getting in a car that you never wanted to buy. Then, you must drive that car for the rest of your life not knowing where the road will take you. Sometimes you have to pull the car off to the side of the road, step back, and look at the new car you just acquired. Maybe there is a flat tire, and you need to phone a friend for some assistance. Or you may need to get out to take a short hike for the day. Some may even try to live in their cars. It might feel like one cannot get out for a bit, so they make a home in it. Regardless of one's experience with their new car on this unknown road, it is important that the new owner takes breaks and ultimately, continues to drive the car on their unknown path. This path can take one to beautiful places. They may be hard and scary as they are unknown. This also highlights the importance of having mindful support in one's grief. Whether we like it or not, there are others with cars that they did not ask for on unknown paths too. Grief can be quite relational and connecting in that way. Having mindful support will allow one to notice the flowers blooming on their drive, the possible flat tire on their new car, or the sunshine around every corner. Please reach out as we are here for you!

grief@suicideprevent.org

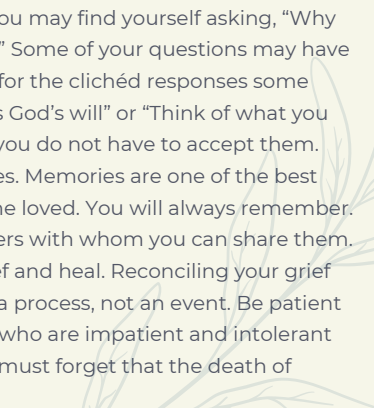


When someone you love dies, you may feel shocked, devastated, and overwhelmed. This is especially true with grief following a suicide. You may have many unanswered questions, and you may not be sure where to turn for support.

This booklet was designed to offer you information and resources during this difficult time.

Mourner's Bill of Rights

Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt

- You have the right to experience your own unique grief. No one else will grieve in the exact same way you do. So, when you turn to others for help, don't allow them to tell you what you should or should not be feeling.
 - You have the right to talk about your grief. Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as you want about your grief. If at times you do not feel like talking, you also have the right to be silent.
 - You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions. Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt, and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. Others may try to tell you that feeling angry, for example, is wrong. Don't take these judgmental responses to heart. Instead, find listeners who will accept your feelings without conditions.
 - You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits. Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.
 - You have the right to experience "griefbursts". Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but it is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.
 - You have the right to make use of ritual. The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. More importantly, the funeral is a way for you to mourn. If others tell you the funeral or other healing rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary, don't listen.
 - You have the right to embrace your spirituality. If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry at God, find someone to talk with who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.
 - You have the right to search for meaning. You may find yourself asking, "Why did he or she die? Why this way? Why now?" Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. And watch out for the clichéd responses some people may give you. Comments like, "It was God's will" or "Think of what you have to be thankful for" are not helpful and you do not have to accept them.
 - You have the right to treasure your memories. Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. You will always remember. Instead of ignoring your memories, find others with whom you can share them.
 - You have the right to move toward your grief and heal. Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever.
- 



Support Groups

and other support resources

Alliance for Suicide Prevention

SuicidePrevent.org
970-482-2209
info@suicideprevent.org

*Support groups for suicide loss survivors
(Virtual and in-person)
Organizational debrief
Consultation
Training
Peer Support*

Creative Healing Center

CreativeHealingCenter.net
970-829-8819
info@creativehealingcenter.net

*Individual, family, couples and play
therapy*

Community Grief Center

CommunityGriefCenter.org
970-506-4114

*Support groups
Family grief classes
Peer Support
located in Greeley, CO

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

AFSP.org

- Healing Conversations: fill out a quick form and get connected to another suicide loss survivor within a week
- Locate support groups nationwide
- Get informed and get support

Sesame Street Grief and Loss

SesameWorkshop.org/topics/grief

- Videos, games, and books to help adults explain death and loss to children 8 years and younger

988 SUICIDE & CRISIS
LIFELINE

3 Hopeful Hearts

3HopefulHearts.com
970-430-6136
programs@3hopefulhearts.com

*Child loss support group
Peer support
Camp Braveheart (Grief camp for kids and teens)*

Longview

24/7 Free, Mental Health Urgent Care
970-494-4200 ext. 4
2260 W Trilby Rd, Fort Collins, CO 80526

*Walk-in services 24/7/365 Mobile crisis team
Med management Crisis support*
If it is a crisis to you, it is a crisis to them

Lighthouse Christian Counseling

LighthouseCounselingNoCo.com
970-413-8998
info@lighthousecounselingnoco.com

*Faith based services and referrals
Training*

Suicide Education and Support Services

<https://northrange.org/community-support/sess/>
970-347-2120

*training and education, support groups - Weld
County, CO*

CAYAC/Connections

HealthDistrict.org
970-221-5551

*Resource navigation
Brief therapy
Psychological testing*


Colorado Office of Suicide Prevention

COOSP.org

- Local and national resources
- free training
- coalition and connection opportunities

Judi's House

JudisHouse.org
• Child grief and trauma specialists



Our community has many support groups available.
Please email grief@suicideprevent.org for help
finding the right fit for you.



Support Groups

How groups can help you heal

"Sharing space with people who have had a similar loss to yours can make you "feel less crazy."

- Heartbeat Participant

- Taking part in a support group allows you to build a community with people who are going through something similar to you.
- It is a way to find a safe space to receive support, express emotions, and get direction.
- Being part of a group can help you realize that you are not alone in your grief.
- Group can help you to learn tools to help yourself cope as you move through your grief journey.
- The people in your support group genuinely care about you and want to share a space to express grief.
- We cannot compare any loss or type of loss, but loss through suicide is definitely a very complex loss.
- Helping others can be healing as well, and groups are filled with people at many different stages of the grief journey.
- No one understands what you are going through like someone else going through the same thing.

Heartbeat Loss Support Group

All groups meet monthly from 6:30 - 8:00pm

First Tuesday: in-person
Second Wednesday: virtual
Third Thursday: in-person



In Person Location:
United Way / Community Impact Center
525 W. Oak Street, Fort Collins, CO 80521
Group meets at the South entrance
ramp at 6:25pm to walk in together



Heartbeat CONNECTIONS:

Last Wednesday of the Month
another way for
suicide loss survivors
to connect,

make a difference together,
or just hang out!



Caring Conversations



Connecting with someone who has experienced the same type of loss can be truly impactful.

We provide one-on-one peer support and compassionate listening to individuals who have lost a loved one to suicide.

We'd love to buy you a treat (coffee, ice cream, tea...etc) while we chat.





Ways to Honor Your Loved One

Rituals are a great way to honor your grief experience, as well as the life of your loved one. Actively remembering our loved ones who have died is what keeps them with us, always. While it may be painful to experience feelings of grief, especially on birthdays and anniversaries, acknowledging the death, and the deceased individual, in a positive way truly helps us be with and work through those feelings.

- Light a special candle to quietly include your loved one.
- Talk about your loved one - this can help people to recognize the importance for you to remember them.
- Place a basket by a lit candle for people to place notes with their feelings or memories.
- Buy your loved one a gift or buy yourself a gift from your loved one.
- Create a memory box and invite friends and family to contribute their memories of your loved one - this is a way to connect with others, remember, and discover things you did not know about your loved one.
- Bring out a meaningful belonging - like a sweater draped along the back of a chair.
- Create a memorial centerpiece.
- Engage in joint storytelling about the deceased, perhaps around the dinner table.
- Visit the cemetery or memorial area for a conversation with the deceased.
- Look at photo albums, recounting favorite times, and hard times, noting change and growth.
- If you have dreams about the deceased, share those with a trusted friend or family member.
- Seek out more distant relatives to fill in missing gaps of information about the deceased.
- Create a special playlist that reminds you of your loved one.
- Plant a tree or flowers in your loved one's memory.
- Make a donation to a charity that your loved one supported.
- Carry something special that reminds you of your loved one with you. Take it out and hold it when you need to.
- Do a favorite activity of the person who died on their birthday and/or on the anniversary of their death (watch their favorite movie, go to a favorite place, listen to a favorite song...etc.).
- Make and eat the favorite meal of the person who died.
- Write about your loved one. If you wish, share it in a way that feels right to you.
- Donate a park bench, or engrave a plaque with your loved one's name.
- Volunteer somewhere that was important to your loved one or reminds you of them.

Make a digital
post on the
ASP
Remembrance
Wall





Helpful Ways of Moving With Grief

Be patient with yourself and others and remember that it is okay to have a hard time with your loss.

Access healthy coping skills daily and often. When it feels hard to do them, see if someone will join you and, do it anyway!

Ask for help when you need it, even when it is uncomfortable. Everyone needs help and those who love you WANT to help. When you let others help, you are winning and so are they. Give the people who care about you the opportunity to be of service by asking for what you need.

Grief will look different for every person. Give people the same grace and space you want as you move through your grief. Know that you can ask for grace and space from those who do not freely give it.

Take it one day at a time or as someone very wise once said, *one moment* at a time.

Remember ... it is okay to say "no." Set yourself up for success by only doing things you want/need to do. You don't owe anyone anything at this time.

Surround yourself with those who make you feel seen and heard. Don't be afraid to reach out for support when you need it.



Understanding Suicide Loss as a Trauma

It is important to recognize that losing someone to suicide can be an especially traumatic experience. By understanding what you have gone through as trauma, you may better understand your grief experiences and the different ways that it may impact you.

Common Trauma Reactions

Re-experiencing the Trauma

Trauma survivors may re-experience their trauma through thoughts, feelings, memories, and other means. Re-experiencing trauma can be very distressing, and may trigger uncomfortable emotions such as fear, anger, or sadness.

- nightmares
- flashbacks (uncontrollable vivid images and memories of the trauma)
- distressing thoughts and feelings about the trauma
- emotional distress or physical responses after experiencing a trauma reminder

Avoidance of Trauma Reminders

Because reminders of trauma can be so distressing, it is common for trauma survivors to use avoidance to control these reactions.

- using drugs or alcohol to suppress uncomfortable thoughts and emotions
- avoidance of activities related to the trauma
- avoidance of people, places and things related to the trauma
- suppressing thoughts related to the trauma
- avoidance of conversations about the trauma

Negative Thoughts or Feelings

These may begin or worsen after experiencing a trauma. Some of these thoughts and feelings might not seem to relate directly to the trauma.

- excessive blame towards oneself or others related to the trauma
 - Try to shift your thoughts from "what if" to "even if"
- loss of interest in activities
- feelings of isolation or disconnection from surroundings
- difficulty experiencing positive feelings
- loss of memory related to the trauma
- excessive negative thoughts about oneself

Hyperarousal

Reactivity, or a feeling of being "on edge," may begin or worsen after experiencing a trauma. This category includes a broad range of physical and psychological symptoms.

- becoming irritable, quick to anger, or aggressive
- a heightened startle reaction
- difficulty concentrating
- frequently scanning the environment or watching for trauma reminders
- difficulty sleeping
- feelings of anxiety, and related symptoms such as racing heart, upset stomach, or headaches
- risky or impulsive behaviors





Children

Explaining Suicide to Kids

Kids react differently to grief than adults do. We (adults) expect that they will cry and be stuck in sadness/grief the way adults often are. Kids process through play. The best thing for them is the opportunity to be a kid - to play, to watch a favorite movie, read a book, dance around and cry, or experience whatever other hard feelings they have. We are often asked by adults, "how do I know when to worry?" The simplest way we can put it is to pay attention to their (or your) ability to live, laugh and love - seen below. Here are some more important tips we've learned from other survivors:

- Be honest. Kids hear and observe more things than we know. When they hear adults talking but only get bits and pieces of information they tend to fill in the gaps with their imagination and usually not with kind and loving things. When kids have, age-appropriate, information they can better process their feelings and grief. In this situation, while it may feel counter intuitive, clear is kind, truly.
- Use your discretion as their parent. You know best what level of information your child can and cannot hold. When you do chose to tell them, use clear, honest information.
 - "Dad died. Just like our bodies can get sick, so can our brains. Dad's brain was very sick and it caused him to kill himself."
 - "Mom has died. She killed herself."
- Tell them they are safe. When kids lose someone they love suddenly, they often feel afraid the other people they love and that care for them might also die suddenly. Reassure kids that they are safe and the adults around them are also safe, as long as that is true.
- Check out the book recommendations at the end for talking to kids about suicide.

If you find that your child (or you) is struggling with their ability to live, laugh, and/or love for at least 2 weeks or longer than you definitely want to consider reaching out for additional support. With trauma, though, it is common to expect a disruption in a person's ability to live, laugh and love for at least 6 weeks before a person's routines and regular self-care come back. If the pain is constant, don't wait, reach out for help sooner rather than later.

Quick Tips:

Take care of yourself first

If you are struggling to take care of yourself, seek support.

Prioritize food, water and sleep

Meeting basic needs is sometimes the hardest for loss survivors.

Clear is kind

Giving kids honest information helps with the healing and grief process.

Live

a person's ability to do daily activities, i.e. eat, shower, go to school/work



Laugh

a person's ability to find joy - to do the things that make them happy



Love

a person's ability to have satisfying relationships





Children:

Common responses to grief

Infant to 2 years old

- do not understand the finality of death
- increased irritability and crying
- change in sleeping and eating patterns
- can become detached

2 - 5 years old

- do not understand the finality of death, may ask questions over and over
- confused and believe death is reversible
- lack of words to express feelings
- act out feelings in behavior and play
- experience separation anxiety
- experience nightmares
- display regressive behaviors
- (i.e. toilet training, thumb sucking)

6 - 9 years old

- begin to understand finality of death
- believe that death only happens to others
- personify death as ghosts/monsters
- engage in magical thinking and may feel they caused the death
- have strong feelings of grief and loss, expressed more through anger
- lack of words to express feelings
- often need permission to grieve, especially boys

9 - 12 years old

- understand the finality of death
- experience difficulty concentrating
- have curiosity about the physical aspects of death
- may identify with deceased by imitating mannerisms
- have vocabulary to express grief, but often chose not to
- need encouragement to express feelings and grieve

13 - 23 years old

- have an adult understanding of death
- philosophize about life/death and search for meaning in each
- can express grief, but often chose not to
- affects entire life - school, home, relationships
- may appear to be coping well when they are not
- are often thrust into role of comforter
- may participate in risk taking behaviors (drinking, reckless driving)

Mental Wellness Plan

Check-in

Where am I at? Am I feeling "off?" What do I think, feel, experience? How is my ability to do daily activities? Am I finding rest/joy/calm? How are my relationships?

Activities I can do by myself to try to take my mind off of things

Things I love to do

Things I do, regularly, that matter

Things that almost always work

Things that I do not love to do but almost always work

Connection



- Who can I connect with?
- Who can I do things with?
- Who can I call for help?

Four horizontal bars for writing answers to the connection questions. The top bar is light beige, and the three bars below it are light green.

What does help look like to me?

Four horizontal dotted lines for writing answers to the question "What does help look like to me?"

I have great STRENGTHS to help me get by

What has worked before?

What do I like about myself?

What can I do when I am feeling good that helps me feel better?



Suicide Loss Survivor's Benefit Fund

Financial assistance for suicide loss survivors

Supported by generous donations, the Alliance for Suicide Prevention offers financial assistance to Larimer County community members following a death by suicide.

All benefits are one-time and offered on a case-by-case basis, as funds are available.

Benefits *may* include assistance with the following:

Rent/mortgage

Therapy

Food/grocery

Funeral support

Childcare

Temporary housing

Clean up services

Vehicle Support

Legal Fees

Other

To Apply for Benefits:

**For Larimer County
Colorado residents only**



To Donate:

**In the "Comments" section
please put "Survivors Fund"**



For questions about this fund, please reach out to
grief@suicideprevent.org

Book/Podcast Recommendations

Books

After Suicide Loss: Coping with Your Grief

Jack Jordan, Ph.D., and Bob Baugher, Ph.D.

Dying to Be Free: A Healing Guide for Families after a Suicide

Beverly Cobain and Jean Larch

Black Suicide: The Tragic Reality of America's Deadliest Secret

Alton R. Kirk, Ph.D.

Suicide of a Child

Adina Wroblewski

My Uncle Keith Died

Carol Ann Loehr

Someone I Love Died by Suicide: A Story for Child Survivors and Those Who Care for Them

Doreen Cammarata

After

Francis Chalifour

Men & Grief: A Guide for Men Surviving the Death of a Loved One and a Resource for Caregivers and Mental Health Professionals

Carol Staudacher

All Sesame Street Grief Books for kids

Podcasts

Healing with David Kessler

Ashley Judd on Mental Illness, Her Mother's Death, and The Importance of Grief Support

Spotify

The Mindfulness and Grief Podcast

Episode 43

Spotify & Apple

Life After Suicide with Dr. Jennifer Ashton

Spotify & Apple

Huberman Lab

Episode 74 - The Science & Process of Healing from Grief

Spotify & Apple

A Slight Change of Plans

Lessons from a Grief Therapist - April 10, 2022

Spotify

All There Is with Anderson Copper

Spotify & Apple

The Addicted Mind Podcast

Episode 75: The Role of Grief and Loss in Addiction with Dr. Sonya Lott

Spotify & Apple

These are just a few suggestions.
For a more comprehensive list, visit: <http://afsp.org/books-for-loss-survivors>

PLEASE JOIN US FOR

Heartbeat

- A SUICIDE LOSS SUPPORT GROUP -

Heartbeat is a monthly grief support group for those grieving the loss of a loved one to suicide.

Together we help each other heal through understanding, encouragement, and caring.

This is a free group that is open to all suicide loss survivors. RSVPs are required.



scan QR code to RSVP

We meet monthly on the

1st Tuesday

2nd Wednesday (virtually)


3rd Thursday

Heartbeat Connections on the last

Wednesday

from 6:30-8:00pm

for more information contact
grief@suicideprevent.org



"You will lose someone
you can't live without,
and your heart
will be badly broken,
and the bad news
is that you never completely
get over the loss of your beloved.
But this is also the good news.

They live forever
in your broken heart
that doesn't seal back up.
And you come through.
It's like having a broken leg that never
heals perfectly
- that still hurts
when the weather gets cold,
but you learn to
dance with the limp."

~ **Anne Lamott**

The contents of this book were collected and created by Larimer County residents/peer specialists/mental health care workers. For more information please reach out to grief@suicideprevent.org

Edited: August 2024

Thank you to all donors and sponsors that made this book possible and accessible to suicide loss survivors. Every amount of support makes a difference.



AllianceForSuicidePrevention.org

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Alliance for
SUICIDE PREVENTION
of Larimer County

IMAGINE
ZERO working together
to end suicide in
northern colorado

of Larimer County