

American Association of Suicidology

SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE FACTSHEET

Suicide Survivor = family member or friend of a person who dies by suicide

Survivors of suicide represent "the largest mental health casualty related to suicide" (Edwin Shneidman, Ph.D., AAS Founding President).

There are approximately 31,000 suicides annually in the USA. It is estimated that for every suicide there are at least 6 survivors.

Based on this estimate, it has been suggested that there are now 4.47 million American survivors of suicide. Each year's suicides produce 186,000 new survivors.

The American Association of Suicidology (AAS) offers a variety of resources and programs to survivors in an attempt to lessen the pain as they travel their special path of grief. They include:

- Survivors Resources: a listing of the many books and other resources available for survivors.
- Surviving Suicide: a quarterly newsletter for survivors and survivor support groups. Healing After Suicide, an annual conference for and about survivors.
- Suicide Prevention and Survivors of Suicide Resource Catalog: a listing of books, pamphlets, etc. which can be ordered from AAS.
- Directory of Survivors of Suicide Support Groups Guidelines for Survivors of Suicide Support Groups: a how-to booklet on starting a support group.
- Child Survivors of Suicide: A Guidebook for Those Who Care for Them: a handbook with helpful information for anyone caring for a child survivor.

For more information:

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Beyond Surviving: Suggestions for Survivors

Iris M. Bolton

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 suicidal 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. Remember, the choice was not yours. No one is the sole influence on another’s life.
13. Expect setbacks. If emotions return like a tidal wave, you may only be experiencing a remnant of grief, an unfinished piece.
14. Try to put off major decisions.
15. Give yourself permission to get professional help.
16. Be aware of the pain of your family and friends.
17. Be patient with yourself and with others who may not understand.
18. Set your own limits and learn to say no.
19. Steer clear of people who want to tell you what and how to feel.
20. 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 start one.
21. Call on your personal faith to help you through.

22. It is common to experience physical reactions to your grief, e.g., headaches, loss of appetite, inability to sleep.
23. The willingness to laugh with others and at yourself is healing.
24. Wear out your questions, anger, guilt, or other feelings until you can let them go. Letting go doesn't mean forgetting.
25. Know that you will never be the same again, but you can survive and even go beyond just surviving.

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