



# Journey to Healing

*A Newsletter for Survivors of Suicide*

*Second Quarter 2013*

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## **The Suicide Survivor's Bill of Rights**

*From Understanding Your Suicide Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart, by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.*

Someone you love has ended his or her own life. Your grief is unique and profound, and you have special needs that must be tended to in the coming weeks, months, and years. Though you should reach out to others as you do the work of mourning, you should not feel obligated to accept the unhelpful responses you may receive from some people. You are the one who is grieving, and as such, you have certain "rights" no one should try to take away from you.

The following list is intended both to empower you to heal and to decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.

### **1. I have the right to experience my own unique grief.**

No one else will grieve this death in exactly the same way I do. So, when I turn to others for help, I will not allow them to tell me what I should or should not be thinking, feeling, or doing.

### **2. I have the right to talk about my grief.**

Talking about my grief and the story of the death will help me heal. I will seek out others who will allow me to talk as much as I want, as often as I want, and who will listen without judging. If at times I don't feel like talking, I also have the right to be silent, although I understand that bottling everything up inside will prevent my healing.

### **3. I have the right to feel a multitude of emotions.**

Confusion, disorientation, fear, shame, anger, and guilt are just a few of the emotions I might feel as part of my grief journey. Others may try to tell me that what I do feel is wrong, but I know that my feelings aren't right or wrong, they just are.

**4. I have the right to work through any feelings of guilt and relinquish responsibility.**

I may feel guilty about this death, even though it was in no way my fault. I must come to acknowledge that the only person truly responsible was the person who took his or her own life. Still, I must feel and explore any possible feelings of guilt I may have in order to move beyond them.

**5. I have the right to know what can be known about what happened.**

I can cope with what I know or understand, but it is much harder to cope with the unknown. If I have questions about the death, I have the right to have those questions answered honestly and thoroughly by those who may have the information I seek.

**6. I have the right to embrace the mystery.**

It is normal and natural for me to want to understand why the person I love took his or her own life, but I also have the right to accept that I may never fully and truly understand. I will naturally search for meaning, but I will also "stand under" the unknowable mystery of life and death.

**7. I have the right to embrace my spirituality.**

I will embrace and express my spirituality in ways that feel right to me. I will spend time in the company of people who understand and support my spiritual or religious beliefs. If I feel angry at God or find myself questioning my faith or beliefs, that's OK. I will find someone to talk with who won't be critical of my feelings of hurt and abandonment.

**8. I have the right to treasure my memories.**

Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. I will always remember. If at first my memories are dominated by thoughts of the death itself, I will realize that this is a normal and necessary step on the path to healing. Over time, I know I will be able to remember the love and the good times.

**9. I have the right to hope.**

Hope is an expectation of a good that is yet to be. I have the need and the right to have hope for my continued life. I can have hope and joy in my life and still miss and love the person who died.

**10. I have the right to move toward my grief and heal.**

Reconciling my grief will not happen quickly. Grief is a process, not an event. I will be patient and tolerant with myself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with me. I must help those around me understand that the suicide death of someone loved has changed my life forever.





At one time or another, most people go through a period of sadness, trial, loss, frustration, or failure that is so disturbing and long-lasting that it can be called a dark night of the soul . . . If you are looking for meaning, character, and personal substance, you may discover that a dark night has many important gifts for you. . . A true dark night of the soul is not a surface challenge but a development that takes you away from the joy of your ordinary life. An external event or an internal mood strikes you at the core of your existence. This is not just a feeling but a rupture in your very being, and it may take a long while to get through to the other end of it. . .

During the dark night there is no choice but to surrender control, give in to unknowing, and stop and listen to whatever signals of wisdom might come along. It's a time of enforced retreat and perhaps unwilling withdrawal. The dark night is more than a learning experience; it's a profound initiation into a realm that nothing in the culture, so preoccupied with external concerns and material success, prepares you for.

Thomas Moore  
*Dark Nights of the Soul*

### ***A Gentle Reminder:***

Losing a loved one through suicide is an especially devastating loss. The loved ones left behind (survivors) have a difficult array of emotions to overcome on their journey of grief. There are many reasons for this.

First of all, the death is usually unexpected and sudden, even if the person had been talking about suicide in the past. The method is often violent and it is difficult for survivors to think about their loved one inflicting this violence on themselves. Unfortunately, suicide carries a stigma in our society; friends and family members are at a loss for knowing what to say.

For many people, losing a loved one to suicide causes a feeling of abandonment thinking, "My loved one chose to leave me!" All of these issues are difficult to deal with during the grieving process.

Fortunately, the Greenville area has a self-help/support group called "Survivors of Suicide" for family members and friends of persons who have completed suicide. This free and confidential group is sponsored by Mental Health America of Greenville County.

Groups meet on the first and third Tuesday of each month at 7:00 – 8:30 PM at St. Michael Lutheran Church, 2619 Augusta Street, Greenville, SC 29605. Additionally, CRISISline is available 24/7 at 864-271-8888.



## *Inspirational*

I have been following with great interest the tragic events in Boston. Once again we are met with a heinous event that has caused great bloodshed and insurmountable human suffering. What started out as a normal event ended with tragedy and heart breaking human suffering. Once again we are confronted with questions such as what is the meaning of this? Why does God allow something like this to occur? What is happening to our country and our world? Who was the cause of this terrorism? I suppose that there are a myriad of other questions that cross people's minds but those are just a few that have crossed my mind in the immediate aftermath of this tragedy.

One of the other issues that has become glaringly apparent to me is that in the past few years we have witnessed such awful and tragic happenings in our country. Such as, the massacre in Tucson, Arizona, where six people died and several people were injured as a result of an individual going on a rampage. Then followed by the massacre in Aurora, Colorado, where twelve people died and scores were injured as a result of another person going on a rampage with a gun. Then followed a massacre in a Sikh mosque where a number of people were slain by an enraged person with a gun, followed by the massacre in Newtown, Connecticut, where twenty young children were slain along with six adults by yet another person with a gun.

When survivors are exposed to the publicity of these tragic events, it is very common to have feelings of grief stirred up as a result of the publicity. Survivors are reminded of the pain that they experienced when their loved ones took their lives. These tragic events bring home to survivors the fact that there are more families who are beginning their own journey on the path of grief. The big question in all of these events is WHY? There is no answer to that question. Survivors of these tragic events are asked to grapple with the mystery of why such horrendous events are happening before our very eyes.

June can also be a difficult month for survivors as well. In June we celebrate Father's Day. This is a day when we honor our fathers, grandfathers and father figures who have had such an impact on our lives. We remember those men who guided us and influenced us in our formative years. It is a sad day for those people who are grieving the loss of a father or grandfather from suicide as well as for those fathers who are grieving the loss of a child from suicide. Oftentimes men get shortchanged when it comes to the aftermath of a suicide. Men get overlooked when it comes to expressing feelings or having feelings. Relatives and friends hover around the women who are grief-stricken and tend to ignore the men such as the fathers, grandfathers, uncles or brothers. Obviously, this is not universal, but there is a tendency to be more concerned about the women who are impacted by this tragic event. Granted, women and men are different and react differently to situations in life. Sometimes women can be conceived as being more emotional and having more of an emotional response to a painful happening in life. It can also be said that men are not as expressive with their feelings in either happy or sad events. In no way should this be construed that men do not have strong feelings about what goes on in their worlds. Just because a man does not express feelings of grief in a very public fashion is not a reason to conclude that he does not have any feelings of sadness or guilt or remorse. Women and men react differently to grief. Just because a man does not exhibit feelings of sadness or grief in an external way should not be construed that he is not experiencing these feelings or is not feeling these feelings as deeply as a woman. Unfortunately, men in our society have been relegated to a position where feelings are not to be expressed. I say this in a general way. There are exceptions to the rule. Sometimes people

view the expression of feelings as a sign of weakness and men generally do not want to be viewed as weak so they choose not to show external reactions to feelings – either good or bad. This is an erroneous opinion. Feelings are nothing more than a reaction to either a joyful or a painful situation. Feelings are a constant reminder that we are human and when things happen to us in life that evoke a response, we are going to respond by expressing our feelings no matter what the feelings are. Men should be allowed to express their feelings in the same vein as women. There should be no difference.

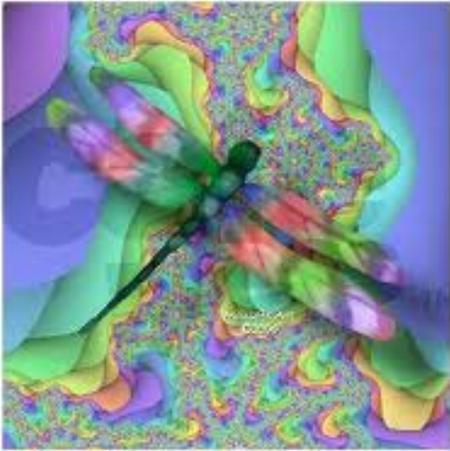
As always, we want to assure each and every one of our “unique” family of our prayers for all of you during our quiet time each day and we encourage each of you to do the same for each other – especially for those people who have recently joined our family. Remember this, that nobody joins our family because they want to but our family is here to support each other during this time of sadness and grief.



I have come to believe that by and large the human family all has the same secrets, which are both very telling and very important to tell. They are telling in the sense that they tell what is perhaps the central paradox of our condition – that what we hunger for perhaps more than anything else is to be known in our full humanness, and yet that is often just what we also fear more than anything else. It is important to tell at least from time to time the secret of who we truly and fully are – even if we tell it only to ourselves – because otherwise we run the risk of losing track of who we truly and fully are and little by little come to accept instead the highly edited version which we put forth in hope that the world will find it more acceptable than the real thing. It is important to tell our secrets too because it makes it easier that way to see where we have been in our lives and where we are going. It also makes it easier for other people to tell us a secret or two of their own, and exchanges like that have a lot to do with what being a family is all about and what being human is all about. Finally, I suspect that it is by entering that deep place inside us where our secrets are kept that we come perhaps closer than we do anywhere else to the One who, whether we realize it or not, is of all our secrets the most telling and the most precious we have to tell.

Frederich Buechner  
*Telling Secrets*





## *Reflections by Becky*

As a longtime member of SOS (Survivors of Suicide), I am sensitive to the use of certain words to describe the act of suicide. In accounts in the secular press, the word 'choice' has been one way of trying to explain the 'why' of such a desperate action. Even among the members at an SOS meeting, a survivor might ask a question like, "Why did he/she make such a decision?", or "Why did he/she choose to end his/her life?". Other statements indict the deceased in a way with such comments as 'He had options' or "She knew we would do anything for her, no matter what. How could she do this to us?" In our confusion and pain, these are normal comments. That's why it's helpful to reflect on what we are asking or stating and what verbiage we use. It is important to ask ourselves, "Did they really have a choice?" Is a person in such psychic pain capable of making choices or decisions that are rational.? I think not. Their action was determined by a troubled mind, not a rational one.

Look at some of the horrific methods used to end their lives. I won't list them as that would be an unnecessary cruelty. Rather, I would ask each one of you who has lost a loved one to any suicidal action, to examine their final act and the method they used. It hurts to think about it, I know, but to do so may shed some insight on the mental chaos that brought them to that edge. In a sense, it was their light at the end of the tunnel, the only antidote for the pain. Please don't misunderstand, I am not justifying the act of suicide as a solution to human problems....we all have them....I'm just saying they made a decision to end their lives their way, and it was completed with that fatal act. That is why I say "complete suicide" and not "commit suicide," because they chose to complete their life.

Below is how another mother tells her story: I believe I speak from a rational point of view. It is unthinkable to me, even now, to imagine my son, Joey, who died 30 years ago this month at age 21, would have the capability of hooking up hoses to his car, turning on the engine and sitting there until he stopped breathing. The note that he left behind just enforces his lack of clear thinking. It had kind of a "To Whom it May Concern. . ."

*'Well there comes a time.  
We all eventually do it.  
Please don't blame anyone.  
I am a total victim of society.  
I suppose refusing to love someone  
put the icing on the cake. I am afraid of something  
somewhere, maybe I'll find it.*

*Please no wake, it would be embarrassing.  
If I could feel love it would be  
different but I can't. I also don't know  
if I want to. It hurts so much.  
Joey'*

This was written on a sheet of paper from a business note pad. Across the top is MURPHY, MOTOR FREIGHT LINES, INC. and at the bottom is their slogan '*GROWING THRU SERVICE*' the detective who handled Joey's 'case' sent us the copy of the original with the following notation:

The words of the note are touching. My heart broke all over again each time I read it. They (the words) are also indicative of a troubled and confused mind - not a rational problem-solving one. I don't know what fears he had and how he could feel embarrassed but could not feel love. What is clear is that he hurt so much that he couldn't figure out how to make the pain stop without stopping his own life.

There's an expression that people use when they want someone to understand what they are trying to explain or where they are coming from intellectually. It goes something like this: "I just want to make sure we're on the same page." It is a certainty that no sane person could be on the 'same page' as the young man who penned the above note. It is an impossible task of a survivor, in this case, myself, to make any sense of the words on that note paper. Believe me, I tried. Between my tears and sadness and in my own confusion, I tried to comprehend his final act. I did the 'why?' thing; I did the 'if only's' again and again; I wondered how he could make such a terrible decision. I failed to shed any light or come up with answers that would satisfy my soul. I decided that I would not continue this fruitless search.

In Joey's mind, stopping the pain was his goal. The pain was, itself, destroying his rational thought process. I can only conjecture that this psychic pain was the impetus for him to resolve the problem. He could no longer reason and, hence, the unreasonable act occurred. That rules out a 'choice' factor. Rational people make choices. Joey didn't choose to die. As awful as it sounds, his desperation to relieve his pain killed him. His death is the result of a troubled mind, a mind unable to find another solution. It could be said that this senseless death took all his troubles away. Dying was his only way out. I hope that he found his peace but I cannot comprehend nor approve of his means to that end.

Suicide is never an answer.....and oh, Bobby, I wish I could say that to you even today 15 years after your unthinkable departure from earth. If I did, would it have changed the ending of my story? No, maybe not, but I still would love to have had that chance.

*Grace and peace,  
Becky*

*In the end, love wins. It does win....we know it wins. When a person dies, love isn't turned off like a faucet.  
It is an amazingly resilient part of us. ~ JK Rowling*



If you are interested in having a part in the *Journey to Healing* Newsletter we welcome your poems, articles, newspaper clippings or readings that have been helpful to you. This newsletter should be not only an instrument of healing, encouragement and education but also a reflection of who we, the survivors are and who we have become. We need your help and input to make this meaningful for everyone and invite your feedback to tell us what additional information you would like to see addressed. Thanks!

*Companioning is not about assessing, analyzing, fixing or resolving another's grief. Instead, it is about being totally present to the mourner, even being a temporary guardian of his soul.*

Mental Health America of Greenville County  
429 North Main Street, Suite 2  
Greenville, SC 29601

*Bringing wellness home.....*



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Journey to Healing is a newsletter for survivors of suicide. Survivors are those of us whose lives have been changed by the completion of suicide by someone we knew. Journey to Healing is intended to let survivors know that you are not alone. If you would like to contribute an article or story for this newsletter, please send it to: Becky Kay, c/o Mental Health America of Greenville County 429 North Main Street, Suite 2, Greenville, SC 29601.

**Survivors of Suicide Support Group** – this group meets the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays of each month from 7:00 – 8:30 PM at St. Michael Lutheran Church, 2619 Augusta Street, Greenville, SC 29605. There is also a closed program for eight weeks designed to help adults, teens and children.

As we grow and recover, it is important to remember that the most powerful aid that SOS can provide new survivors is the companionship of others who have endured the same type of pain. For SOS to work at its best, we must continue going to meetings to help others after we no longer need to go to be helped.

**SOS Support Team**  
This team of survivors who volunteer their time to reach out to survivors in need is available to anyone who feels the need to share with another survivor by phone or personal visit in between meetings. Please call CRISISline at 864 271-8888 to arrange a call or visit from a team member.