

COPING WITH THE GRIEF THAT SUICIDE BRINGS

FINDING A POWER OF CONNECTION

For many survivors of suicide there is a power of connection found with other survivors. It is important when dealing with the grief that follows a loved one's death by suicide to push yourself to get out and seek the help that you need. It is not a time to be alone in life, but rather you need to surround yourself with life. Relief is found when a person can talk openly about suicide. A critical part for many survivors has been finding a "Surviving after Suicide" grief support group where there are no walls of stigma and where understanding can be found. A support group provides a safe place where survivors can come and share their experience and support one another. Knowing there are others who understand the nightmare that they may be enduring can help a survivor to know that they are not alone and may help them to take the next step to recovery.

Some survivors attend a support group almost immediately, while others may wait for years. Some attend for a year or two and then go only occasionally (such as the particularly difficult days) birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, etc. In the beginning it takes time to feel comfortable. Somehow sharing your sorrow allows you to be able to grasp and work through what has happened. Many times in our grief our lifelong friends disappear perhaps because they don't know what to say or do or because they feel uncomfortable. In a support group fellow survivors often begin new friendships based on a common thread of understanding and knowing the pain and tragedy that your hearts have felt through the tragic loss of suicide.

A Surviving after Suicide Support Group helps survivors of suicide in the following ways:

- It is a place where they can verbalize their thoughts and emotions.
- It provides a forum for airing their grief and helps them to understand their grief.
- It allows them to find support.
- It allows them to learn that they have the recourses within themselves for helping themselves and each other.
- It is a place where they meet new friends and it allows them to become mentor to each other.
- It validates their feelings and emotions.
- It helps them to see that they are not alone.
- The longer bereaved become models of hope. There is a sense of doing something positive.
- It is a place where teens have found that their school family truly cares about them.
- It is a place where they learn to communicate to others what they are feeling rather than stuffing it down.
- It is a place where they learn it is okay to cry, it is okay to laugh and that it's okay to feel.
- It is a place where self-esteem and self confidence is found.



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Aspects of Young Adult Grief: Surviving After Death by Suicide

Our youth experience death at a higher rate than ever these days. When grief enters a teen's life, they feel very isolated and alone. Confusion sets in and they become unfocused. Grades can plunge and the possibility of alcohol, drug abuse and other general risk-taking behavior is greater.

Young Adults often feel invisible, overwhelmed, and frequently become the "forgotten grievers". For the adolescent, life itself is confusing. It is a time of transitions and subtle loss. They are taking on new responsibilities and saying good-bye to childhood. For the first time they are riding the "*emotional roller coaster of life*." They are working hard to gain their own independence and establishing their new identity. If the death of a parent, a loved one, or a friend is added to their daily challenges of being a "normal" young adult, they will often become frightened confused, and feel isolated. It is even more complicated when their loved one dies by suicide. For a teen just like an adult this type of death is traumatic. Often teens feel that there are few people that they can turn to for help.

Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death and is the third leading cause of death for young adults. For every one death by suicide there are 100-200 young adults that attempt suicide. For every death there are about 18 people immediately affected.

It is important to meet "teens on their turf." Help them to find a support group that they can "choose" to attend. Many schools are now offering teens in grief support programs during the school day. A support group will help them to find a safe place to share their feelings and emotions. Teens want to know that they are not alone. They want to understand the many aspects of their grief and they want to find hope. Like any adult, they too, want to understand their grief. ***These groups are not meant to take the place of professional counseling rather they are to be used in conjunction with one another.***

With Suicide:

- There is no time for them to prepare mentally or emotionally.
- There was no time for good-byes; teens often share they didn't get to say good-bye and that they will never have the chance to say good-bye or that they loved them.
- Due to the shock and related stress those left behind may be unable to develop coping strategies.



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- There is the shock; they cannot believe what has happened, they cannot wrap their mind around what has happened.
- There is the disbelief and the big question of “WHY?”
- They struggle with guilt; they may feel guilty for the way they acted; for harsh words; or for what they didn’t say.
- There’s the anger; “How could this have happened to me?”
- There’s the depression; “How can they survive?”
- There’s the STIGMA; “What will people think?”
- Teens may feel responsible for their loved one’s death and think that they somehow could have prevented the death.
- Teens often face grief alone, their friends are uncomfortable and don’t know what to say.
- Teens who grieve often feel that it is easier not to talk about their loss since they don’t want their friends to feel uncomfortable.
- Teens try to be strong for their family and often struggle with many issues alone or they bury them so deep within that they later can create major problems later in life
- It’s important to look for the windows of opportunity; many times teens just want their parents or guardian to listen without interruptions.
- Older teens and young adults manage to escape by means of their cars -- They keep busy to avoid their loss which can puts them at greater risk for long term resolution. This type of response doesn’t always have negative results; however, it can delay their healing process.
- Younger teens, ages 13-15, spend more time at home and can have a tendency to be more withdrawn.
- Death by suicide creates a totally dysfunctional family. When parents are frozen in their own grief, if a teen sees that mom or dad cannot function, how can we expect them to be different?
- It is important to seek counseling as a family; this will help them to at an early age to know that it is not weak to ask for help.

Many people feel they have little to say, or are unsure what to say to the grieving young adult.

Young Adults needs’ are unique -

- **They need to share in the family's grief process.** They need to be included so that they don't feel isolated. This may be difficult when they are miles away from home attending college.
- **They need to be loved.**
- **They need to be listened to.**
- **They need to understand.** Talk to them about grief and validate their feelings. Let them know it’s okay to cry. It is important to keep the doors of communication open.



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- **It is important that they be part of the planning of the funeral.** This helps them to be recognized, and it allows them to become an active part of the visible grieving process. Let them know what to expect at the funeral.
- **Be honest with them about the death.**
- **Many times the death of a friend can open wounds of grief from the past.** It is important to reach out to a student who has previously suffered the death of a loved one, especially if their loved one died in a similar way. Many people keep their grief deep within until another death happens. Grief has a way of ripping open old wounds.
- **Young Adults need outward signs of support** including hugs, a pat on the back etc. These are important physical forms of support.
- **Re-establishment of routine and discipline is an important way to provide security.** Inconsistency in family life is very typical during the first days following a death. Teenagers want and need structure.
- **Who are their role models? Whom do they look up to? Parents, teachers, counselors, caring adults and their peers that have experienced death.** It is important for young adults of all ages to see their parents getting better. It is a heavy burden for teens when they see that parents aren't getting better. They need a stable environment to come home to. They need to see that their family is doing their best to cope with their grief. If this is not happening in a reasonable time, seek professional help. We need to help the young adult feel a sense of family and belonging.
- **Much of the young adult's time is spent in school,** and this can be a very lonely place. Though it is important to establish a normal routine again, there may be times during a school day that the student will not be able to cope or focus.
Teachers can help by excusing the student and possibly providing a place for privacy and personal support. This allows the teacher to acknowledge the student's special needs and provide support at the same time. Talk to their teachers.
- **It is important for parents and guardians to share with teachers, and school personnel important dates,** such as anniversaries of a loved one's death, birthdays and milestone events in their lives. All of these can cause grief moments.
- **Talk to the school's counselor and see if there is a grief support program** at their school or where one might be in the community.
- **Many times, young adults will turn to the opposite sex for comfort.** They want to belong; they want someone who will care about them. If a teen is dating someone and they break up during this time, it can cause the loss to be more profound.
- **When pain is felt, relief is sought.** Young Adults often give in to pressures of drugs and alcohol. They need to know that this is only a temporary means of escape and that it can and will cause a deeper depression. They need to be guided to a way of opening up and sharing their pain.
- **Young Adults feel frightened and alone.** Any support a parent, a friend or a teacher provides reminds the grieving teen every day that there is a person to whom they can turn.



- **Young Adults need their loved ones or friends to be remembered.** If a fellow student dies during the school years', allow students to write a memory or say good-bye in a letter form. These letters can be put together and given to the parents. This can be very therapeutic for both the students and the grieving parents. A grieving parent's wish is for their child to be remembered.
- **Rather than memorialize or glamorize the issue of suicide, schools can provide leadership in channeling the energies of students into projects to help the living.** Metzgar (1995) and Siehl (1990) caution that if schools elect to provide some form of memorial following a suicide death, all such efforts **MUST** include positive messaging. It should be made clear to students that there are other solutions to problems. It should be made clear to students that there are people to help.

When you take the time to care you will truly

“Make a Difference” to the life of a grieving teen.



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RESOURCES

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255): **Suicide hotline**, 24/7 free and confidential, nationwide network of crisis centers
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement 513-803-2222
www.cincinnatichildrens.org/school-crisis

The American Association of Suicidology: 202-237-2280 website- suicidology.org
The American Foundation of Suicide Prevention: afsp.org

Cincinnati Children's Hospital and Medical Center – Surviving the Teens Program
www.cincinnatichildrens.org/surviving-teens- Cathy Strunk 513-602-7329

Tri-State Suicide Prevention Coalition: http://partnershipformentalhealth.org/clients_tsspc.htm

QPR Institute www.qrrinstitute.com

Companions on a Journey Grief Support Inc. 513-870-9108 or 513-755-9433
www.companionsonajourney.org **Nationally Trained and Certified Bereavement Facilitators and Nationally AFSP trained in facilitation for Adult, Children and Teen Suicide support groups.**
Certified QPR Gatekeeper trainers
Program offered in area schools—Teens Attacking Grief (TAG) programs include:
Surviving After the Death of Suicide Teens in Grief Support Program
Surviving After the Death of Suicide for Adults
Crisis Response Team to assist schools following the death of students, teachers from various causes such as: suicide, accidents, illness and murder.



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Local Support Groups for Survivors of Suicide

Ohio

WEST CHESTER/LIBERTY TOWNSHIP, HAMILTON AND THE CINCINNATI AREA

Group Name & Mailing Address:

Companions on a Journey Grief Support, Inc./Surviving After the Death of Suicide

Contact: Sheila Munaf-Kanoza, (513) 870-9108

www.companionsonajourney.org or Sheila@companionsonajourney.org

Meeting Place: St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish

5720 Hamilton-Mason Road

Hamilton, OH 45011

Meeting Day(s)/Meeting Time:

1st Tuesday of the month from 7-9 p.m. in the Hospitality Room.

Facilitated by: Peer and Professional

Charge: No

Newsletter: Season of Grief Newsletter

Counties Served: Butler, Warren, Hamilton Counties and open to anyone who has had a loved one die by suicide.

Teens Attacking Grief (TAG): Group formed in high schools to help in the post-vention of Suicide as well as Open Grief Groups

Last Updated: 8-17-2011

CINCINNATI

Group Name & Mailing Address:

Survivors After Suicide

4142 Eddystone Drive

Cincinnati, OH 45251

Contact:

Betty Scholle (513) 385-6110

Bob Hasley (513) 793-7385

Meeting Place:

Mercy Franciscan Terrace

80 Compton Road

Meeting Day(s)/Meeting Time:

3rd Monday of every month from 7-9 p.m.

Facilitated by: Peer

Charge: No

Newsletter: No

Counties Served: Tri-State Area (OH-KY-IN)

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CINCINNATI

Group Name & Mailing Address:

Fernside Center for Grieving Children

4380 Malsbary Road, Ste. 300

Cincinnati, OH 45242

Contact: (513) 745-0111

www.fernside.org

Meeting Place: Please contact Fernside for location

Meeting Day(s)/Meeting Time: Call for dates

Facilitated by: Trained facilitator

Charge: No

Newsletter: Yes

Counties Served: Greater Cincinnati area -- all are welcome

Comments: This is a support group serving all children who have experienced loss, including suicide. There is a separate adult group available specific to suicide loss available for those bringing children.

Last Updated: 8-17-2011

DAYTON

Group Name & Mailing Address:

Survivors of Suicide

Suicide Prevention Center

P.O. Box 1393

Dayton, OH 45401-1393

Contact: (937) 226-0818

www.suicideprevention.tc

Meeting Place:

Miami Valley Hospital

Weber Center for Health Education, Rm. 4800

One Wyoming Street, Dayton, OH

Meeting Day(s)/Meeting Time:

1st and 3rd Mondays (including Holiday Mondays) of every month from 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Facilitated by: Staff and Peer

Charge: No

Newsletter: No

Counties Served: Montgomery, Greene, Preble, Butler, Clark, Darke, Miami, Warren, Adams, Auglaize, Brown, Champaign, Clermont, Clinton, Fayette, Hamilton, Hardin, Highland, Logan, Madison, Pike, Ross, Shelby, Union

Last Updated: 7/10/09



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Kentucky

FORT THOMAS

Group Name & Mailing Address:

Survivors of Suicide of Northern Kentucky

c/o Ken & Carol Himes

48 Edwards Court

Fort Thomas, KY 41075

Contact:

Carol Himes (859) 441-1958

spbears@fuse.net

Meeting Place:

Christ Church, United Church of Christ

15 South Fort Thomas Avenue

Meeting Day(s)/Meeting Time:

1st Tuesday of every month from 7-9 p.m.

Facilitated by: Peer

Charge: No

Newsletter: No

Counties Served: The entire Cincinnati area, including Northern Kentucky, Cincinnati and Eastern IN.

Last Updated: 8-17-2011

QPR –Gatekeeper Training

Certified Trainer's members of the Tri-State Suicide Prevention coalition

Companions on a Journey Grief Support: Sheila Munaf-Kanoza as well as members Tri-State Suicide Prevention Coalition.—513-870-9108

Denis Walsh--http://partnershipformentalhealth.org/clients_tsspc.htm

Question... A person about suicide

Persuade... the person to get help

Refer...the person to get help.

QPR is not intended to be a form of counseling or treatment.

QPR is intended to offer hope through positive action.

QPR is intended to teach those who are in the position to recognize the warning signs, clues and suicidal communications of people in trouble to ACT vigorously to prevent a possible tragedy.



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