

## International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day

Saturday, November 18, 2017 is International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day. This day is intended to be one of healing throughout the world where all those impacted by suicide loss can connect around the lives of their loved ones and share stories of hope, support, and encouragement.

### SURVIVOR DAY EVENTS

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) oversees the hosting of events to connect people with similar experiences to others in their communities so they know they are not alone. Visit AFSP's website to find an event near you.

For those unable to attend an event in person, they offer the option to participate in an online program with the screening of "The Journey: A Story of Healing and Hope" as well as a follow up feature "The Journey Revisited" about the suicide loss experience. These programs air at 4:30 pm Eastern time on their website.

If you are in crisis, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255 or contact the Crisis Text Line by texting TALK to 741741.



## This Issue

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When someone dies through suicide, at least 6 people are intimately traumatized by the death. Those affected include immediate family, relatives, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and acquaintances. Death is an experience we will all inevitably encounter and each of us will grieve in different ways. However, suicide is still stigmatized and associated with shame by our society which complicates the grieving process.

Survivors of suicide loss may feel bewilderment, overwhelming guilt, self-blame, anger, abandonment, disappointment, and rejection. These feelings can last a very long time and the struggle to make sense of their loved one's death may take even longer because of unanswered lingering questions. Survivors of suicide loss are also prone to developing symptoms of depression and post traumatic stress disorder as a result of their loved one's death. The unspeakable sadness about suicide becomes a circle of never ending bewilderment, pain, flashbacks, and a need to numb the anguish.

Every suicide is a unique personal story. The primary goal is not normally to end life but to end pain. Significant depression is one of the main reasons for someone taking their life. Serious illness, chronic pain, substance abuse, life crisis, marital issues, financial difficulties, or work-related problems can sometimes trigger depressive reactions and irrational thinking that can lead to the development of suicidal thoughts.

Mental illness is a physical disease like other serious medical conditions someone can inherit genetically. When a loved one dies of cancer or another serious illness, their deaths are received by others with sympathy and compassion. We can choose to extend this same degree of kindness to those who lose loved ones to suicide and as a result lessen or remove the stigma. If someone you know has lost a loved one to suicide, here are some suggestions for helping them or yourself.

### Helping Someone

1. Acknowledge the death—Extend your condolences, express your feelings of sorrow, and be sure to use the person's name. Your empathy and compassion will help with healing.
2. Ask how you can help—Simply being there ready and willing to be of assistance is comforting and acknowledges the tragic death.
3. Encourage openness—Be accepting of the person's feelings and how they are expressed whether it's denial, anger, or silence.
4. Be patient—Grief can take a long time to process. People often need to share and repeat stories, conversations, or feelings to recover. Encourage seeking professional help.
5. Listen—Be a compassionate listener. Simply being present is the best way to offer support.

### Helping Yourself

1. Ground yourself—Hold tightly to the truth you are not responsible for the person's decision to commit suicide.
2. Be patient—Grieve in your own way on your own time frame. It will take time to find a place for your loss and even more to feel hope and possibilities again.
3. Make connections—Consider joining a support group specifically for survivors of suicide loss or seek professional help.
4. Plan ahead—When you're ready, find ways to remember your loved ones birthday, celebrate holidays, and life milestones.
5. Give yourself permission—Take control of your path to heal, express your emotions, and process the loss.

All of the emotions survivors of suicide experience are completely normal. If you are experiencing difficulties coping, contact us for support. Healing from suicide takes time.

