



520-861-6632

Survivors of Suicide—Tucson Chapter

Welcome to Survivors of Suicide (SOS), a safe place to grieve and reach out to others who understand the hurt, depression, guilt, confusion and grief of losing someone to suicide. Together the group explores feelings and finds understanding, strength and hope in each other and the process of healing. Unfortunately, suicide is the eighth leading cause of death in our nation. Annually, 30,000 Americans die by suicide. Approximately one out of four people knows someone who committed suicide, and each completed suicide affects a complex network of family and friends who must cope with the aftermath.

After Suicide--The Initial Shock

Someone close to you has died of suicide. Although you might not react at first to the suicide, other times, you may react strongly. You may feel numb and in shock for a while, which is normal and helps protect you from the pain of the loss. You might have physical symptoms such as nausea, headache, and other flu-like symptoms. You may find it difficult to feel any emotions, or you might find that you cannot control your emotions. This multitude of feelings is normal—the healing process is painful and seems slow. Understanding that this is normal will help. You also need a support system, which can include close friends, family, support group, clergy, doctor and/or therapist.

Am I to blame?

No, you are not to blame. You may be full of other questions such as: *Why? How could they have done that to me? Why didn't I see it coming? What if I had only.....? Will I ever get over this? What do I tell everyone? Will I ever be the same again?*

After a suicide, family members and friends often review the deceased's life and blame themselves or others for the loss. It is important to realize that suicide is an individual decision. Anyone who has lost someone to suicide and is blaming themselves or is a victim of being blamed should seek out bereavement counseling and/or support groups to help relieve this false feeling of responsibility. No one is to blame!

Complicated Grief

Complicated grief is an extreme reaction to the normal feelings experienced during life passages. This is typically the result of the sudden and traumatic death of someone close by suicide or murder. It can generate a great deal of self-blame, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), shame, embarrassment, and social stigma. Those experiencing complicated grief should seek grief-counseling or join a support group. This is a reminder that suicide (especially if you found the body) is very difficult to deal with. These chaotic emotions are to be expected; you are not going crazy. If PTSD symptoms persist, consider seeing a doctor.

Hope after Suicide

There is hope after a suicide. By learning about suicide, reading and gaining some sort of support, people learn not to be victims but survivors. You will be amazed at how strong you will become years down the road. You will become a great asset in helping others recover, and you will walk tall.

Survivors of Suicide--Tucson Chapter meets the first and third Thursday from 6:30-8:00 p.m. at the Catalina United Methodist Church at 2700 E Speedway, Room H-30. For more information and a book list please visit our website at <http://www.sostucson.org>.

If you are suicidal or need to talk to someone, please call 1-800-SUICIDE.

I just lost someone to suicide and I need you to

- ❖ Please listen to me
- ❖ Don't tell me to get over it, I won't. I will get through it but not over it.
- ❖ Don't ask me to put a time limit on my grief. Recovery will take me years.
- ❖ Anger, guilt, confusion, forgetfulness are common responses. I am not crazy—I am mourning.
- ❖ Don't feel sorry for me
- ❖ Don't judge me, the choice was not mine
- ❖ I'm going to ask a lot of questions, let me it is part of my process.
- ❖ I'm going to be angry. This too is part of my process. Don't tell me not to be angry!
- ❖ Let me cry, it is part of my healing, it's healthy for me
- ❖ Don't dance around the subject. Bring it up to me, I need to talk.
- ❖ I will have setbacks. Don't panic my emotions at times will hit like a tidal wave.
- ❖ Know my feelings are overwhelming and these feelings are normal.
- ❖ Don't tell me how I should feel.
- ❖ I will have suicidal thoughts it doesn't mean I will hurt myself. Offer me help if you are concerned.
- ❖ Don't blame me or anyone else I do not need to feel guilty and I will not take the blame. If you have the need to blame me, then I will not accept it and ask you to leave me alone.
- ❖ Allow me to set my own limits and boundaries
- ❖ I will be forgetful and confused. It is part of my grief process.
- ❖ If you cannot be kind to me, please leave me alone.
- ❖ I will need space. Please respect that.
- ❖ I will never be the same.
- ❖ Accepting me as I am is the greatest support you can offer me.
- ❖ Don't ask me to make any major decisions for a while
- ❖ I am learning how to live again. I am trying to accept what happened to me and I am willing to generate possibilities through this tragedy.



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The agony of grief Stephanie Ericsson

What is there to say about grief? Grief is a tidal wave that overtakes you, smashes down upon you with unimaginable force, sweeps you up into its darkness, where you tumble and crash against unidentifiable surfaces, only to be thrown out on an unknown beach, bruised, re-shaped, and unwittingly better for the wear. Grief means not being able to read more than two sentences at a time. It is walking into rooms with intentions that suddenly vanish.

Grief is three-o'clock-in-the-morning sweats that won't stop. It is dreadful Sundays, and Mondays that are no better. It makes you look for a face in a crowd, knowing full well there is no such face to be found in that crowd. Grief is utter aloneness that razes the rational mind and makes room for the phantasmagoric. It makes you suddenly get up and leave a meeting in the middle, with-out saying a word.

Grief makes what others think of you moot. It shears away the masks of normal life and forces brutal honesty out of your mouth before propriety can stop you. It shoves away friends. scares away so-called friends, and rewrites your address book for you. Grief makes you laugh at people who cry over spilled milk. right to their faces. It tells the world that you are untouchable at the very moment when touch is the only contact that might reach you. It makes lepers out of upstanding Citizens.

Grief discriminates against no one, it kills. Maims. And cripples. It is the ashes from which the phoenix rises, and the mettle of rebirth. It returns life to the living dead. It teaches that there is nothing absolutely true, or untrue. It assures the living that we know nothing for certain. It humbles. It shrouds. It blackens. It enlightens. Grief will make a new person out of you if it doesn't kill you in the making.



Suicide -- the misunderstood death By Rev. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

Death is always painful, but its pains are compounded considerably if its cause is suicide. When a suicide occurs, we aren't just left with the loss of a person, we're also left with a legacy of anger, second-guessing, and fearful anxiety.

What needs to be said, and said again, about it? First of all that it's a disease and perhaps the most misunderstood of all diseases. We tend to think that if a death is self-inflicted it is voluntary in a way that death through physical illness or accident is not. For most suicides, this isn't true. A person who falls victim to suicide dies, as does the victim of a terminal illness or fatal accident, not by his or her own choice. When people die from heart attacks, strokes, cancer, AIDS, and accidents, they die against their will. The same is true suicide, except that in the case of suicide the breakdown is emotional rather than physical -- an emotional stroke, an emotional cancer, **a breakdown of the emotional immune-system, an emotional fatality.**

This is not an analogy. The two kinds of heart attacks, strokes, cancers, breakdowns of the immune-system, and fatal accidents, are identical in that, in neither case, is the person leaving this world on the basis of a voluntary decision of his or her own will. In both cases, he or she is taken out of life against his or her own will. That's why we speak of someone as a "victim" of suicide.

Given this fact, we should not worry unduly about the eternal salvation of a suicide victim, believing (as we used to) that suicide is always an act of ultimate despair. Spirit is infinitely more understanding that we are, and Spirit's hands are infinitely safer and more gentle than our own. Imagine a loving mother having just given birth, welcoming her child onto her breast for the first time. That, I believe, is the best image we have available to understand how a suicide victim (most often an overly sensitive soul) is received into the next life.

Again, this isn't an analogy. Spirit is infinitely more understanding, loving, and motherly than any mother on earth. We need not worry about the fate of anyone, no matter the cause of death, who exits this world honest, over-sensitive, gentle, over-wrought, and emotionally-crushed. Spirit's understanding and compassion exceed our own.

Knowing all of this however, doesn't necessarily take away our pain (and anger) at losing someone to suicide. Faith and understanding aren't meant to take our pain away but to give us hope, vision, and support as we walk within it.

Finally, we should not unduly second-guess when we lose a loved one to suicide: "What might I have done? Where did I let this person down? If only I had been there? What if ...?" It can be too easy to be haunted with the thought: "If only I'd been there at the right time."

Rarely would this have made a difference. Indeed, most of the time, we weren't there for the exact reason that the person who fell victim to this disease did not want us to be there. He or she picked the moment, the spot, and the means precisely so that we wouldn't be there. Perhaps it's more accurate to say that suicide is a disease that picks its victim precisely in such a way so as to exclude others and their attentiveness.

This should not be an excuse for insensitivity, especially towards those suffering from dangerous depression, but it should be a healthy check against false guilt and fruitless second-guessing.

We're human beings, not Spirit. People die of illness and accidents all the time, and all the love and attentiveness in the world often cannot prevent a loved one from dying. Suicide is a sickness and there are some sicknesses that all the care and love in the world cannot cure.

A spiritual response to suicide should not be horror, fear for the victim's eternal salvation, or guilty second-guessing about how we failed this person. Suicide is indeed a horrible way to die, but we must understand it (at least in most cases) as a sickness, a disease, an illness, a tragic breakdown within the emotional immune-system. And then we must trust, in Spirit's goodness, Spirit's understanding, Spirit's power to descend into hell, and Spirit's power to redeem all things, even death, even death by suicide.