

Survivor of Suicide Handbook



SUICIDE PREVENTION EDUCATION AWARENESS KNOWLEDGE

Acknowledgements

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Visit www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/hecomm, go to Services and Programs and click on Mental Health. The original document can be found under Suicide Postvention Initiative. Or, download the booklet from www.lifelongmentalhealth.com.

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Marion Cooper, W.R.H.A.

July, 2006

This Handbook is dedicated to survivors
and the loved ones they lost.

*Perhaps, they are not the stars,
but rather openings in Heaven
where the love of our lost ones
pours through
and shines down upon us
to let us know they are happy.*

Inuit legend
Author unknown

This guide has been written to help you through the difficult grief after the loss of a loved one to suicide. There is practical information - such as planning a funeral, taking care of finances - and there is information that we hope you find supportive and comforting in dealing with your grief. Remember that grief is as unique as the individual and there is no “right” or “wrong” way to grieve. Understand that the primary cause of suicide is untreated depression.

SPEAK is a non-profit charitable organization that was started in 2001 by five families who lost a loved one to suicide. We remember with stark clarity the first few moments, days and years of our loss. We hope that what we have learned throughout the years will be helpful to you and your family.


Please accept our sincere condolences on your loss. On page 38 of this booklet you will find further information on SPEAK and the services we offer to survivors.

Peace and Courage,

Marlene Potash
Executive Director
SPEAK

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*When
Someone
You Love
Dies by
Suicide*

When Someone You Love Dies by Suicide

You will survive. Yes the grief is overwhelming. It is hard to believe now, but one hour at a time, one day at a time, you will get through this.

What Helps in the Short Term

Emotional reactions to a suicide are intense and overwhelming. Knowing what to expect might make it easier for you to cope.

Know What to Expect

Most survivors find it hard to think clearly. It may seem as if your brain is numb, that you keep forgetting things. You may replay the suicide over and over in your mind, and find you cannot stop asking “Why?”

It is common to feel overwhelmed by sorrow, physically ill and angry. You may feel ashamed or guilty. It is important to remember that you are not to blame. Sometimes, survivors think about suicide themselves. If you are having suicidal thoughts, talk to a counsellor about how to cope with the situation and keep yourself safe.

These reactions are normal, as are other strong feelings you may have. You are not losing your mind - you are mourning your loss.

Let others help you

The sense of confusion is so great that it can be very hard to cope at first, so let other people help you. Look to your friends, family, place of worship, community and others for support. They can deal with people, make some decisions and help you remember what you need to know. Also, they can be there just to listen.

Telling Others

What to Say

One challenge you might face is telling others about the suicide. Although you may find it difficult to speak about suicide openly, it is important for you, your family and friends to be told the truth. This allows everyone to help each other cope with their grief, and also helps you work through yours. There is no need to go into details of the death, simply say he/she died by suicide. Be prepared for insensitive questions surrounding the death, some people know no boundaries. When asked how her son died (by suicide), one survivor replied “Alone”.

In addition to telling family and close friends, people with whom the deceased had regular contact also need to be contacted. These people might include, clergy, school personnel, an employer, work colleagues, family physician and landlord. Have a friend or relative take care of this for you.

Telling Children

Tell the truth

Children need to be told the truth. Children can sense when they are being lied to and this creates an atmosphere of mistrust, fear and loneliness. For a more detailed explanation see page 25 “When Children Grieve.”

Show Your Grief

It is okay for children to see your anger, helplessness and confusion. This helps them understand that their own feelings are natural and okay to express. Check in with them to make sure they do not take on responsibility for your feelings. They need to know it is not their job to make things better for the family. Reassure them that you and others will still be able to take care of them.

Emergency Response and Investigation

The events and procedures that take place after a suicide can cause great anxiety for survivors. It lessens the stress if you know what will happen. Having supportive friends and family surround you will also help. Your mind may not be able to process all the information you are given. Have someone take notes for you to have your questions answered at a later date.

Response to the Emergency Call

When a sudden death is discovered, Emergency Medical Services, the police and fire department respond to the emergency call. When police arrive, they will notify the Chief Medical Examiner's Office.

Emergency Medical Services

Emergency Medical Services provides medical assistance and determines if death has taken place, or takes the person to the hospital for further care if death has not occurred. At this point the hospital takes over care of the person.

Police

The police help in a number of ways. They provide safety for emergency personnel and other people who are present. They secure the scene, investigate the death, and collect identification, valuables and other items related to the investigation, for safekeeping. Photographs may also be taken. The person who identified or reported the deceased may be asked to make a statement to the police. The same may be asked of those who found or spoke to the deceased. The police will attempt to notify next of kin.

The police or Medical Examiner take control of the scene, which is considered a crime scene until the investigation is completed and the cause of death can be determined. This is done for your protection and the safety of others. You may feel powerless, anger, guilt and a range of other negative emotions.

Victim Assistance

The police or Medical Examiner may request a victim assistance support team (or you can request this) to provide support, information and referrals. In Winnipeg phone 986-6350.

Fire Department

The fire department provides medical assistance to Emergency Medical Services, as well as extra help where needed.

Medical Examiner

The police notify the Chief Medical Examiner's Office, who will investigate the circumstances around the death. In the case of a suicide, only the Medical Examiner can sign and issue a death certificate.

You may be given cards of resources to contact. Have a friend or relative take charge, and put these in a convenient place for later.

Investigation

An investigation is done to find out the circumstances of the suicide. This includes the identity of the person, the date, time and place of death as well as the cause and manner of death. The investigation often includes a review of the past medical history, an examination of the scene of the death and an examination of the body.

Medical Examiner

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner investigates all unexplained and all violent deaths, including suicide, by the authority of the Fatality Inquiries Act. The investigation is performed by the Medical Examiner's Investigators.

Items Collected at the Scene

The Medical Examiner's Office holds on to items collected at the scene that are related to the death, including suicide notes. These items can be returned to next of kin after the investigation, but must be requested. Suicide notes will be returned only to the person addressed in the note. Police may collect and

retain valuables, which will be returned to next of kin upon written request. If unclaimed by next of kin, items and valuables that are collected by the police will be auctioned or destroyed. Items collected by the Medical Examiner and not requested by next of kin will be stored with the investigation reports at the Provincial Archives.

Autopsy

If there is some doubt about the cause or manner of death, an autopsy may be ordered by the Medical Examiner. Permission from next of kin is not required for a Medical Examiner's autopsy to be done. If there are any cultural sensitivities around the autopsy, notify the Medical Examiner. An autopsy may include complex laboratory tests and often results are not known for several weeks after the death. In cases where the cause of death is obvious, an autopsy is not done

The Scene After the Investigation

If the death has taken place in the home, the next of kin are responsible for cleaning up the scene. Sometimes family members choose to clean the area themselves. However when body fluids are present, it is wise to have a professional perform the cleaning tasks. You can contact Winnipeg Funeral Sanitation at 956-2882 for further information.

Tissue and Organ Donations

If you wish to donate tissues or organs, notify the Medical Examiner's office at 945-2088, or the Manitoba Tissue Bank at 789-3652.

Autopsy report and Proof of Death

You may obtain copies of the autopsy report as well as certificates to prove death has occurred.

Autopsy Report

If the Medical Examiner authorized an autopsy, you can request a summary and a detailed report. There is no fee to the family for this service.

Proof of Death

You can obtain two types of documents as proof of death in order to settle an estate: a Certificate of Death and a Certificate of the Medical Examiner.

A Certificate of Death is the official government document and is accepted by most organizations as proof of death. This certificate includes the name of the person, date and place of death, marital status, regular place of residence, sex and age. It does not give the cause or manner of death. This certificate may be obtained for a small fee, from the Vital Statistics Agency; 254 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, phone (204) 945-3701. The certificate usually takes one to two weeks after you apply for it. Several copies may be needed.

A Certificate of the Medical Examiner is issued by the Medical Examiner's Office upon written consent by next of kin. It includes the medical cause and manner of death as well as a brief description of the circumstances. This certificate is issued in place of the "Proof of Death" forms required by most insurance companies in order to settle life insurance claims. There is no fee for the Medical Examiner's Report for family members.

Note: In cases investigated by the Medical Examiner's Office, including all suicides, only the Medical Examiner can sign and issue a death certificate. If a Medical Examiner has investigated a death, neither a family doctor or a hospital may complete any documents as proof of death.

Public Fatality Inquiry

A Public Fatality Inquiry can be held in some deaths investigated by the Medical Examiner's Office. This is very rare in cases of suicide. However, if the person was in custody or was a ward of the court at the time of death, an Inquiry is mandatory. There are three Inquest Review Committees in Manitoba: Child, Adolescent and Geriatric.

A provincial court judge conducts the Public Fatality Inquiry. The Inquiry will determine the identity of the deceased, and the date, time, and place of death. The judge may make recommendations for the prevention of similar incidents. Findings of legal responsibility or any other conclusions of law are not permitted in the Public Fatality Inquiry.

Contact Information for Medical Examiner

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

210 - 1 Wesley Avenue

Winnipeg, Manitoba

R3C 4C6

Phone: (204) 945-2088



*Practical
Matters*

Arranging a Funeral

A funeral is an important ritual that gives family and friends a chance to reflect and grieve while being supported by others who care. It allows them to say goodbye and begin the grieving process.

Making Arrangements

Guidelines and customs of funeral services vary and different cultures and religions have special rituals to recognize a death. Friends, family, clergy or the funeral director can help you decide which arrangements to make. To choose a funeral home, ask for suggestions from family and friends or check local listings in a phone book.

Children should also be allowed to take part in the funeral because it helps them as their grief unfolds. It is wise to talk with the children ahead of time about what will happen at the funeral. On the other hand, if a child does not want to attend the funeral, assure him/her that it is okay not to be there and let them grieve in their own way. Sometimes in the midst of our grief we tend to forget about the children that are affected by the suicide.

If you are not able to tend to your child/children, make sure that a caring person (friend or relative) is available for support.

Funeral Service

In a traditional service, a ceremony is held in a place of worship or a funeral home chapel. You can decide whether the service will be public or private. A committal service is a brief service where final words of farewell are spoken. It happens at the end of the traditional service and may be done at the graveside, crematorium, at the church/chapel, or synagogue.

In a military service, the deceased is given military honours. This is available to any veteran or serving member of Canada's Armed Forces.

A memorial service is similar to a funeral service, except the body of the deceased is not present.

If you choose not to have a service, you can ask a funeral home to care for the body of your loved one.

Talking About Suicide

It is okay to talk about suicide at the funeral service. Make sure any mention of suicide in the service is done without judgment or reference to blasphemy. It may be appropriate to acknowledge the pain the deceased was feeling. Celebrate the life of your loved one and talk about memories. Some survivors have found it helpful to place an open notebook on a table at the funeral and encourage others to write down their memories of the deceased. Allow yourself to grieve the relationship you shared.

Dealing With Legal and Financial Matters

Disposition of Assets

Disposing of a deceased person's assets is usually done through a will. A will is a written record that details how a person's belongings, or estate, will be divided upon death. The executors are responsible for taking care of the estate and should be notified as soon as possible after the death.

If there is a Will

Probating a will occurs when the will is proved valid by a court of law. If the estate is small and held jointly, there may be no need for probate. Any property held jointly (real estate, bank accounts, bonds) can be easily transferred to the surviving spouse or individual named. A bank may require probate if there is a large amount of money that is not held jointly, or for other reasons.

If there is a Handwritten Note

Sometimes a signed handwritten note that distributes a person's property and possessions may be used as a will. This includes suicide notes. You should be aware that this type of note might be challenged in a court of law on the grounds of mental incapacitation. Contact a lawyer for more information. For Legal Aid phone (204) 985-8500.

If there is no Will or Your Situation is Complicated

If there is no will, or if no will is found, the deceased died "intestate" and you may need advice from the public trustee. The Public Trustee can be reached at (204) 945-2700. If your situation is complicated for other reasons, such as marital separation or common-law relationships, you may need to contact a lawyer. You may want to set up a memorial fund in the name of your loved one. Donations can be made in lieu of flowers. This is also a good way to distribute money of the deceased if he or she was an adolescent or young unmarried adult. The proceeds of the fund can go to charitable organizations that your loved one cared about, or alternately to organizations that are in the mental health field.

Insurance

You will need to notify all insurance companies (house, car, life) of the death. In Canada, generally life insurance policies must have been held for at least 24 months to be valid if the death is by suicide (there may be exclusions so check your policy). However, there may be special circumstances where a policy held for less than 24 months may be challenged in court by the family of someone who died by suicide. Consult your lawyer or insurance provider for more information.

Financial Matters

A number of financial matters need to be dealt with after a death. You may want to ask other family members or close friends to help you deal with some of these matters during this difficult time. It is strongly recommended that you seek the advice of a professional before making major decisions that may affect your financial or personal situation

First: Gather Documents

The first step in dealing with financial matters is to gather the documents of the deceased. This must be done before you (or your financial advisor or executor of the will) can take care of matters related to the estate. Set up a folder to keep all the personal documents and records of legal and financial matters.

Personal Documents

- Death Certificate - you must have the death certificate before you can cancel, transfer and apply for benefits and obligations
- Birth Certificate
- Driver's License
- Marriage Certificate
- Passport
- Personal Will
- Social Insurance Number

Banking and Financial Documents

- Bank Account Numbers, Passbooks, Statements (chequing and saving)
- Bank and Credit Cards
- Investment Records (stocks, bonds, RRSP's, GIC's)
- Lease and/or Rental Contracts
- Loan Agreements (monies owed or owing)
- Mortgage Papers
- Safety Deposit Box Number and key

Health Documents

- Manitoba Blue Cross Number
- Manitoba Health Care Number

Property Documents

- Land Title(s)
- Personal Possessions (art work, jewellery)
- Vehicle Registration(s)

Other Documents

- Employee Benefit Booklets
- Insurance Policies (life, medical, home, car, business, mortgage)
- Membership Cards (sports/recreation clubs, professional associations, libraries)
- Pension Information
- Previous Tax Returns
- Utility Account Numbers (phone, gas, water, electricity)

Once all documents have been gathered, you will have to cancel, transfer and apply for various financial benefits or obligations. Be aware that there are fees associated with some of these matters.

Items to Cancel

- ❑ Manitoba Blue Cross, P.O. Box 1046 Winnipeg, Manitoba.
Phone 775-0151 in Winnipeg, other regions call 1-866-601-2583
- ❑ Manitoba Health in Winnipeg, call 786-7101 other regions call 1-866-778-7730
- ❑ Bank Cards Contact the issuing bank to cancel bank cards held by the deceased.
- ❑ Canada Pension Plan 1-800-277-9914
- ❑ Cheques can be cancelled by telephone. You will be asked to provide the name, address, and social insurance number of the deceased. The estate is entitled to the pension cheque in the month in which the death occurred.
- ❑ Credit Cards Contact the issuing bank to cancel credit cards held by the deceased.
- ❑ Disability Benefit 1-800-277-9914 You will need to cancel disability payments, both federal and provincial.
- ❑ Insurance Policies Notify all insurance companies with whom the deceased had policies (e.g. Manitoba Public Insurance, business or life insurance) You may also need to contact the person's employer to cancel workplace insurance policies.
- ❑ Leases/Rental Cancel any lease or rental contracts in the name of the deceased, or transfer them to another name.
- ❑ Memberships (sports/recreation clubs, professional associations, libraries). Cancel memberships, or transfer them to another name as appropriate.
- ❑ Passport . If the deceased held a valid passport at the time of death, return it to the nearest passport centre or mail it to the processing centre. Include a copy of the death certificate or letter stating why you are returning the passport. Call 1-800-277-9914 for more information.
- ❑ Veterans Benefit 1-800-866-1240
- ❑ Pension or compensation benefits continue for one year after death. There may be other Veterans Affairs benefits available (e.g. assistance with funeral expenses and burial in a veterans grave) Contact Veterans Affairs for further information.

Items to Transfer

- ❑ Joint Bank Accounts, RRSP's, GIC's
- ❑ Any accounts held in common can be transferred to the survivor. You will need to contact your financial advisor or the bank holding these accounts for specific information on how to transfer the accounts.
- ❑ Land Titles For General Office/Search phone 945-2285 (Winnipeg)
- ❑ Stocks and Bonds. Ask your financial advisor or bank for information on how to transfer these assets.
- ❑ Utility Accounts (phone, gas, water and utilities) If your household utilities were in the name of the deceased, transfer them to a new name. You will have to contact each utility for information.
- ❑ Vehicle Registration If the deceased had vehicles registered in his or her name, the ownership of these vehicles will need to be transferred. A probate registry agent can help you do this.

Items to Apply For

- ❑ Allowance for the survivor phone: 1-800-277-9914 This benefit for widows and widowers is based on income qualifications. Proof of marriage is required (common-law relationships will be considered). This benefit is not retroactive and must be applied for immediately.
- ❑ Children's Benefit 1-800-277-9914 There may be benefits available for children under the age of 18 or for children between 18 and 25 who are full time students. If you are the caregiver of children of the deceased who are under the age of 18, you should apply for this benefit on their behalf. However, if any of these children are living on their own, they can apply themselves. Dependent children between 18 and 25 and in full-time studies should apply for this benefit themselves.
- ❑ CPP Lump Sum Death Benefits 1-800-277-9914 . This benefit is based on the CPP contributions of the deceased. You will need to provide a copy of the death certificate or statement of death, your birth certificate, and social insurance number.
- ❑ CPP Survivor's Benefit 1-800-277-9914 This benefit is based on the CPP contributions of the deceased. The amount of the benefit awarded will depend on the age of the surviving spouse or common-law partner and other dependency factors. Benefits for children may also be available.

- ❑ **Guaranteed Income Supplement** Surviving widow/widowers over the age of 65 may be entitled to this benefit. This benefit is based on income qualifications.
- ❑ **Mortgage Life Insurance** Mortgage life insurance is not the same as mortgage insurance. If the deceased held mortgage life insurance, the mortgage will be paid upon death. The mortgage Company will require a copy of the death certificate. Some policies will not cover death by suicide if they occur within two years of the start of coverage. Review the policy or consult with the bank for specific information.
- ❑ **Veterans Benefits** 1-800-866-1240 If the deceased was a veteran, you may be eligible for benefits including funeral expenses and burial in a veteran's grave. Contact Veterans Affairs for details.

Other Financial and Legal Matters

Other financial matters that need to be addressed include loans and personal debt, income taxes, GST credit and lawsuits.

Loans and Personal Debt

- ❑ Loans (individual or co-signed) from a bank, company, or other institution. These may or may not be insured.
- ❑ Personal loans, either owed to the deceased or owing to others.

Income Taxes

- ❑ A final tax return must be filed. If the death occurred between January 1st and October 31st, the final return is due by April 30th of the next year. If the death occurred between November 1st and December 31st, the final return is due 6 months after the death. If tax returns from previous years have not been completed, they must also be filed.
- ❑ You may want to get a clearance certificate before you distribute any property under your control. A clearance certificate certifies that all amounts for which the deceased is liable to Canada Customs and Revenue Agency have been paid, or that security has been accepted for the payment. If you do not get a certificate, you can be liable for any amount the deceased owes. Contact Canada Customs and Revenue Agency for more information at 1-800-959-8281.

Employer


- ❑ Contact the employer to collect a final paycheque and discuss where to send the T4 slip. Employee benefits may apply.

GST Credit

- ❑ Contact Canada customs and Revenue Agency at 1-800-959-8281 for information on GST credit.

Lawsuits

- ❑ Judgements either for or against the deceased may need to be settled by the estate.



*Working
Through
Your Grief*

Working Through the Grief

Grief is more complicated when a death is sudden. There was no chance to say goodbye. Very strong emotions arise as a result of the suicide, such as extreme sadness, anger and shame, and this complicates your grieving. Survivors often feel guilt, and so you must remember that you are not to blame in your loved one's death. Guilt is very common among Survivors. Guilt is your worst enemy, because it is a false accusation! You must say to yourself over and over that you are not responsible for your loved one's suicide in any way, shape or form. Suicide is a very complex problem involving biological, psycho-social and spiritual factors. The number one cause of suicide is untreated or under treated depression. The following scenario is a perfect example of how many Survivors take the blame for a suicide.

“If only I had...” A true tale of two mothers.

There were two young women who died by suicide, both after a year-long battle with depression. Each had made several suicide attempts. They would refuse professional help and stop taking their medication just when it seemed to begin helping. Fearing for her life, the first woman's mother had her committed, against her wishes, to a psychiatric clinic for treatment. While there, despite being on “suicide watch”, the young girl asphyxiated herself with her bed sheets.

The second woman's mother constantly urged her daughter to seek professional help. However, fearing that she would worsen her daughter's depression, she refused to force her into any kind of institutionalized care. One day, she killed herself with an overdose of medication. Afterwards, both mothers blamed themselves for not preventing their daughter's suicides. The irony is that each blamed themselves for not doing exactly what the other one did. The first mother felt that if she hadn't isolated her daughter in that institution, she wouldn't have lost her. The second was sure that if only she had committed her daughter, she would've been saved. We often fail to realize that, even if we could turn back the clock and do things differently, it wouldn't necessarily change the outcome.

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Your Grief is Unique

The grief process is different for each person. While some aspects of grief are predictable, grief does not happen in neat, orderly stages, but rather an erratic process that varies from person to person. The aspects of grief that everyone has in common are explained below.

Numbness and Shock

Survivors usually feel numb and shock when they first find out about the suicide. This feeling is like sitting on the side of a play about your life, but not really taking part in life itself. One Survivor felt as if she was floating outside her body watching this terrible tragedy unfold. The feeling of shock has a purpose - it cushions you from the pain of what has happened.

Loss and Disorganization

As you grieve, you will experience a range of thoughts and very strong emotions. Survivors commonly feel intense anger, sorrow, loneliness, and sometimes guilt. At times you might feel as if the suicide never really happened. There can be times when everything in life seems meaningless. You might be obsessed with the thought that you could have prevented the death. It is common to have trouble sleeping and eating during these times.

Grieving Takes Time

Grieving takes time, and the amount of time is different for each person. It is okay to cry, it is okay to laugh and most importantly it is okay to accept your feelings, Occasionally Survivors get stuck as they work through their grief. Being stuck means that you are suppressing your grief and not allowing yourself to move on. If this happens, a counsellor can help. Sometimes Survivors are completely overwhelmed and can become clinically depressed. If you are concerned about depression, please contact your doctor.

When Children Grieve

Children do not show their feelings in the same way as adults do. Sometimes they look as though they have not been affected by the death. They may cry for a while and then return to play, not because they are not upset, but because their words and behaviour do not always reflect how they feel inside.

You may see their grief expressed in their play. They may talk about their feelings with other children rather than with adults.

It is common for children as they grow, to grieve the loss of their loved one at a later time. They may have new feelings and responses to the death, even years after the suicide. They often ask different questions as they go through their development and try to understand what happened from a more mature point of view. Be available to talk about it with them or have them talk to someone else they trust.

How to Talk to Children About Suicide

As with adults, children can react differently to a death by suicide. Age and maturity of the child should be kept in mind when talking to your child. Here is a list of some of the feelings and emotions your child might be experiencing:

- Abandoned - that the person who died didn't love them.
- Feel the death is their fault - if they would have loved the person more or behaved differently, the death would not have happened.
- Afraid they will die too.
- Worried that someone else they love will die.
- Worried about who will take care of them.
- Guilt - because they wished or thought of that person's death.
- Sad.
- Embarrassed - to see other people or to go back to school.
- Confused.
- Angry - with the person who died, God, at everyone.
- Lonely.
- Denial - pretend like nothing happened.
- Numb - can't feel anything.
- Wish it would all go away.

Remember that whatever emotions your child may be experiencing he or she needs your unconditional support. A child needs to understand that the deceased loved them, but because of their illness may not have been able to convey their feelings. They need to be reassured that the suicide was not their fault, and that nothing they could have said or done would have prevented the death. Explain that the brain is an organ of the body just like the heart, liver and kidneys. Sometimes these organs stop working properly and people get sick and sometimes die. If the child is suffering from depression, please make sure you explain that with proper care depression can be cured.

Some children might ask questions to the morals of suicide. If possible steer clear of this. Suicide is not good/bad, right/wrong, it is something that happens when people are in a severe depression and can't seek appropriate ways of coping with their pain.

It is important for the child to know that he/she can come to you for support and comfort; that you will be available to them to answer questions honestly. Reassure them that they will feel differently as time passes and that they will be loved and taken care of, no matter what happens.

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What Helps Healing in the Long Term

It is important to know that the pain will lessen.

Healing does not mean forgetting. It means that the sadness and other feelings do not get in the way of your life as much as they did in the beginning. Think of your grief in terms of a life long journey. Throughout the years, your grief will change and take on different forms.

Keep on Talking

Some survivors seek out information about suicide and grieving; others do not feel comfortable in doing so. Many survivors say they talked their way through their grief. As you continue on your journey, it is vital to talk about your memories of the person who died by suicide. Find a safe person, or several people., who will let you and are comfortable hearing about your pain. The people you choose to talk to may or may not have experienced the suicide with you.

When you are open about the suicide, you give others permission to talk about it too. Keeping the suicide a secret will only make it harder for you to heal. A lot more people than you realize have been touched by suicide.

At times you may need to be distracted from your grieving. This is okay. Do not feel guilty about participating in life.

Hold on to Your Memories

Often survivors, both adults and children, have found comfort in holding on to items that remind them of their loved one, such as furniture, clothing, jewellery or favourite objects. You might like to put together an album with photos of the deceased. You can also build a collection of memories by asking other people to tell you their stories of the deceased and recording them in a notebook. Alternately, you could have a book for this purpose at the funeral, or at your home and have friends and family write their memories down.

Do What Works for You

Sometimes friends and family want to help but they do not know what to do. They may feel uncomfortable talking about the suicide because of the

(perceived) stigma attached to it. They may be worried about making people cry when they bring up the subject. They might act strangely and not mention the suicide at all. Do not let this get in the way of your talking about it when you need to. Tell people it is okay to mention the suicide and let them know they can help you by simply listening. Most people really do care.

Remember to choose to do what feels right for you, not what pleases other people. It is okay to say “no” when invited to do something you do not feel ready to do.

Paradoxes of Grieving

- To gain independence, allow yourself to be dependent.
- You may not want to be with others, yet you don’t want to be alone.
- It isn’t the mountains that wear you down, it is the little things that tend to break us.
- Grieving is not easy. It takes physical and mental strength. Listen to your body.
- You may go forward and then backward. Remember to take baby steps.

Later Reactions

Some survivors feel even more pain and emptiness several months after the death. The tasks of planning the funeral and dealing with financial and legal matters are complete. Friends and family have offered their sympathy and then got back with their lives. Be prepared for this and reach out for help when you need it.

You may have felt disappointed by some of your friends and family’s attitudes and support since your loss. Not everyone can handle the depth of grief that a suicide creates. Try not to get angry; rather, align yourself with relationships that make you feel good. Grieving requires a tremendous amount of energy, don’t waste yours on harmful relationships.

Difficult Days

There will be many times through your journey when coping with the loss becomes more difficult, such as the anniversary of the death, birthdays, and holidays. You may feel more on edge in the weeks leading up to them. It will help you to plan ahead and talk to other family members about how they want to spend the day. This gives everyone a chance to support each other and talk about their grief. Some ideas are to write a card to the deceased, light a memorial candle, write a poem, look through photo albums, or just reminisce.

Finding the Answers

You may never know the answer to “Why?” Many times survivors mistake a “triggering event”, such as a relationship break-up, for the “cause” when, in most cases, the person was in extreme emotional or physical pain for a long time. As you work along in your journey of grief, the urge to “know why” will lessen.

Support Groups

As time goes on, you may find it helpful to talk with other survivors of suicide. The healing power of a shared experience is very strong and talking to others who have lost someone to suicide can help you work through your own grief.

See Other Resources for further information on page 37.

Taking Care of Yourself

Before you can begin to help others, you must learn to take care of yourself. Grief takes a huge toll on your body. Your body needs time to rest and recuperate.

- Try to eat at regular times and choose healthy foods.
- If sleeping through the night is difficult - this is very normal - see your doctor for some medication. Having a good night's sleep will allow you to have a bit more energy throughout the day.
- Getting some daily exercise nurtures your body and your mind.
- Allow yourself to proceed slowly with the many tasks ahead of you.
- Do what feels right to you. Others may have opinions as to what you should or shouldn't be doing. Remember, take charge of yourself.
- Allow yourself to feel the feelings you are experiencing.
- Ask, if you need help with managing day to day activities.
- Be gentle with yourself, give yourself the respect and love; avoid punishing yourself as if you deserved what has happened to you.

Here are a few simple suggestions to pamper yourself:

- Take a warm bath with soothing oils.
- Take a leisurely walk.
- Go to a movie, or a restaurant.
- Listen to your favourite music.
- Play with your pet.
- Try a yoga or meditation class.
- Have a body massage.

The Suicide Survivor's Bill of Rights

- I have the right to be free of guilt
- I have the right not to feel responsible for the suicide death
- I have the right to express my feelings and emotions, even if they do not seem acceptable, as long as they do not interfere with the rights of others
- I have the right to have my questions answered honestly by authorities and family members
- I have the right not to be deceived because others feel they can spare me further grief
- I have the right to maintain a sense of hopefulness
- I have the right to peace and dignity
- I have the right to positive feelings about the one I lost through suicide, regardless of events prior to or at the time of the untimely death
- I have the right to retain my individuality and not be judged because of the suicide death
- I have the right to seek counselling and support groups to enable me to explore my feeling honestly to further the acceptance process
- I have the right to reach acceptance
- I have the right to a new beginning

I HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE

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*Other
Resources*

For further information or additional copies, contact:

SPEAK

4 Fort Street - Suite 100
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Phone: (204) 831-3610
e-mail:speak@mts.net
www.speak-out.ca

Mental Health Education Resource Centre (MHERC)

4 Fort Street - Suite 100
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 1C4
Phone: (204) 953-2355
Phone Toll-Free: 1-866-997-9918
www.mherc.mb.ca

Assiniboine Regional Health Authority

192-1st Avenue West
Box 579
Souris, Manitoba
Phone Toll-Free: 1-888-682-2253

Brandon Regional Health Authority

150A - 7th St.
Brandon, Manitoba
Phone: (204) 571-8400

Burntwood Regional Health Authority

867 Thompson Drive South
Thompson, Manitoba
Phone: (204) 677-5355

Churchill RHA Inc.

Churchill Health Centre
Churchill, Manitoba
Phone: (204) 675-8318

Interlake Regional Health Authority

589 3rd Ave. S.
Stonewall, Manitoba
Phone Toll-Free: 1-888-488-2299

NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority
84 Church St.
Flin Flon, Manitoba
Phone: (204) 687-1300

North Eastman Health Authority
24 Aberdeen Ave.
Pinawa, Manitoba
Phone Toll-Free: 1-877-753-2012

Parkland Regional Health Authority
27 2nd Avenue S.W.
Dauphin, Manitoba
Phone Toll-Free: 1-800-259-7541

Regional Health Authority - Central Manitoba Inc.
Box 243
Southport, Manitoba
Phone Toll-Free: 1-800-742-6509

South Eastman Health/Sante Sud-Est Inc.
Box 470
La Broquerie, Manitoba
Phone: (204) 424-5880

Suicide survivors have found these organizations, websites and books to be especially helpful. For other resources, ask at your public library, local mental health organizations and regional health authority.

Organizations

Suicide Information and Education Collection (Centre for Suicide Prevention)

An extensive library and resource centre providing information on suicide and suicidal behaviour (not a crisis centre)

www.suicideinfo.ca

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Contains numerous resources to information on suicide prevention, surviving suicide, grief and bereavement, research and grant awards.

www.afsp.org/index-1.htm

National Center for Grieving Children and Families

This site contains specific sections for age groups with activities to help cope with death. It is sponsored by the Dougy Center, the first center in the United States to provide peer Support for grieving children.

www.dougy.org/

Grief and Loss

A collection of Resources and a Community of Care.

This site contains access to numerous resources.

www.aarp.org/griefandloss/home.html

Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention (CASP)

www.the-support-network.com/CASP/main.html

1000 Deaths

This page on this site contains links to numerous other links dealing with all issues around suicide, grief and loss, and mental health.

www.1000deaths.com/library/links.html

Metanoia

This site provides information and resources addressing suicide as well as grief and loss.

www.metanoia.org/suicide/

Mental Health Education Resource Centre (MHERC)

provides materials on Mental Health and related issues. They also have a lending library at no charge. They are located at 4 Fort Street - Suite 100 in Winnipeg.

Call 953-2355 in Winnipeg or toll free 1-866-997-9918.

www.mherc.mb.ca

Canadian Mental Health Association

www.manita.cmha.ca

Suicide Awareness/Voices of Education (SAVE)

www.save.org

American Association of Suicidology

www.suicidology.org

survivoradvocates@yahoogroups.com

An informational and educational on line group, connecting Canadians in all aspects of suicide prevention, intervention and postvention.

Suicide Support Groups

Klinik

offers grief counselling and a survivor of suicide support group. For immediate crisis help if you are suicidal, or a survivor of suicide phone toll-free: 1-877-435-7170.

For more information phone Klinik at (204) 784-4090

www.klinik.mb.ca

SPEAK

offers educational presentations to high schools and professionals about suicide and its link to depression. A Survivors of Suicide Support Group is offered on the last Monday of each month, from September to June. Admission is free. The group meets at Harrow United Church, 955 Mulvey at 7:00 (Winnipeg).

Phone 831-3610 for more information.

www.speak-out.ca

The Compassionate Friends

offers grief support for those who lost children.

Manitoba contacts:

Brandon (204) 727-1823

Dauphin (204) 638-7384

Portage la Prairie (204) 243-2169

Winnipeg (204) 257-8605

Canadian National Office of The Compassionate Friends 1-866-823-0141

Reading List

Stimming and M. Stimming (Editors), Temple University Press, 1999

Do They Have Bad Days in Heaven? Surviving the Suicide Loss of a Sibling; M. Linn-Gust, Atlanta, GA; Bolton Press, 2001

The Grieving Teen: A guide for Teenagers and Their Friends; Fitzgerald, H. ; Fireside Books, 2000

No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One; Carla Fine; Doubleday; 1997

Healing after the Suicide of a Loved one: Ann Smolin and John Guinan, NY: Simon & Shuster, 1993

How to Go on Living When Someone you Love Dies: Therese A. Rando, PHD. Living When a Young friend Commits Suicide or Even Starts Talking About it; Linn-Gust. Beacon Press 2001

Making Meaning of the Madness: One Man's Journey Through Grief; D. Lundine, Tall Timbers Press, 1997

Men & Grief; Carol Staudacher; Harbinger Publications 1991

My Son..My Son: A Guide to Healing After a Suicide in the Family; Iris Bolton & Mitchell C.; Bolton Press, 1983

Prayers for Bobby: A Mother's Coming to Terms with the Suicide Death of Her Gay Son; Leroy Adams, Harper Collins; 1995

Seven Choices: Finding Daylight After Loss Shatters Your World; Elizabeth Harper Neelds, Time Warner, 2003

Stronger Than Death: When Suicide Touches Your Life (A Mother's Story); S. Chance, (1992, 1997)

The Year of Magical Thinking; Joan Didion, Random House Inc., Published by Knoff (2005)

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Paraclete Press. (2000). *Journey Through the Shadows. Hope and Healing After Someone You Love Has Completed Suicide.* [videotape]. Massachusetts: Paraclete Press.

Paraclete Press. (2000). *Light Amongst the Shadows. How to Help Those You Care for When suicide Occurs.* [videotape]. Massachusetts: Paraclete Press.

Red Deer City RCMP Victim Services. (2001). *Dealing with the Loss of a Loved One.* Red Deer: Red Deer City RCMP Victim Services Unit.

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Supporting Suicide Survivors. (1999, November). SIEC Alert, p. 1.

Wroblewski, A. (1991). *Suicide: Survivors. A Guide for Those Left Behind.* Minneapolis: Afterwords Publishing.



*Beyond
Surviving*

Beyond Surviving

Know you can survive. You may not think so, but you can.

Struggle with why it happened until you no longer need to know why or until you are satisfied with partial answers.

Know you may feel overwhelmed by the intensity of your feelings but all your feelings are normal.

Anger, guilt, confusion and forgetfulness are common responses. You are not losing your mind, you are grieving.

Beware you may feel appropriate anger at the person, at work, at God, at yourself. It's okay to express it.

You may feel guilty for what you think you did or did not do. Guilt can turn to regret, through forgiveness.

Having suicidal thoughts is common. It does not mean you will act on those thoughts.

Remember to take one moment or one day at a time.

Find a good listener with whom to share. Call someone if you need to talk.

Don't be afraid to cry. Tears are healing.

Give yourself time to heal.

Remember, the choice was not yours. No one is the sole influence in another's life.

Expect setbacks. If emotions return like a tidal wave, you may only be experiencing a remnant of grief, an unfinished piece.

Try to put off major decisions.

Give yourself permission to get professional help.

Be aware of the pain of your family and friends.

Be patient with yourself and with others who may not understand.

Set your own limits and learn to say no.

Steer clear of people who want to tell you what or how to feel.

Know that there are support groups that can be helpful, such as Compassionate Friends or Survivors of Suicide groups. If not, ask a professional to help start one.

Call on your personal faith to help you through.

It is common to experience physical reactions to your grief, e.g., headaches, loss of appetite, inability to sleep.

The willingness to laugh with others and at yourself is healing.

Wear out your questions, anger, guilt or other feelings until you can let them go. Letting go doesn't mean forgetting.

Know that you will never be the same again, but you can survive and even go beyond just surviving

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