INFORMATION PACKET

This Survivors of Suicide Information Packet is distributed by
Mental Health America of Greenville County
A Response Center for Suicide Prevention and Aftercare

429 North Main Street, Suite 2, Greenville, SC 29601
864-467-3344 CRISISline 864-271-8888 TEENline 864-467-8336

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The Links Counseling Center
Atlanta, GA
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 do 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
**SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE SUPPORT PACKET**

This information is compiled for survivors – the family, friends, co-workers, neighbors and others impacted by the self-inflicted death of someone they care about. Mental Health America of Greenville County is the local chapter of a nationwide, volunteer membership organization dedicated to working for America’s mental health and victory over mental illness. MHAGC is affiliated with Mental Health America in South Carolina and Mental Health America – national organization.

MHAGC, a Resource Center for Suicide Prevention and Aftercare offers a variety of services for Survivors of Suicide. These services include:

1. **Support Groups for Survivors of Suicide (S.O.S.).** Groups that offer an opportunity for people who have lost a loved one by suicide to connect with other survivors in a safe and healing environment. This service is offered to survivors at no charge.
2. **SOS Support Team.** The team is made up of trained survivors who are at least two years beyond their loss. Upon request, team members will visit with newly bereaved individuals and families. Most team members are not therapists, but available to share their own experiences, offer support and give information about resources.
3. **Postvention.** Following a suicide, mental health professionals and survivors will speak to schools, businesses, churches, synagogues, and any group in the community needing support and guidance after a suicide. Speakers discuss the grief process, special aspects of grief pertaining to a suicide, share personal stories of loss, and attempt to facilitate the healing process.
4. **Other resources.** Resources include this Survivor’s Packet of information, our newsletter for survivors of suicide (Journey to Healing), a library of helpful books and other literature on the subjects of grief and life after a loss.

For more information, contact the MHAGC staff at 864-467-3344. MHAGC also offers a 24-hr emergency crisis line for anyone in need of immediate phone counseling services. The CRISISline number is 864-271-8888 and the TEENline number is 864-467-8336. There are also two national 24 hour crisis services – The National Suicide Prevention LifeLine at 1-800-273-TALK(8255) and The Hopeline at 1-800-784-2433.

Always remember that your own support system may be extremely helpful during a time of grief and mourning. Family, friends, neighbors, church and community groups who already know you may want very much to help in any way they can. This is a time to take care of yourself, to ask for what you need and sometimes insist upon what you need. We wish you love, hope and peace during this most difficult journey.
Mental Health America of Greenville County offers a support group for anyone who has lost a loved one to suicide. Survivors of Suicide Support Groups provide a safe place where survivors can share experiences and support each other on the journey toward healing. Although support groups are not for everyone, many people have found them to be a vital part of their healing process. The first visit may be difficult. We recommend attending at least three meetings to determine if it is beneficial for you. Additionally, not all SOS groups are the same. Most are led by volunteer survivors and diversity of group members vary. Please keep reaching out until you find something that is helpful to you.

**When:** First and third Tuesdays of the month from 7:00 pm until 8:30 pm. Home visits and family debriefings are also available for those too bruised to attend monthly support group.

**Where:** St Michael's Lutheran Church, 2619 Augusta Street Greenville, SC.

**How:** The meetings begin with introductions and then it is opened to the group for a general discussion.

**Library:** SOS has a library of books that can be checked out that range on topics regarding survivor issues and specific mental illness.

**Newsletter:** Those who sign up will have a newsletter sent to them. The purpose is to provide support information, upcoming events and allows for peer support through remembrance of your loved one.

**Contact:** Our 24/CRISISline can offer a safe place to talk anytime and for any reason and the number is 864-271-8888. CRISISline also serves as a contact for SOS and if you would like to talk specifically to a survivor, CRISISline can have someone call you back within 24 to 48 hours of your call.

If you have any questions don’t hesitate to ask one of the group facilitators or call the MHAGC office at 864-467-3344.
Support Group Information

Mental Health America of Greenville County offers support groups for anyone who has lost a loved one to suicide. Survivors of Suicide Support Groups provide a safe place where survivors can share experiences and support each other on the journey toward healing. Although support groups are not for everyone, many people have found them to be a vital part of their healing process. The first visit may be difficult. We recommend attending at least three meetings to determine if it is beneficial for you. Additionally, not all SOS groups are the same. Most groups are led by volunteer survivors and diversity of group members vary. If one group does not fit your needs, try a different group. The bottom line is, keep reaching out until you find something that is helpful for you.

If you live within the Greenville area, contact CRISISline 24/7 at 864-271-8888 for SOS group information. If you are located outside the Greenville area, call the American Association of Suicidology at 202-237-2280 or the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention at 888-333-2377 for a support group near you.

How Support Groups Can Be Beneficial:

- Verbalizing thoughts and emotions helps to connect 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.
What is Normal?

If you think that you are going insane,
THAT’S NORMAL!

If all you do is cry,
THAT’S NORMAL!

If you can’t taste your food or have any semblance of an appetite,
THAT’S NORMAL!

If you have feelings of rage, denial and depression,
THAT’S NORMAL!

If you find yourself enjoying a funny moment and immediately feeling guilty,
THAT’S NORMAL!

If your friends dwindle away and you feel like you have the plague,
THAT’S NORMAL!

If your blood boils and the hair in your nose curls when someone tells you
“It was God’s will,”
THAT’S NORMAL!

If you can’t talk about it, but can smash dishes, shred old phone books or kick the garbage
can (preferably empty) down the lane,
THAT’S NORMAL!

If you can share your story, your feelings with an understanding listener...another person,
THAT’S A BEGINNING!

If you can get a glimmer of your loved one’s life while grieving the death,
THAT’S WONDERFUL!

If you can remember your loved one with a smile,
THAT’S HEALING!

If you are able to reach out to others,
THAT’S GROWING!

Author - Unknown
I am a Survivor. I am the Mother of a Suicide. My child killed himself, and that fact is always just under the surface of everything else that exists.

Please be patient with me. Though it has been nearly a year, I am not the same person I was, I doubt what I ever was, and what I am now is still evolving. While I can look and sound quite regular, I am not.

If I had a broken leg, you would allow me some time to heal but yet accept me when I tried to return to normal life. You would hold the door open for me, walk a little more slowly to be with me, and still give me credit for sense even as the regular things I used to accomplish had now become strained and awkward.

I have a broken heart. I never anticipated this, never prepared for this. My "cast," my support and protection while I mend, is your friendship and understanding. Daily I find new ways to live and survive, but everything is different, strained, evolving. I need you to recognize this. I need your help in lots of little ways.

The brain is a mysterious thing as it tries to heal the heart. I focus on forgetting, and it works too well. I forget where I set my keys, my shoes, my purse. I forget your name, what we discussed last, what day it is, where I left your phone number or address, whatever appointments I made. I forget to cook, to eat, to tuck the tag into the back of my shirt or check the mirror before I leave. I am embarrassed. I try to focus on remembering, and I remember too well. My mind wanders while I am trying to listen to you.

Our friendship or our conversation reminds me of something he said or something funny that happened to him, or the scent of the Autumn air reminds me of the last season I spent with him. Your sons and your children and your daily joys conflict me--I was once there where you are, or maybe I would have been, if only... I feel guilty for short-shifting our friendship, after all you have done for me.

Everything has changed. I am disabled but healing. My purse and briefcase have been traded for a backpack to give me a measure of security over misplacing them.

My keys are now tied to a string around my neck (when I can find them). My freezer is full of quick frozen meals that I can whip up as effortlessly as possible, if I have the energy to shop for them. I rely on medications to shore up my thin veneer and keep me positive and almost normal-looking. Sometimes I forget them, too.

Don't be afraid to ask me about or comment on what you see; I need your perspective on anything, everything, my friend, because I am re-learning to trust my own judgment again.

Once I was confident. I learned too late that my love for my child, something I took for granted as simple and sacred and strong, was not strong enough to hold him in the world I brought him into, and this loss has shattered the very foundation of everything I've ever believed in.

I need to talk about what happened--I like it when you care enough to ask. Don't be afraid you will say the wrong thing, and especially, don't become anxious or uncomfortable if your tenderness or the memory of my child makes me teary. This is simply the rain on the roses, and it will pass. If I am ever to bloom again, this is as important as the sun, which does come through these clouds more often as the months go by. You are helping me heal.

I need to feel good. It's a struggle sometimes. When I begin to enjoy myself, it is quickly interrupted by guilt. "how dare I laugh again when my baby is dead?" "have I forgotten him so quickly that I can feel happy again so soon?" "maybe I..."
didn’t REALLY love him enough, and that’s what REALLY killed him…” These tapes are deadly.

These thoughts are a downward spiral. Help me drown out those painful voices by assuring me that life is for the living and I deserve to live again. Remind me to have fun. Let me laugh with you and forget for a moment.

You will know when I am ready to talk. A genuine, “how are you doing?” will bring one of two responses. If you get a quick, “great, fine, how are you?” then probably I really am, and let’s keep going from there. Please. If you get a quiet, furtive, “fine, thank you;” then I am probably NOT fine. Asking “what can I do for you?” does not help. It will probably bring “nothing-really-thanks anyway.”

Here is what I really need: Encourage me. Listen to me. Do small normal things for me that I may be too absorbed to do for myself. Help me care for my family. Bring dinner. Drop by and feed my cat. Drop by and bring me lunch, or tea, or chocolate (lots of chocolate) or share an evening with me just visiting. Ignore the state of my house when you arrive—it mirrors the state of my life. Water my plants.

Lend a hand where you can. Get somebody to mow my lawn or rake my leaves or offer to drive the kids to their appointments. Remind me of my appointments. Cover for me if I am not where I should be and then go looking for me. Ask me out, take me out, get me out.

Let’s go do normal things, like shopping or folding laundry at your house or going to a meeting together or hot-tubbing on a Saturday night. Help me rediscover the satisfaction and even joy that everyday life brings. Believe me, I am acutely aware that every moment is precious.

Check in with my children—they are hurting, too. Encourage them to talk and heal. Pizza and an ear helps. Help me keep an eye on them when they are out of my sight. Feel free to be a friend or to “parent” them, too. They are just as disoriented as I am. They are also at risk. They are survivors who have lost both their sibling and the stability of a home they once knew.

Treat us like any other survivor of a fatal illness, always living in a tentative, strange remission between the lost past and the ever present fearful new possibility that another child, another someone we love will shock us again. We are not contagious, except for that first excruciatingly painful moment when it dawns on you that this could happen to your child or someone you love, too.

Treat us just as you would a cancer survivor over the long term, with respect, support, tolerance; expecting and riding through setbacks yet forging ahead to make every day just a little bit more pleasant.

Our Angel died only once. Survivors of suicide die a 1000 deaths.

William Shakespeare once described: “Grief fills up the room of my absent child, Lies in his bed, Walks up and down with me, Puts on his pretty looks, Repeats his words.” Macbeth left brave advice: “Give sorrow words. grief has need to speak, lest whisper o’er the fraught heart and bid it break.”

My grief has need to speak, and each time I am fortunate enough to be allowed to talk and share or speak to help spare someone else this sorrow, I gain a renewed strength that heals my heart. I am honored that somehow Grace gives me a voice to explain all this.

Daily I am reclaiming some bit of treasure from this tragedy, and my broken heart mends just a bit more. Please bear with me.

Copyright - Holland Rainey, Mother of Nicholas Kemp
GRIEF AND THE MOURNING PROCESS

THE PHASES OF GRIEF

Many people refer to the “stages” or “phases” of grief. It may be helpful to be aware of these identified phases or common aspects of grief. It is also important to know there is no right or wrong way to grieve. You may go back and forth between phases, experience more than one at a time, or even skip one all together. All feelings are normal, even if they seem abnormal.

*Shock* is the first stage of numbness, disbelief and unreality.

*Denial* is thoughts or words such as, “I don’t believe it – It can’t be!”

*Bargaining* involves making promises such as, “I’ll be so good if only I can awaken to find this hasn’t happened” or “I’ll do all the right things if only . . . “

*Guilt* is a hard stage and difficult to deal with alone. This is a normal feeling characterized by statements such as, “If only I had . . . If only I had not . . . done or said or thought something. Guilt may ultimately be resolved by understanding that all of us are human beings who give the best and worst of ourselves to others. What they do with what we give is their responsibility.

*Anger* is another very difficult phase, but it may seem necessary in order to face reality and get beyond the loss. We all must heal in our own way and anger is a normal stage along the way. However, you may feel guilty because you are angry at the person who died or because you life is continuing while his or hers is not. If you don’t feel anger, don’t manufacture it!

*Depression* may come and go and be different each time in length and/or intensity. Give yourself time to heal.

*Resignation* means you finally believe the reality of the death.

*Acceptance and Hope* come when you finally understand that you will never be the same, but you can go on to have meaning and purpose in your life.

FOUR “TASKS” OF GRIEF AFTER SUICIDE

*Tell the story:* Talk about what has happened until it becomes real. Talk to caring family and friends, attend a support group, begin individual work with a mental health professional, but find a way to speak about the person who died and how the death has impacted your life and family. Tell the story until you don’t need to tell it anymore. Chances are, you will be close to acceptance at that point.

*Express the Emotions:* Grief is filled with conflicting tidal waves of emotion. Just when you think you’ve accepted the death, disbelief may sweep over you again. You may feel intense anger along with equally intense feelings of love and loss. Or, in the midst of crying about the person’s death, a sense of unreality may surface again. No matter what the range of emotions, all are to be expected during grief. “Stuffed” feelings can build and build and become overwhelming. Scream, cry, write, draw, punch a punching bag, tell someone, take a walk, do SOMETHING to express what you feel.

*Make Meaning from the Loss:* Nothing can make what has happened “okay.” Life is turned upside down and changed forever. However, you can determine that something good and reasonable will come out of the unreasonable tragedy that you are experiencing. At some point, you may be able to accept the reality that your loved one’s entire life was not defined by his or her last decision to die. Nothing can take away the good things the person accomplished. When you are ready, you may reach out to others with similar experiences . . . , or set up a scholarship or other appropriate memorial in the person’s name . . . or work in some capacity to better the lives of others. There are many, many ways to make meaning from tragedy.

*Transition from the Physical Presence of the Person to the New Relationship:* While missing the physical presence of a loved one in our lives may continue well into the future, it is possible to transition into acceptance of the person’s non-physical presence. What can that relationship be? For some, it is memories and love carried in our hearts. No one can take away our memories and, as long as we treasure love for the person who has died, they are not forgotten. The new relationship may be spiritual or in some other way in keeping with religious beliefs.

SUICIDE IS A PERMANENT SOLUTION TO A TEMPORARY PROBLEM!
BEYOND SURVIVING

*Here are some suggestions from those who have lived through and beyond the death of a loved one.*

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 self-destructive 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. Expect setbacks. If emotions return like a tidal wave, you may only be experiencing a remnant of grief, an unfinished piece.
13. Try to put off major decisions.
14. Give yourself permission to get 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, such as Survivors of Suicide or Compassionate Friends. If not, ask a professional to help start one.
20. Call on your personal faith to help you through.
21. It is common to experience physical reactions to your grief, such as headaches, loss of appetite, inability to sleep.
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.

- Iris M. Bolton
GRIEVING: WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN A LOVED ONE HAS DIED BY SUICIDE

Know that this may be the worst pain you will ever feel. You may experience many different emotions, some of them all at once time: denial, 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 would 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 settles 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

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 what or 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 of you.
- Call someone.
- Know that there are groups that can be helpful, such as the Survivors of Suicide (S.O.S.) 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 or 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.

“Hope is the flutter of butterfly wings in the soul …”
Guidelines for Immediate Help From Close Friends
In the Aftermath of a Suicide

Everyone handles grief in his own way. It is a very personal thing. 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.

This list may prove to be helpful to you in understanding those things which may be comforting and those things which may not be helpful to the family. Some of these suggestions pertain to immediate needs, others are suggestions for the following weeks and months.

**DO:**

- **Respond honestly** to questions asked by the family. You don’t need to answer more than asked. If they want to know more, they will ask later. Too much information too soon can feel hurtful.
- **Surround them** with as much love and understanding as you can.
- **Give them** some private time. Be there, but don’t smother them.
- **Show love, not control.** If you make a person dependent upon you, you might both end up in a painful position.
- **Let them talk.** Most of the time they just need to hear out loud what is going on inside their heads. They usually aren’t seeking advice.
- **Encourage** that any and all decisions be made by the family together.
- **Expect** that they will become tired very easily. Grieving is hard work.
- **Let them decide** what they are ready for. Offer, but let them decide themselves.
- **Get the names and phone numbers** of anyone on the scene; police, medical examiners, etc. (anyone who has been involved). The family may want to ask questions later.
- **Keep a list** of phone calls, visitors and people who bring food.
- **Keep the mail** straight. Help with errands.
- **Keep track** of bills, cards, newspaper notices, etc.
- **Keep a list** of medication administered (i.e., Sandy, aspirin 2x, 1PM).
- **Offer to help** with documentation needed by the insurance company. (They generally require a photocopy of the death certificate, etc.)
- **Give special attention** to the other members of the family at the funeral and in the months to come.
- **Allow them** to express as much grief as they are feeling at the moment and are willing to share.
- **Offer** to make calls to people they wish to be notified.
- **Keep the mail** straight. Help with errands.
- **Keep track** of bills, cards, newspaper notices, etc.
- **Keep a list** of medication administered (i.e., Sandy, aspirin 2x, 1PM).
- **Offer to help** with documentation needed by the insurance company. (They generally require a photocopy of the death certificate, etc.)
- **Give special attention** to the other members of the family at the funeral and in the months to come.
- **Allow them** to express as much grief as they are feeling at the moment and are willing to share.
- **Allow them to talk** about the special endearing qualities of the loved one they have lost.

**DON'T:**

- **Assume** you know best.
- **Tell the person** you “know how they feel,” if you don’t
- **Make comparisons,** - “I know how you feel because my Mother, Father, etc., died”).
- **Tell them what** to feel. Allow them to feel what they are feeling, when they are feeling it.
- **Try to explain** or change those feelings so that they are more comfortable, (i.e., pain, anger).
- **Treat them** as though they don’t have sense enough to make decisions or understand what they are being told.
- **Preach to them.** If religion plays an important part in their lives, they will draw strength from it when they need it.
- **Tell them** it is God’s will.
- **Tell the person** to call you if they need anything, anytime unless you are prepared for a 3:00 a.m. phone call.
- **Try pushing anything** at them that will help to quiet them, such as drinks, medications, etc. If medication is necessary, let a trained person do it.
- **Ask about things** such as running errands, laundry, etc. JUST DO IT.
- **Try to stop them** from talking about their loved one.
- **Remove tasks, responsibilities or activities from them without their permission.** They may wish to remain involved in those things which they feel they can handle.
- **Stop seeing them.**
- **Tell them** what you would do or how you would feel if you were them. YOU’RE NOT.
- **Make the loved one**’s name taboo. If no one speaks his/her name, it feels as though everyone wants to forget the person existed.
- **Alter his/her room** in any way. Do not pick up clothes or clean the room. When the family is ready, they will take care of this in their own way or ask for help, if needed.
- **Let your own sense of helplessness** keep you from reaching out to a bereaved family.
- **Try to find something** positive (i.e., a moral lesson, closer family ties, etc.) about the person’s death.
- **Make any comments** which in any way suggest that the care at home, or in the hospital emergency room, or whatever, was inadequate. (Families are plagued by feelings of doubt and guilt without any help from others.)
My hope for you . . .

I agree that this is one of the worst things that can happen to you in your life. I know because my twenty-year-old son committed suicide. You can survive it, even though you may not think so now. Then you will know your own strength. When you’ve survived this, you can survive all life’s tragedies.

- **You need to talk to each other about your loss and your pain.** Talk about the good times you remember and the not-so-good. Keep talking and don’t bottle up. All of your feelings are natural. Know this and believe it. Feelings of guilt and anger may be strong and are to be expected.

- **You may use this time to bring your family closer together or to tear you apart by blaming.** Nobody is at fault. You may need to feel guilty for a while to eventually know that you are not responsible. Sometimes you have to go through a feeling to get beyond it. Facing death together can give you an appreciation of each other and of life that you never had before. There is no right or wrong to any of it. There are no set rules to follow. Take the lead from your minister or the person making arrangements, but ask for anything you want or need, even if it seems foolish.

- **My personal/faith is in a loving God who is with us through tragedy.** I do not believe he caused it or that he allowed it. It just happened. I believe my healing will come through my faith, my family and friends. If your beliefs do not include the concept of God, your comfort and support may come mainly from family, friends and your own inner strength.

- **You will ask why a million times and you need to ask the question.** You may never know the complete answer of why, but it’s important to struggle with the question. Then one day you will be able to let it go and not need to know anymore. The meaning I have found in my own son’s suicide is to realize that life is tenuous for us all, so I have the choice of making every minute count with my family from now on and valuing them and friends and life in a way I never had before.

- It may be helpful to face the reality that suicide was an apparent solution to overwhelming problems for a member of your family. If you can talk openly with each other or a counselor about other solutions and alternatives to problem solving, this agony may never again touch your family.

- **Please allow your friends and family to take care of you.** This helps you and helps them, too. You don’t have to be strong. In fact, crying is natural and healing and keeps you from bottling up your feelings.

- **Know and expect guilt and anger to be natural and hard to deal with.** It may be important for you to someday get angry at him/her. This was important for me to do, even though, at first, I could not get in touch with my anger at all. I finally gave myself permission to be angry at my son for giving up, for leaving me with such pain, for leaving my life, for not allowing me or others to help him, for his choice about his life, and for his lost future and mine with him. When my anger was expressed, I could then let it go and the anger lost its destructive power in my life.

- **I struggled with guilt – what had I done or not done that I should have or should not have?** I finally realized that I gave my son my humanness, my positives and negatives. What he did with that was his responsibility, not mine. I could give him total responsibility for his own actions. I could let the guilt and the anger go. I could experience a sense of relief for the end to his pain and suffering. A sense of peace.

My hope for you is that you will go through the mourning and grieving that is needed for emotional healing, and that you too will one day find renewed meaning in your own life and hope for the future.

Though we meet as strangers, by our love we shall be known.

Excerpt from “My Son … My Son … A Guide to Healing After Death, Loss, or Suicide” by Iris Bolton, MA
To purchase Iris’s book, call Bolton Press at 770-645-1886 or visit www.boltonpress.com
All of us are familiar with the Beatitudes from childhood...here is a different spin on them related to the grief and loss we experience from someone we love completing suicide.

**Blessed** are those who recognize our grief is compounded; that we grieve the death of a beloved person but foremost, we grieve the cause of the death...suicide.

**Blessed** are those who give us permission to mourn the loss of one dearly loved, free of judgment, censure and shame.

**Blessed** are spiritual guides who relieve our concerns for the repose of our loved one's soul with the truth that God is All-Knowing and All-Forgiving.

**Blessed** are those who don’t offer the meaningless cliché, “Time heals,” because, for a long while, the passing of time holds no meaning or value for us.

**Blessed** are those who don’t say, “I know just how you feel,” but instead say, “I am here for you. I will not tire of your tears or your words of sorrow, regret and anger.

**Blessed** are those who have the patience and love to listen to our repetitive obsession with Why? without offering useless answers of explanations.

**Blessed** are those who reaffirm the worth of our beloved deceased by sharing memories of their goodness and times of fun, laughter and happiness.

**Blessed** are the mental health care providers who explain to us that, very probably, our loved one died of a terminal illness called depression.

**Blessed** are those who challenge our sense of omnipotence with the reminder that no one has enough power or control over another to cause them to end their life.

**Blessed** are the first responders to our loved one's suicide who try to relieve our sense of guilt and responsibility by assuring us “This death is not your fault.”

**Blessed** are those who lend acceptance to the value of the relationship we shared with the one who died by allowing us to speak of them and ‘what might have been.’

**Blessed** are those that allow and encourage us to use our loved one’s death in a manner that gives our loss and grief meaning and purpose.

**Blessed** are those who do not expect us to find closure,” “grief resolution,” “grief recovery,” or to “be healed,” understanding that these terms define ‘grief work in progress’ that will take the rest of our life.

**Blessed** are community caregivers who direct us to suicide bereavement support groups where our anguish is understood, our loss validated and where we are encouraged by the example of others who have traveled this road before us.

**Blessed** are long-term survivors after suicide that role-model not only that we can survive, but, in time, we can thrive...we can regain peace of mind, restored confidence, renewed productivity and a revived zest for living.
WAYS TO TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT SUICIDE

Linda Goldman, Bart Speaks Out on Suicide: An Interactive Storybook for Young Children on Suicide

- Define suicide as when “someone chooses to make his or her body stop working.”
  
  - Give age appropriate facts and explanations. Dispel myths about suicide.
  
  - Retell good memories
  
  - Model feelings and thoughts for children.
  
  - Emphasize that suicide is always a mistake because “There is always another way out.”

WORDS TO USE WITH SUICIDE

Linda Goldman, Bart Speaks Out on Suicide: An Interactive Storybook for Young Children on Suicide

- Death: Death is when a person’s body stops working.
- Depression: Extreme feelings of sadness and hopelessness that last a long time.
- Guilt: A feeling that makes us think we are the cause of something and that we may have done something wrong.
- Grief: The feelings we feel after someone close to us has died. We can feel sad, angry, frightened – or guilty.
- Suicide: The act of killing yourself so that your body won’t work anymore. People may do this when they feel there is no other way to solve their problems, there is no other way to escape their pain, or they may feel that at the moment life is not worth living. People can get help. There is always another way.
Ways to Help a Grieving Child
The Dougy Center
The National Center for Grieving Children & Families

1. Listen
2. Listen some more.
3. Be honest. Never lie to a child.
4. Answer the questions they ask. Even the hard ones
5. Give the child choices whenever possible.
6. Encourage consistency and routines.
7. Talk about and remember the person who died.
8. Make a child’s world safe for grieving.
9. Expect and allow all kinds of emotions.
10. Forget about the “grief stages”.
11. Respect differences in grieving styles.
12. Get out the crayons, pens, pencils, paint and chalk.
13. Run! Jump! Play! (Or find other ways to release energy and emotions)
14. Be a model of good grief.
15. Hug with permission.
16. Practice patience.
17. Support children even when they are in a bad mood.
18. Expect some kids to act younger than their age.
19. Expect some kids to become little adults.
20. Encourage kids to eat right and drink lots of water.
21. Help the child at bedtimes. Sleep may come hard for grieving children.
22. Inform the child’s teacher about the death.
23. Resist being overprotective.
24. Don’t force kids to talk.
25. Take a break.
26. Remember: “Playing” is “grieving”.
27. Seek additional help for the child if needed.
28. Attend to the physical aspects of grief.
29. Help children know they are not alone in their grief.
30. Understand that grief looks different at different ages.
31. Set limits and rules, and enforce them.
32. Remember special days that impact the child
33. Plan family times together.
34. Be available for children when they need you.
35. Take care of yourself, and do your own grieving.
Almost Heaven: A Father’s Perspective – by John Reid

I will never forget the first time ever I saw her face. Who can describe the ultimate joy, elation, thrill, and bliss as a father gazes into the eyes of his firstborn daughter? Only another father, as he first beholds his beautiful bundle of joy sent from God.

As time passes, each “first” - steps, words, and accomplishments fill you with such awe and even more profound joy. You strive to become the best father possible. As she grows in beauty, intelligence, and talent, you grow as protector, provider, and guide and you learn what unconditional love is all about. You realize more and more each day just how blessed you are and you give thanks and praise to the Lord. In your child’s eyes, you become a hero, a superman, and you can fix everything; while she becomes even more beautiful, caring, and evolves into “Daddy’s little girl”.

No experience could be better, as this is Almost Heaven. But then, something happens; a mistake; followed by a wrong choice; followed by more bad choices and decisions and errors in judgment. What? This beautiful child in rebellion? Against whom? Against the one who loves her more than life itself? Oh God, No! You beg and plead; you pray and bargain; you fuss and cuss; all to no avail. You panic when she is missing and the telephone does not ring. You are blown away when the telephone does ring and you must deal with the crisis de jour. You try everything and everything fails. Then you learn about “tough love”. Yeah, that’s the ticket! That will work! When it doesn’t, you die a little, but you keep on trying.

You seek the counsel of those you believe are wiser or more spiritually connected. You hear, time and again, “Let go – Let God”. Well, OK! Why not? She was His in the beginning, is now, and will be eternally and you have lost your ability to fix anything. Your continual prayers are; “lead, guide, and direct her; protect her from harm, heal her and make her whole, and restore and return the prodigal – please, God!”

Then the telephone rings again, almost one year ago. This time, it’s the coroner – SHE’S DEAD! Just like that – DEAD – DECEASED – a probable suicide and your entire world turns upside down. Bur HOW? WHY? God – where were you? Where are you now? The utter devastation, brokenness, helplessness, and hopelessness are overwhelming. The finality of death, how cruel! No longer is there time to say what you wished you could say. No longer is there time to repair the damage that resulted from what you did say. All that remains are “if only”, “why”, and a tremendous anger. I will never forget the last time ever I saw her face! I love her still and I always will.

As one life ends in suicide, so many more lives are impacted, much like the ripples a stone produces when “thrown away” into a pond. Relationships, family, love, work and even life itself are irrevocably altered. With death, hopes and dreams evaporate and joy disappears. Yes, the future does appear bleak, but we who believe are not destroyed. We believe – No, we KNOW! We will see our lovely daughter again. Only the next time, she will be healed, whole, and perfected! Not almost Heaven, but in Heaven.
I agree that this is one of the worst things that can happen to you in your life. Death of a loved one to suicide, particularly your child, pulls your heart, soul and life out of your body. I know because my thirty-five year old son died from suicide. You can survive it, even though you may not think so now. Then you will know your own strength. When you’ve survived this, you can survive all of life’s tragedies.

However, you need to talk about your loss and your pain. Talk about the good times and the not so good times you remember. Keep talking and don’t bottle anything up. All of your feelings are natural. Know this and believe it. Feelings of guilt and anger may be strong and are to be expected.

You may use this time to bring your family and friends closer together or to tear you apart by blaming. No one person is at fault. You may need to feel guilty for a while to eventually know that you are not responsible. Sometimes you have to go through a feeling to get beyond it. Facing death can give you an appreciation for life that you never had before. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. There are no set rules to follow. Take your lead from your counselor, minister, respected friend or support group of peers facing this same horrible loss.

My personal faith is in a loving God who is with us through tragedy. I do not believe He caused Bobby’s death nor that He allowed it. It just happened. I believe my healing came through my faith, counseling, my family, friends and last, but not least, the support group of SOS. If your beliefs do not include the concept of God, your comfort and support may come mainly from your family, friends, a counselor, a support group and your own inner strength.

You will ask why a million times and you need to ask the question until it is no longer important for you to ask. You may never know the complete answer of why, but it’s important to struggle with the question. One day you will be able to let it go and live with the “not knowing.” The meaning I have found in my own son’s suicide is to realize that life is tenuous for us all, so I have the choice of making every minute count with my family from now on and valuing them, my friends and life in a way I never did before.

It may be helpful to face the reality that their suicide was the only solution they knew, at that time, to an overwhelming problem. If we learn to talk openly with each other or about other solutions and alternatives to problem solving, this agony may never again touch your family or friends.

Please allow your friends and family to take care of you. This helps you and helps them, too. You don’t have to be strong. In fact, crying is natural and healing and keeps you from bottling up your feelings. It also pays tribute to the love you felt for the person who died.

Know and expect guilt and anger to be natural and hard to deal with. It may be important for you to get angry at them. This was important for me to do, even though, at first, I could not get in touch with my anger at all. I finally gave myself permission to be angry at my son for giving up, for leaving me with such pain, for leaving my life, for not allowing me or others to help him, for his choice about his life, and for his lost future and mine with him. When my anger was expressed, I could then let it go and the anger lost its destructive power in my life.

I struggled with guilt - what had I done or not done? I finally realized that I gave my son my humaness…my positives and negatives. What he did with that was his responsibility…not mine. I could give him total responsibility for his own actions. I could let the guilt and the anger go. I could experience a sense of relief for the end to his pain and suffering – a sense of peace, as insane as that may sound to you at this moment.

Physically our son is no longer with us, but he is within our hearts, souls and lives; he is still such an important part. The memories of Bobby will never part from us.

My hope for you is that you will go through the mourning and grieving that is needed for emotional healing, seek help, join a support group and that you too will one day find renewed meaning in your own life and hope for the future.
THE LOVE OF MY LIFE
(On the death of a spouse)

It was a beautiful spring morning, the kind of Saturday in May when you can’t wait to
get outside and water all of God’s greenery. How can such a spectacular day full of
sunshine and birds bathing in the sprinklers turn into the most horrendous day of my life?
How many times in the past three years I have asked myself that question!
I lost the love of my life on May 29, 2004, at 10:15 am. My husband, Gary, left our
home that morning telling me he was going to get the car washed and a haircut. Instead,
he went straight to his family practice office and committed suicide with a gun he had
recently purchased. We didn’t own a gun nor did we believe in them.
I have cried an ocean of tears and nothing could have prepared me for the devastating
grief and pain I have felt in the past three years. This journey of sadness robbed me
physically and mentally. My emotions were all over the place, from extreme anger one
minute to willing him to walk back in the door the next. He was a physician who spent his
entire life helping people – how could he possibly not help himself? Yet, another question
I have asked myself many times!
Three weeks after his death I walked into my first Survivors of Suicide meeting. I
can’t tell you anything about that evening except to say I was so raw with shock and pain
that I could only sit and stare in space, often shaking my head; my daughter and I holding
on to each other for dear life. I went back to the group meetings several times during the
next few months, still in so much shock that I stopped attending altogether. During this
time of absence from SOS, I began intense private counseling and continued with therapy
for the next year and a half.
During the spring of 2005, I was invited to attend an eight week closed session of
Survivors of Suicide. SOS and my private counseling formed the first steps of my
recovery. Being able to express my feelings openly in the group setting was vital to my
climb out of this pit of darkness and devastation. I actually found myself looking forward
to Thursday evenings. I found through SOS a non-judgmental acceptance. The very gifted
counselors and others who shared my pain reassured me I was not alone in my journey.
The friendships I have made are truly treasures in my life and will forever be cherished.
Day by day I am rebuilding my self-esteem, and ever so slowly, time is healing my broken
heart.
Each Christmas morning since Gary’s death, my children, grandchildren and I release
balloons with a Christmas card attached. My precious 5 year old grandson, Alex, wanted
to send a card to his “Mamps” in heaven. (When Alex was 2, he couldn’t say “Gramps” --
hence the name “Mamps”). I know Gary is still with me. In my belief of eternal life he is
here as surely as the wind blows through my hair, as the drops of rain fall on my face and
as Alex dances when he watches the balloons go to his “Mamps” in heaven.

By Debbie Cottingim
In loving memory of Gary Cottingim, MD
(1951-2004)
On Losing My Mother

I am writing today to think about how the suicide of my mother seven years ago has affected me. One certainty is this: whether you thought you were or not, you grow up the day your mother takes her own life. There is no possibility of being a baby again.

I remember when my father gave me the news over the phone, he told me “You know you were the apple of your mother’s eye.” It felt nice to hear, but it also was quite painful. Why was I not a good enough apple? Obviously I was a bit of a rotten apple!

And there I go again, making everything into a joke. I remember the night she died, and dozens of people rummaging around and disturbing her kitchen. They were near strangers to her, friends of my father’s. I remember telling my friends I was going to sneak up on the kitchen and in my best poltergeist voice whisper “Get out! Get out!”. I had everyone rolling, but they also probably thought I was in need of a valium.

I’ve learned there is no wrong way to grieve. You have to let people in grief express themselves. I had to laugh because that’s what I know how to do, and it stabilized me. I’m a cut up, and it was comfortable for me to be in my natural state, even in a time like that.

But I digress. My point was being forced to adulthood. A bond with a mother is about the most comforting bond a person has.

Your father yells at you when you don’t change the oil in your car.
You mother tells you how many times she’s run out of gas.
Your father disciplines you when you stay out too late.
Your mother reminisces about old boyfriends with you.
Your father teaches you to balance your checkbook.
Your mother covers your cold checks.

When I lost my mother, I lost the one source of unconditional love and acceptance that I had in life. And perhaps, the only one I’ll ever have. After seven years of missing my mother, though, I can honestly say I accept that. Hence, I take another step further into adulthood.

I am told a girl who loses her mother will miss her the most at her wedding and childbirth. Could that dread of renewed grief be the reason I’m a proponent of elopement and adoption? I sometimes feel I will gladly give up the white dress and the family eyes, if it makes it easier to deal with her absence in those moments.

Those are the specifics to the loss of a mother. It shatters your heart, and brings your childhood to a screeching halt. Because of it, though, I do know I am a better person and a stronger one. My time with Iris Bolton and my Survivors of Suicide support group gave me that, and to them I am immensely thankful. The only thing you have to do to be a good SOS member is listen. It’s not a tough job. And through it you often hear yourself. Perhaps even find a kindred spirit who can help you feel like a child again.

Ginny Sparrow
Atlanta, Georgia
1999
Journey Through My Heart: A Meandering Creek

My older brother Bobby and I had a very special bond between us. As a small child, he was my greatest source of entertainment. Our bedrooms were diagonally across the hall from each other and I remember lying in my bed watching him bounce up and down on the foot of his bed. His dark shiny hair, his big soulful brown eyes and a smile that lit up the night! We played our own imaginary games and spent endless hours together having fun and making wonderful memories. As life whirled about us and swiftly moved us forward, so many memories were being etched in my heart – as if we were blinking an eye, my life as a sibling came to an earth shattering end.

As adults, Bobby lived in a much different world than I imagined. Where my world was filled with two remarkable sons, loving family, wonderful friends and so much more, Bobby’s life was filled with hidden sadness and his own demons that clattered around him. The day Bobby took his life by suicide, my life and the lives of everyone around me, drastically changed. It seemed that the cool water of my creek dried up that hot July night. I remember that night so vividly. The night air was hot and humid and as I sat on the cool green grass of my parent’s yard, I couldn’t believe what had happened. How could Bobby have been so lost and alone? Why didn’t he tell me how horrible he felt? So many times in my adult life, when the waters of my creek were flowing swift and rough, he held my hand and spoke softly saying … “Mis, it will be okay.” Why didn’t I have the chance to hold his hand and tell him it would be okay? My heart, my world was a dry creek with ugly jagged rocks. Even though we were in the heat of the summer, the next few weeks after Bobby’s death were dark and cold for me. I felt so lost and alone.

Some eight months before Bobby completed suicide, we lost our younger brother Mike in an automobile accident. My life as the middle child … a younger sister and an older sister … had come to a screeching halt. My life as a sibling had ended. I was so angry with Bobby for leaving me here alone and for making me an only child. I was afraid to even think how I would handle life going forward. I felt the weight of the world on my shoulders. I no longer had a brother, my mom no longer had sons, and my sons no longer had uncles. It ended with me and I am all that’s left of three.

As time has passed, the creek of my life has slowly filled back up with much needed water. Its banks are covered with life and the water is beautiful, cool and peaceful. The rocks are still there but have been smoothed by the flowing of the water. These rocks are the foundation of my life and without them I would not be who I am today. I am a daughter, a mother, an aunt, a friend, and yes, I am still a sister.

-- Missy Craven
Defining Moments

“I put everybody that enters my life into the category of a tree. Some people are like leaves on the tree. The wind blows this way and they’re over here. The wind blows the opposite direction and they’re now over there. And when the season changes, they wither and die. And then they’re gone.”

“But that’s alright. Most people in the world are like that. They take from the tree and offer a little shade every now and then. That’s all they can do. But don’t get mad at people like that. That’s who they are and they’re never going to change. They were put on this earth to be what they are - a leaf.”

“Now some people are like the branch on a tree. Be careful of these branches because they’ll fool you. They will get you to believe they’re a good friend and strong...but the minute you step out on them, they’ll break and leave you high and dry.”

“But if you find 2 or 3 people in your life that are like the roots at the bottom of the tree, YOU ARE BLESSED because those are the type of people that are going NO WHERE. If it weren’t for those roots, the tree couldn’t live. A tree can have a hundred-million branches but only a few roots at the bottom to make sure it gets what it needs”. (Tyler Perry).

I knew from the beginning he would be a root. I had been on campus less than 4 hours when we met. Wearing a blue polo shirt with Lander Ambassadors stitched on the pocket and a smile that warmed the room, he introduced himself and asked if he could be of help. Despite the couch dangling out the window, a U-Haul full of mementos, and rainy weather predictions, I smiled and said, “No Thanks. We’ve got it.” He chuckled and walked away. Frustrated with the unmovable couch, I moved to the bedroom and continued to squeeze Texas into Idaho. I heard a big thud. The couch had arrived and the young man still wearing the warm smile admired his handiwork from the window. He simply stated, “Sometimes in life we all need a little push.” From that day forward we were inseparable. He pushed me to do my best in everything, and would do anything for me. He was my mentor, my friend, and undeniably one of my strongest roots. In life we shared many laughs and weathered many storms, yet the greatest I faced alone. On a cold Wednesday morning, a freight train ripped through my soul and tore my life into shreds. To this day I only vaguely remember the conversation. The words T.J., DEAD, SUICIDE penetrated through my head but not my heart. IT MUST BE A MISTAKE. WHY WOULD SOMEONE PLAY SUCH A HORRIBLE JOKE? And as my heart begin to feel what my head could not understand. OH MY GOD. WHY DID THIS HAVE TO HAPPEN? HOW COULD I HAVE NOT KNOWN? PLEASE SOMEONE TELL ME THIS IS A HORRIBLE DREAM. I WANT TO WAKE UP. PLEASE SOMEONE HELP ME. I CAN’T BREATHE. I’M DYING INSIDE.

It’s been a little over 10 years since that cold Wednesday morning. Many things have changed and others have remained the same. T.J. is still one of my roots. His death brought purpose and passion to my life. Together we are making meaning of such a tragic loss and giving hope to so many. I still struggle with the WHY and at times the guilt. But I’ve learned to accept that T.J.’s life, while unbeknownst to many of us, was spiraling out of control and his desire to die outweighed his desire to live. His choice, although made in darkness and clouded with pain, was his alone to make. I’ve learned that the journey to surviving is a very complex one with many twists and turns. You struggle to find familiar ground and the minute you think you have everything figured out, everything changes and the journey starts again. But one thing is certain, it does get better. And most of all, time does not heal all wounds but it does soften them and remind us to cherish each moment. I am thankful for all of life’s blows, each have shaped me into the person I am. I AM A SURVIVOR. I AM THRIVING. I AM LIVING. I CAN BE CHANGED BY WHAT HAPPENS TO ME. I AM NOT REDUCED BY IT!

Wishing you hope and healing,

Michelle Morton (Mental Health America of Greenville)
Asking the Question Why Suicide?

Asking “why did my loved one do this?” is the question that haunts most survivors of suicide. The outside world demands to know from us, and we don’t know ourselves. For some of us there were definite clues that our loved ones were depressed or that something was wrong. We either knew that they were in pain and did not know the extent of it, or we did know and tried everything we knew to get help for them. For others the suicide was completely out of character. Many people who end their lives are extremely good actors and actresses. They only allow us to see what they want us to see. In either instance, for many, we never thought it could really happen to us, to our loved ones, and to our families. It doesn’t make sense.

So we search, trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together. Hindsight is 20/20, and sometimes we find bits and pieces, clues to what might have happened to allow our loved ones to lose hope and give up on life. We often want a specific reason, a direct cause and effect. If we can understand exactly why our loved ones ended their lives, maybe we can keep it from happening again to someone else we love.

For years I struggled with this question myself, following the suicide of my boyfriend. The best explanation was described to me by Iris Bolton, the Executive Director of The Link Counseling Center in Atlanta, GA and a survivor of her son’s suicide. Iris went to Emory University and received a Masters in Suicidology in an attempt to answer this question for herself. She did not find it. Later, Iris found as close to an answer as she will have. It did not come from a Doctor, Professor, or a Therapist. It came from another mother who had lost her son by suicide. This is how it was described to me, and I share it with you:

“The Cup Analogy”

There is a cup of water sitting on a table. It is so full, it is rounded at the top. One or two drops of water are added to the cup and it spills over. What caused the water to spill? We want to blame the last one or two drops, but in an empty cup it would not spill. It was not the water in the cup prior to the drops being added, because if left alone, it would not have spilled. It was a combination of all the drops of water in the cup that came before and the last one or two drops that caused the water to spill.

In a person’s life, the water in the cup is symbolic of all the hurt, pain, shame, humiliation, and loss not dealt with along the way. The last couple of drops symbolize the “trigger events,” “the last straw,” the event or situation that preceded the final act of taking one’s own life. Often we want to blame the trigger event, but this does not make sense to us. Like the water, these events all by themselves would not cause someone to end their life. It is the combination of everything in that person’s life not dealt with and the last one or two things that caused our loved ones to lose hope. For us, we must find a way to pour out the water along the way. This may be through talking it out, writing it out, sometimes yelling it out, whatever works for you. We must learn to deal with our pain in a way our loved ones could not.

This analogy does not give us the concrete answer many of us are looking for, but I know it made sense for me and has been helpful for many survivors. It allowed me to let go of the search for “why,” and to find a different way of dealing with my pain.

Tracy T. Dean, M.S.
National Resource Center for Suicide Prevention and Aftercare
Please Don’t Ask Me to Explain … Again

Addressing Other Losses by Suicide

I am writing this for anyone who has lost someone they loved and cared about by suicide. I am a Survivor of Suicide, defined as anyone who has lost a loved one by self-inflicted death. Eleven years ago on December 5, 1986, my boyfriend, Andy, shot and killed himself. He was 17 years old. At the time, no one seemed to doubt my pain or my significance in his life and his in mine. His family included me like one of their own in the memorial and funeral services.

I remember during that time, my life seemed to have no purpose or value, full of seemingly endless pain. Well intentioned comments such as “You’re young, you’ll have many more loves in your life” deepened the excruciating wounds they intended to soothe. How could I ever replace this dear person? I never will. I don’t want to spend my life alone, but risking love again? My love is no good, it only causes pain and despair. I felt broken. And who could I trust enough to love? Would they leave me too?

As time went on, the well intended comments turned to “You should be over this by now, after all, he wasn’t a relative of yours,” causing me to feel more alone, crazy, and believing there was something terribly wrong with me. Everyone seemed to want me to be “normal” again. I wanted to be “normal” again. I would vacillate between putting on a brave face and a good act and shutting down in isolation. My continuous attempts to be what everyone wanted crumbled in my hands, feeding my belief that I was damaged and always would be.

My mother, sensing my extreme pain and desperately wanting to help, found the name of a woman at the local counseling center who had lost her son by suicide, Iris Bolton. I don’t remember much of our meeting, as I have lost memory of at least two months of that time, however, I remember feeling real hope for the first time in months. My mother later told me I said two things when I left her office, that she thought she was going crazy too, and at least she knew the pain. Here was a woman who didn’t make me justify my pain, she accepted it to be real and valid. And in that simple acceptance she gave me the gift of hope that I too would survive and one day live a happy productive life.

After that, I entered therapy with a counselor she referred me to, went on to college, completed my Masters in Counseling, and began working with Survivors. Currently, I’ve been happily married for three years and coordinate The Link Counseling Center’s National Resource Center for Suicide Prevention and Aftercare. I still get the occasional well-intended question or comment such as “What was so special about Andy that he made such a profound impact on your life?” And I think to myself “Please don’t ask me to explain … again.” You see, I don’t mind telling my story, because in the telling there is healing for me and education for others, but I refuse to justify my pain to anyone. I have learned that it is valid just because it’s mine. It doesn’t need to follow anyone else’s rules or guidelines based on how they think I should feel.

Whatever brings you to read this article, the loss of a parent, child, sibling, spouse, friend, or any other relationship, do not compare your pain to others, it is unique and different, for the person you lost was unique as was your relationship. There are common threads that bind us as we try to put our lives back together. It is not our old lives, but different ones. We will never be the same. We will create a “new normal” for ourselves defined by our own healing and growth. Know that your pain is real and valid. And that there are people willing to listen and be with you in your pain and not ask you to justify or explain.

Tracy T. Dean, November 1997

Distributed by Mental Health America of Greenville County, 429 North Main Street, Suite 2, Greenville SC 29601
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HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL DAYS

When you think of “the holidays” and birthdays, what comes to mind? Do you have memories of happy times or are they in sharp contrast to the Brady Bunch? Whatever the case, the fact that your loved one is no longer a part of the vision probably causes great pain. That’s to be expected.

The first holiday season, anniversary or birthday after the death of your loved one may be the hardest, because without their presence the fact of their death becomes all too real. As time passes, holidays may still be difficult.

Some guidelines may be helpful:

1. Tell your family and friends what you need and what is not helpful. I needed to be with people, but also needed alone time.

2. Change your traditions. You may want to take a trip to get away.


4. Do something for someone else in the name of the person who died. I took presents to a children’s hospital.

5. Do something special for yourself. I took the day off, stayed in bed all day and read a good book.

6. Give yourself permission to grieve. Take time out when the waves of grief come over you.

7. Know it’s OK to laugh again. Life does go on …

8. Know that you are not alone. In time you will heal from this trauma and there is hope that you will survive and even thrive again. I have, and I believe you can too.

9. Whatever your faith, or belief system, let your holidays be filled with grace. As the Australian Aboriginals say: Live in service, live without judgment and live in forgiveness.

Blessings, healing and hope to you all.

Iris Bolton
I Need

By Deb Kosmer

Reprinted from Suicide Bereavement Support www.sbsnw.org

I need you to be quiet
To not fill the air
With your words
All the time.

I need you to listen
To the silence
As I do, to hear what it says
And say nothing... just listen...

I need to know you’re sincere
That you can be depended upon
To keep your word
To do what I say.

I need you to ask me
Not tell me
What or how
I should feel or think.

I need to know
That you will not run
When it gets ugly or messy
Or too uncomfortable.

I need to know that
I still have a place
In this world
That has become so foreign.

That you see me
Who I am
What I have to offer
That I am more than
What has happened

That you are not afraid
That you cannot catch from me
The tangled web
I am in.
RESOURCES FOR SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE

American Association of Suicidology
Suite 310, 4201 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
Washington, SC 20008
202-237-2280
www.suicidology.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
120 Wall Street, 22nd Floor
New York City, NY 10005
212-363-3500
www.afsp.org

The Compassionate Friends
National Headquarters for bereaved parents and siblings
P.O. Box 3696
Oak Brook, IL 60521
630-990-0010
www.compassionatefriends.org

The Jason Foundation
116 Maple Row Blvd., Suite C
Hendersonville, TN 37075
888-881-2323
www.jasonfoundation.com

The Jed Foundation
583 Broadway
New York, NY 10012
212-343-0016
www.jedfoundation.org

The Link’s National Resource Center for Suicide Prevention and Aftercare
348B Mount Vernon Hwy. NE
Atlanta, GA 30328 404-256-2919
www.thelink.org EM: linknrc@bellsouth.net

Center for Disease Control & Prevention
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
Division of Violence Prevention
Contact: Alex C 770-488-4362
www.cdc.gov/ncipe

Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) www.sprc.org 877-438-7772
National Organization for People of Color Against Suicide Inc. (NOPCAS)  202-549-6039
4715 Sargent Road, NE, Washington, DC  20017
www.nopcas.com

OASSIS
101 King Farm Blvd. #D-401
Rockville, MD  20850
240-632-0335
www.oasis.org

The Samaritans
P.O. Box 1259 Madison Square State
New York, NY  10159
212-677-3009
www.samaritansnyc.org

Kristin Brooks Rope Center National Hope Network
Suicide Prevention Crisis Line and Local Referral
Crisis Number 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)
Business Number: 800-422-HOPE (4673)
www.livewithdepression.org  www.hopeline.com

SAVE (Suicide Awareness/Voices of Education)
9001 E. Bloomington Fwy., Ste 150
Bloomington, MN  5420-3435
952-946-7998  Fax: 952-829-0841
www.save.org

SPAN USA (Suicide Prevention Action Network USA)
1025 Vermont Ave., NW, Suite 1200
Washington, SC  20005
202-449-3600  Fax: 202-449-3601
www.spanusa.org

Centre for Suicide Prevention
1202 Centre Street S.E. Suite 320
Calgary, Alberta Canada  T2G 5A5
403-245-3900
www.suicideinfo.ca

Yellow Ribbon/Light for Life Foundation
P.O. Box 644
Westminster, CO  80036-0644 USA
303-429-3530
www.yellowribbon.org
GRIEF LITERATURE

Children’s Literature

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN 3 TO 8 YEARS:

Alex, Marlee & Ben, Grandpa and Me. (We learn about death)
Brown, M., The Dead Bird, Young Scott Books, 1958. Vietnam (Buddhist point of view)
Crowthamel, Sr., Thomas G., It’s OK, Keystone Press, 1986. (Brother/Sister)
De Paola, Tomie, Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs, Puffin Books.
Hammond, Janice M., When My Dad Died, Cranbrook Publication Co.
Miles R., Annie and the Old One, Little, Brown, and Company, 1971. (Grandmother)
Stein, S., About Dying, Walker and Company, 1974. (Bird, Grandfather)
Viorst, J., The Tenth Good Thing About Barney, Atheneum, 1971. (Cat)

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AGES 9 TO 12:

Barker, Peggy, What Happened When Grandma Died, Concordia, 1984
Carrick, C., The Accident, Seabury Press, 1976. (Dog)
Clifton, Lucille, Everett Anderson’s Good-Bye, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
Jampolsky, G., There’s a Rainbow Behind Every Dark Cloud, Celestia Arts, 1978.
Johnson, Philip E., Goodbye, Mom, Goodbye, Welch Publishing Co.
Koch, Ron, Goodbye Grandpa, Augsburg Publishing House.
Lovre, Cheri, When Somebody Special Dies, (Children Talking about siblings or parents who have died)
Lowry, L., A Summer to Die, Houghton-Mifflin, 1977. (Sister)
Smith, D., A Taste of Blackberries, Thomas Y. Crowell, 1973. (Boy’s Friend)

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AGES 10 AND UNDER:

Gryte, Marilyn, No New Baby, Centering Corporation
Adolescent Literature

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN 13 AND OVER:

Grollman, Earl A. Grollman, Sharon H., Talking About Suicide, Char Koosta Printing.
LaTour, Kathy, For Those Who Live, 1983.
Paterson, Katherine, Bridge to Terabithia, (Friend)
Rawls, Wilson, Where the Red Fern Grows, (Dogs)

PARENTS’ BOOKS ON CHILDREN/TEENAGER GRIEF:

Mellonie, Bryan 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.

CHILDREN’S GRIEF PAMPHLETS:

Bereavement: A Magazine of Hope and Healing, Bereavement Publishing.
Guide Lines: Answers to a Child’s Questions About Death, Gee & Hickton, LTD.

Notes
SUICIDE GRIEF LITERATURE

BOOKS:

Alexander, Words I Never Thought to Speak.
Chance Sue, Stronger Than Death.
Chilstrom, Andrew, You Died Too Soon.
Clark, Clergy Response to Suicidal Persons and Their Family Members, Exploration Press.
Clarke, Life After Grief.
Elliott, Ripples of Suicide.
Hartley, Breaking the Silence.
Rosefeld, Linda and Prupas, Marilynne, Left Alive: After a Suicide.
Sandefer, Mom, I’m All Right
Smolin and Guinan, Healing After the Suicide of a Loved One.
Styron, Darkness Visible.

PAMPHLETS:

Afterwards, a quarterly newsletter about suicide and Suicide grief, Adina Wrobeski, 5124 Gove St., Minneapolis, MN 55436.
Grief After Suicide, Mental Health Association, 414 W. Moreland Blvd., Room 101, Waukesha, WI 53186 (self-addressed, stamped envelope).
Parents of Suicide, brochure, The Compassionate Friends, P.O. Box 1347, Oak Brook, IL 60521.

Suicide: Questions and Answers, Adina Wrobeski, 5124 Grove St., Minneapolis, MN 55436.
Suicide: The Danger Signals, Adina Wrobeski, 5124 Grove St., Minneapolis, MN 55436.
Suicide: Your Child Has Died, Adina Wrobeski, 5124 Grove St., Minneapolis, MN 55436.
Survivors of Suicide (S.O.S.), 184 Salem Ave., Dayton, OH 45406.

SUICIDE PREVENTION:

Gordon, Sol, When Living Hurts, YAD TIKVAH FOUNDATION.
McCoy, Kathleen, Coping with Teenage Depression, NAL, 1982.
Scheidman, Edwin K., Definition of Suicide, John Wiley & Sons, 1980.
Directions to Survivors of Suicide:

St. Michaels Lutheran Church 2619 Augusta Street Greenville, SC 29605

From Spartanburg Area

- Take I-85 South
- Take Exit 46 (SC-291/Mauldin Road/Pleasantburg Dr./Augusta Road Exit)
- Take the Mauldin Road Exit 46 C, toward SC-291 N/Pleasantburg Drive
- Turn Right onto Mauldin Road
- Turn Right onto Augusta Street/US-25-BR
  - Note: Augusta Street is just past Waters Avenue. Furniture Market Place in Terrace Shopping Center is on the Corner. If you are on the Potomac Avenue and reach Monteith Circle you’ve gone about .1 miles too far.
- 2619 Augusta Street is on the right
  - Note: Your destination is just past Rockwood Drive. If you reach Phillips Lane you’ve gone a little too far.

From Anderson Area

- Take I-85 North
- Take Exit 46 (SC-291/Mauldin Road/Pleasantburg Dr./Augusta Road Exit)
- Take the Mauldin Road Exit 46 C, toward SC-291 N/Pleasantburg Drive
- Turn Right onto Mauldin Road
- Turn Right onto Augusta Street/US-25-BR
  - Note: Augusta Street is just past Waters Avenue. Furniture Market Place in Terrace Shopping Center is on the Corner. If you are on the Potomac Avenue and reach Monteith Circle you’ve gone about .1 miles too far.
- 2619 Augusta Street is on the right
  - Note: Your destination is just past Rockwood Drive. If you reach Phillips Lane you’ve gone a little too far.

From Columbia

- Take US-76 West becomes I-26 West
- Merge onto I-385 N via Exit 51 on the left towards Laurens/Greenville
- Turn Left onto W. Butler Road
  - Note: W. Butler road is .1 miles past Whatley Circle. Tutti Frutti Frozen Yogurt is on the left. If you are on the Potomac Avenue and reach Monteith Circle you’ve gone about .1 miles too far.
- 2619 Augusta Street is on the right
  - Note: Your destination is just past Rockwood Drive. If you reach Phillips Lane you’ve gone a little too far.

From Asheville, NC

- Take I-240 West toward I-26 East/I-40
- Merge onto I-26 East/US-74 East via the exit on the left toward Asheville Airport / Hendersonville / Spartanburg
- Merge onto US-25 South Via Exit 54 toward US-176 / Greenville / NC-225 (Crossing into South Carolina)
- Merge onto US-25-BR-S
- Turn Left onto Buncombe Street / SC-183 East. Continue to follow SC-183 E.
- Turn Right onto Church Street / US-29
  - Note: Church St. is just past N. Irvine St. If you reach Broadus Avenue you’ve gone about .1 miles too far.
  - Note: Augusta Street is just past Crescent Avenue. Taco Bell is on the corner. If you are on Mills Avenue and reach Elm Street you’ve gone about .1 miles too far.
- 2619 Augusta Street is on the left
  - Note: Your destination is just past Phillips Lane. If you reach Rockwood Drive you’ve gone a little too far.