

Suicide - a major trauma for people left behind

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» *The loss of a loved person is one of the **most intensely painful** experiences any human being can suffer, and not only is it painful to experience, but also painful to witness, if only because we are so impotent to help.*«

Bowlby, 1980

Who is a survivor of suicide?

Anyone who has lost someone close by suicide

- A relative (parents, siblings, children)
- A friend or a colleague.
- A schoolmate or a teacher.
- A therapist or any other caregiver.
- A patient.
- A supervisor.
- Personnel in jail.

Factors Influencing the Course of Bereavement after Suicide:

- Gender and age of the bereaved,
- Relationship and age of the deceased,
- Time elapsed since the death,
- Exposure to the body immediately after the death,
- Method of suicide,
- Anticipation of the act,
- Participation in any kind of professional help,
- Social support.

Callahan, 2000; Grad, 2011

Who seeks help?

Only one quarter of all suicide survivors.

Saarinen et al, 1999

Jordan, 2004

But 88% express the need for help.

Dyregrov, 2002

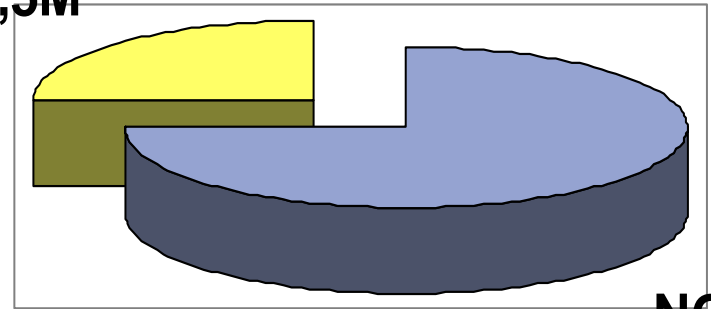
6 Million Survivors Each Year World Wide

(Grad in Hawton, 2005)

1 million suicides



HELP
1,5M



NO
HELP
4,5M

Why so many suicide survivors do NOT seek help? (I.)

(Grad, 2011)

- Some do not need it.
- Some suppress or deny difficulties to avoid pain or to sustain emotional balance.
- Some fear being recognized as suicide survivors and try to avoid: pity, blame, condemnation, stigmatization.
- Some fear that seeking help would lower their self-esteem, make them insecure, unbalance them.

Why many suicide survivors do NOT seek help? (II.)

(Grad, 2011)

- Some do not believe in talking about pain and find other ways to relieve their feelings.
- Some cannot ask and accept help.
- No help available in the community.
- Unfavourable attitudes (about suicide and about seeking help) in the environment.

Fact or fiction ?

Suicide is not socially acceptable way to die under any circumstances - without socially acceptable reasons for death, how can the loss be socially acceptable?

Wallace, 1977

What is the main goal in helping suicide survivors ?

Worden, 1991, Grad 2011

- To ease the process of mourning.
- To acknowledge, understand, accept and express own feelings and reactions.
- To understand what suicide in general is about.
- To have own understanding of this particular suicide.
- To accept and forgive the decision for suicide.

How to reach this goal?

TO KNOW WHAT
THE PROCESS
(USUALLY) CONTAINS

(Bereavement is a process, not an endpoint)

The process of bereavement contains

(Grad, 2011)

1. Emotional reactions.
2. Physical disturbances.
3. Changed attitudes towards people.
4. Changed attitudes and values.
5. Flashbacks.
6. metaphors.
7. Reconciliation. Memories.
8. Symbols, dreams.

Ad 1. Emotional reactions I.

- Sadness and crying
- Guilt and shame
- Anger and bitterness
- Fear of social stigmatization
- Shock
- Agonizing questioning.

Ad 1. Emotional reactions II.

- Feelings of futility
- Purposelessness
- Numbness
- Detachment
- Feeling stunned
- Feelings of rejection

Ad 2. Physical disturbances

- Chest discomfort.
- Nausea.
- Sleep disturbances.
- Eating disturbances.
- Fatigue.
- Problems with breathing.
- Cardiac discomfort.

Ad 3. Changed attitudes towards people

- Withdrawal.
- A sense of loneliness.
- Envy of other people's lives.
- Distrust towards others.

Ad 4. Changed attitudes and values in suicide survivors themselves

- Different values in life than before.
- Less need for public approval.
- The survivor's priorities are altered.

Ad 5. Flashbacks

- Experiences with the deceased.
- Associations connected to past events.
- The image of the body found.
- Vision of possible rescuing.

Ad 6. Memories

- Photos (at home, in the session).
- Personal belongings of the deceased.
- Imaginary re-living of life together.

Ad 7. Symbols, dreams and metaphors

- Symbols: grave or other places, an animal or other representative object (a star, a bee, a cat, a dog), an abstract representation (to found an award in the honour of...)
- Dreams: comforting, caring, disruptive (nightmares), saying farewell, revengeful..
- Metaphors: "He is the blinking light." "His suicide brought the permanent seal to our family - past and future."

Ad 8. Reconciliation.

- Finding own explanation for suicide.
- Finding the meaning of own life.
- Accepting the decision for suicide.
- Relocating of the deceased.
- "Cooling down", acceptance.
- Functioning as before suicide.

What suicide survivors usually get from the environment ?

↑ social ambivalence,

↓ social openness,

↓ talk about the deceased,

↑ cliché advices,

↑ stereotypes about bereavement,


↑ neglect of the individual needs.

What sort of help do suicide survivors need?

- Is it therapy, counselling or support?
- Structured or non-structured?
- Group format, family or individual?
- Educational (skills-building) or expressive?
- Time-limited or on-going?
- With a professional leader, a peer-survivor leader or combined?

What do we tackle in therapy?

- Everything that survivor brings as a problem.
- The survivor's life in perspective.
- How to improve: mood, self-confidence, sense of belonging.
- How to accept and normalize differences in grieving (in the family, in the group).....



There is no growth without pain and
conflict,
there is no loss which cannot lead to gain.

Pincus, 1974

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