



OHIO SUICIDE LOSS SURVIVORS

A RESOURCE GUIDE
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OSPF
Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation

OHIO SUICIDE LOSS SURVIVORS

A RESOURCE GUIDE
SECOND EDITION



OHIOSPF.ORG

CREDITS

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PROVIDING COMFORT & SUPPORT TO OHIO SUICIDE LOSS SURVIVORS

IF YOU HAVE LOST A LOVED ONE TO SUICIDE, YOU ARE NOT ALONE.
THERE IS HELP AND THERE IS HOPE.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

***INTRODUCTION:
YOU ARE NOT ALONE***

PAGE 6

***EMOTIONS
& GRIEVING***

PAGE 24

***CARING FOR
YOURSELF***

PAGE 42

***FINDING
SUPPORT***

PAGE 54

INTRODUCTION

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

*LOSING A LOVED ONE
OR FRIEND TO SUICIDE
TRANSCENDS WORDS. IT IS
LIFE CHANGING. IT LIKELY
IS ONE OF THE MOST
DIFFICULT LOSSES
THAT YOU WILL
EVER EXPERIENCE.*

Feelings of grief, shock, and confusion feel extremely intense. You may feel completely overwhelmed and lost. There are so many unanswered questions.

You may not believe that you can survive this - but you will. You will survive this loss. And, in time, you will begin to realize that you are not alone. There are many of us who've experienced what you're going through. We are survivors of suicide loss, too.

You are not alone.

There are resources that can help you. There are survivors of suicide who will journey with you.

There are steps you can take that will help. Here are some helpful resources you can use right now:

Start Here: Initial Steps to Take

1. Facts About Emotions and Grieving

2. How to Care for Yourself

3. Finding Support

4. Suicide Survivor Resources

This booklet is offered to provide you with information that we hope you'll find both beneficial and healing.

WHAT TO DO

Losing a loved one, close friend, or significant person in your life to suicide is without question, life altering.

This loss may be one of the most difficult losses that you will ever encounter in life. You may feel completely overwhelmed with everything right now. Please know that you will survive this. You are not alone. Many of us have experienced what you're experiencing. We, too, are survivors of suicide. We are here to help you and to offer hope. Please hear us when we say, "You are not alone."

In the U.S., suicide is the 12th leading cause of death among adults. Each year, over 45,000 Americans die from suicide. In the state of Ohio, suicide is the 14th leading cause of death. In fact, 1 person dies every 5.3 hours by suicide in our state.



Since 2000, the suicide rate in this country has steadily increased. There have also been increases in the percentage of individuals who have:

- **Seriously considered attempting suicide**
- **Made a suicide plan**
- **Attempted suicide**

Suicide affects many individuals and families each and every day. It is a major public health issue. Throughout this guide, we have referred to the individuals lost to suicide as "loved ones or friends." Our intention with the wording is to be inclusive of all meaningful relationships. A large number of individuals may be exposed when a death by suicide occurs. This large group may be comprised of people with varying relationships and perceived emotional closeness to the person who dies. These different connections, relationships, and circumstances of the exposure result in people who have varying impact following the suicide death.

That is, in addition to immediate and extended family members and close friends, those who are impacted by the suicide can include, for instance, acquaintances, classmates, teachers, coworkers, therapists, clients, first responders at the scene, those who might have been present and witnessed or discovered the suicide. Any of these or other exposed individuals who might have experienced or felt a relationship to the deceased may be impacted, sometimes significantly, by the death. When we refer to those who have lost a “loved one or friend,” it is understood that some suicide loss survivors will have a relationship that is not precisely identified by that wording, but they may still have significant and impactful grief.

Among this array of possible exposed and affected individuals there will be a wide range of personal impact intensity and duration. Within this larger group, those who were emotionally close and who have intense reactions and long-lasting impact are considered suicide

loss survivors. While those with intense and long-lasting effects are most often thought to be the family and closest individuals to the person who died by suicide, exposed people with any relationship to the deceased might experience high levels and lasting duration of effects. In addition, some of those exposed will have shorter-term effects and milder impact. Thus, those who are suicide loss survivors (i.e., more intense and long-lasting grief) are the likeliest to benefit most from support, resources, and interventions following the death.

As a survivor, it’s not unusual to experience a range of emotions, including grief, sadness, anger, abandonment, guilt, shame, fear, shock, and confusion, as well as many others.

You may feel inundated with questions. This is common, too. Others who have lost loved ones or friends to suicide also have felt a vast range of emotions – emotions that often change quickly.

There are some steps you can take; steps that can really help you. So, consider doing (or at least trying) these things:

What to do: Steps you can take to help

- 1. Share Your Feelings with Another Person**
- 2. Allow Yourself to Grieve**
- 3. Recognize that You Are Not Alone – There Are Others Who Have Survived Suicide Loss**
- 4. Take Care of Yourself**
- 5. Reach Out to Other Survivors of Suicide Loss**
- 6. Attend a Survivor Support Group**
- 7. Talk to a Mental Health Professional**
- 8. Ask For Help In Managing Logistical Issues**



SHARE YOUR FEELINGS



SHARE YOUR FEELINGS WITH ANOTHER PERSON

Surviving a suicide loss is accompanied by an array of feelings and emotions. When feeling distressed, you may want to isolate yourself. You may even try to hide from what you're feeling. Hiding tends to worsen feelings of distress and aloneness.

Instead, it may help to tell a loved one or friend exactly how you feel. Be open and authentic, even if it's confusing, overwhelming, or unclear. Talk honestly about your feelings. Opening up to a trusted individual and bringing them into your inner circle can help you feel less alone and less frightened. This individual may be able to help support you in ways you can't imagine right now.

Sometimes just having another person listen to you can help. It may provide at least a little comfort and connection.

Openly talking about your feeling might help ease the pain and distress you may be experiencing. Remember: You are not alone.

ALLOW YOURSELF TO GRIEVE

The loss of a loved one or friend is one of the most difficult losses you will ever experience. When it happens, it's common to feel a wide range of emotions. Some of the emotions you may feel and the reactions you may have include:

**Ambivalence • Agitation • Anger • Blaming • Confusion
Crying • Depression • Disbelief • Denial • Despair
Fear • Guilt • Helplessness • Humiliation • Irritability
Jealousy • Loneliness • Loss of Interest • Moodiness
Mood Swings • Numbness • Sadness • Shame • Shock**

This list does not include every possible emotion, of course. And you may experience many others. There are, however, some emotions that are common reactions to loss. Please understand that you may experience several emotions all at the same time. This is normal and to be expected.

The intensity and duration of your emotions may have a tendency to change with time. Your mood also can change rapidly. Because of these changes, you also may feel completely overwhelmed. You may even start to question your overall resiliency. Please remember that these emotions are appropriate and may even help you as you grieve.

Understand that it will take time to fully comprehend the intense and extensive impact of your loss. Allowing yourself to grieve may help you in acknowledging your feelings. It might also help you start to cope with the feelings you have because of your loss.

Grieving is a necessary process. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. There is no single pattern or set of stages. Grief does not always move in a forward direction. Because there are a vast array of emotions and thoughts you need to work through, it will take time.





YOU ARE NOT ALONE

RECOGNIZE THAT YOU ARE NOT ALONE, THERE ARE OTHERS WHO HAVE SURVIVED SUICIDE LOSS

In losing a loved one or friend to suicide, you may feel that you are completely alone and that no one can truly understand the depth of your pain and loss. In so doing, you may feel compelled to isolate yourself from others and avoid any contact or interaction outside of your home. The feelings of grief and loss can be so overwhelming that you may feel emotionally paralyzed and completely distraught. Your inner thoughts can seem endless. You may believe that there is absolutely no way that someone else can even begin to fathom how you feel.

The truth of the matter is that there are many people who've experienced the loss of a loved one or friend to suicide. There are many who are suicide loss survivors

just like you. And there are many who have felt how you are feeling right now. You are not alone.

Recognizing the fact that you are not alone can help you. There are individuals who understand your feelings and who will work to help you. First, recognize that you are not alone. Second, reach out and talk to an individual who understands your distress and the emotions you're experiencing.

For now, please know that there is a community of suicide loss survivors that you can reach out to for love and support. When you're ready and when you feel comfortable, contact these individuals and allow them to share in your journey towards healing.

There are many suicide survivor support groups that also can be quite helpful. Even when it's hard, continue moving forward knowing these two things: **1.** You are not alone. **2.** You will not always feel the way you feel right now.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

The grieving process can be quite grueling, and it can take its toll on your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health. In order to heal and to manage your daily activities, you need to take care of own health, even when it feels really hard to or you don't want to. Make sure to prioritize taking care of the various dimensions of your personal health. Eating healthy, moving or participating in some type of physical activity, getting quality sleep, and tending to your emotional health can help in your healing process. Here are some activities that might help you take care of yourself:

- 1. Develop a Daily Schedule and Routine**
- 2. Do Something Physically Active Each Day**
- 3. Eat Healthy**
- 4. Try to Get a Quality Night's Sleep**
- 5. Slow Down and Breathe**
- 6. Focus on the Present Moment**
- 7. Go Outside and Enjoy Nature**
- 8. Do Things You Have Enjoyed Doing**
- 9. Do Not Use Alcohol or Drugs**
- 10. Connect with a Pet**
- 11. Open Up and Connect with Others**



TAKE CARE
OF YOURSELF



REACH OUT

REACH OUT TO OTHER SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE LOSS

There is a community of suicide loss survivors you can reach out to for love and support. When you're ready and when you feel comfortable, contact these individuals and allow them to assist and share in your journey towards healing.

ATTEND A SURVIVOR SUPPORT GROUP

There are others who have survived the loss of suicide. You are not alone. Attending a support group can provide you with support from others who've gone through what you're going through. It might be especially healing to hear the stories of how others have traveled along their grief journey. Continue moving forward, knowing that you are not alone. Remember, you will not always feel the way you feel right now.

TALK TO A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

A mental health professional may help you express and process your feelings of grief and your intense emotions. If you feel that your grief is overwhelming or unmanageable, please reach out to a mental health professional. There are mental health professionals located throughout your community who can help. You'll most likely find them within community mental health facilities, hospitals, and private settings. Reach out to one for assistance. Sharing your feelings with a mental health professional might help you process your grief and move towards a place of healing.

ASK FOR HELP IN MANAGING LOGISTICAL ISSUES

Accompanying the loss of your loved one or friend will be a variety of logistical issues – each of which needs to be managed. Addressing these issues in an effective and timely manner might help reduce anxiety and help you begin the grieving process. It's important to realize that you are not expected to take charge of everything that needs to be done nor do you need to direct everyone in the things they must do. Ask for help, instead of trying to do everything yourself.

Delegate a friend or family member to serve as a support person for you. Ask this individual to help you tell family and friends about what's happened. You may also want to ask this person to manage any offers of help from your family and friends.

People will want to know what they can do to help. Let them. Here are some tasks that others can take care of for you:

**Meals • Childcare • Pet Care • Grocery shopping
Bills & Mail • Laundry • Cleaning • Home Maintenance
Yardwork • Transportation**

Another thing that needs to be managed is the funeral and memorial. Allow family members and the funeral director to assist you in making these arrangements. Legal matters may also need to be addressed. Contact an attorney to help you in handling these legal issues.



EMOTIONS & GRIEVING

GRIEVING IS A NATURAL EMOTIONAL RESPONSE TO LOSS. GRIEVING FOR THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE OR FRIEND CAN BE AN EXTREMELY INTENSE, EMOTIONAL, AND, QUITE FRANKLY, EXHAUSTING EXPERIENCE.

The act of grieving can be quite taxing mentally, emotionally, and physically. It's not unusual for the grief experience, and the pain associated with the loss, to feel overwhelming and never-ending.



EVERYONE GRIEVES DIFFERENTLY

GRIEF IS PERSONAL

During the grief process, there are often several conflicting and unexpected emotions that arise. Moods and feelings can quickly shift from anger to sadness, from shock to guilt, from questioning to complete and utter numbness. Keep in mind that grief is a highly individual experience and each person has the right to grieve in their own way.

The way in which people grieve is specific and unique to themselves. How you grieve depends on many different factors, including your usual coping mechanisms, overall personality, belief system, support network, etc.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

There is no set timeline for grieving.

There is no single sequence of stages or set of reactions or emotions in grieving suicide.

Grief is a process that, much like a journey, will take time.

Learning more about emotions and the grieving process can help you through your own grieving journey.

Remember: everyone grieves differently, so how you grieve is how you grieve. Keep reading for information and ideas to help in your healing.

ALLOW YOURSELF TO FEEL & TO GRIEVE

Because people experience grief and loss in their own way, recognize that the feelings you have are your own personal feelings. You may be experiencing a whole bunch of different feelings, some of which may conflict with one another.

Please understand that this is okay. These are your feelings and this is your grief journey.

Here are some things you might do to help cope with your feelings:

- 1. Try to open yourself up and truly feel your feelings.**
- 2. Accept your feelings and understand that they are fine just the way they are.**
- 3. Remind yourself of this truth: You will survive this.**
- 4. Know that grieving takes time and that this is the journey you are now on.**
- 5. Give yourself time to process the loss of your loved one.**

Throughout this journey, please know that it is okay for you to take breaks and deep breaths along the way. Grieving is a process. Be gentle with yourself. Be nurturing. This will take time.



THIS IS YOUR
GRIEF JOURNEY

RANGE OF EMOTIONS

The loss of a loved one or friend is one of, if not the most difficult losses you will ever experience. When this happens, it is very common to feel a wide range of emotions. Some of the emotions you may feel include:

Ambivalence • Agitation • Anger • Blaming • Confusion • Crying • Depression • Disbelief • Denial • Despair • Fear • Guilt • Helplessness • Humiliation • Irritability • Jealousy • Loneliness • Loss of interest • Moodiness • Mood swings • Numbness • Sadness • Shame • Shock

Since this isn't a list of all possible emotions, it can help to know that you may experience many other emotions. There are many, many different emotions that are a common reaction to loss. It's also quite common to experience several different emotions at the same time. Suicide grief is complicated.



WHAT YOU'RE FEELING AND
EXPERIENCING IS HEALTHY
AND NECESSARY.



MOOD SHIFTS & CHANGES

You can expect the intensity and duration of your emotions to change with time. Moods also may change rapidly. These changes may have you feeling completely overwhelmed. You may even begin to question your ability to make it through; what we call “overall resiliency.”

Hear us when we say, you are resilient. You will survive this. Please know that these wide, varying, and changing emotions are not only normal and appropriate, They’re actually helpful to you.

It will take time to fully comprehend the intense and extensive impact of your loss. Allowing yourself to begin to grieve will help you in acknowledging your feelings. It also will help with beginning to cope with the feelings you have about your loss.

Grieving is a necessary process. There are a vast array of emotions and thoughts for you to work through. It will take time.

While you’re grieving, don’t be surprised if you experience rapid shifts and changes in your moods. These changes are frequently experienced reactions to loss.

Remember that you are trying to process all that happened as well as everything that you are feeling. It is a lot. The intensity and depth of your emotions can be overwhelming and crushing. As a way of dealing with it, your mind and your body may shift from one thought or feeling to another. Because of these shifts, you may start to have some concern about your mental sanity and overall resilience. Be patient with yourself. You will survive this. You are healing.

What you’re feeling and experiencing is healthy and necessary to help you in processing your loss.

This will take time. Everything associated with your grieving is aimed at helping you to heal.

- 1. Be comforting to yourself.**
- 2. Take deep breaths.**
- 3. Allow yourself to feel and grieve.**
- 4. Share what you are feeling with others you trust.**

HOW SUICIDE LOSS DIFFERS

Although suicide loss is unique for each person and there is no right or wrong way to grieve, there are some common features and themes associated with suicide grief that differentiate it from other types of losses. While many aspects of suicide loss are shared with other forms of grief, John Jordan and John McIntosh reported common themes and features that are different from or more prominent than in losses from other causes. These features have been supported in research with suicide loss survivors (the first 5), or are observed in clinical experience or appear anecdotally in survivors' personal accounts:

1. Abandonment or rejection

2. Shame & stigma

3. Concealment of the cause of death as suicide

4. Blaming

5. Increased risk of self-destructiveness or suicidality

6. Guilt

7. Anger

8. Search for explanation

9. Relief

10. Shock & disbelief

11. Family & support system effects

12. Obsession with the topic of suicide and prevention efforts

1. ABANDONMENT OR REJECTION

Feelings that the death was a choice to leave you or were purposeful abandonment by the person lost have been found.

2. SHAME & STIGMA

Suicide loss survivors frequently report feelings of stigma and shame associated with the suicide loss, both toward themselves and the person they lost. These feelings of shame and stigma may affect the behavior of others after the death as well as the survivors' behavior. Survivors might feel isolated from others and might also increase feelings of isolation by avoiding others.

3. CONCEALMENT OF THE CAUSE OF DEATH AS SUICIDE

Related to shame and stigma issues, or perhaps to protect the memory of the lost individual, survivors may conceal from others that the death was a suicide.

4. BLAMING

Blaming may be related to anger. Survivors may hold others responsible for the suicide, perhaps in some cases, to avert feelings of self blame. In other cases blaming might take the form of scapegoating, with

blaming and anger expressed toward that individual. Blaming can be toward mental health professionals, therapists, family, friends, or others.

5. INCREASED RISK OF SELF-DESTRUCTIVENESS OR SUICIDAL THINKING AND BEHAVIOR

There is strong evidence that exposure to suicide increases the risk of suicide by survivors. This risk may be produced by a combination of shared heredity (when family members), environment, and stressors.

6. GUILT

Survivors might feel guilt about what they did, what they did not do, or what they imagine that they might have done (“What if...?” or “If only...” or “Why didn’t I foresee and prevent their suicide?”).

7. ANGER

Suicide loss survivors might feel anger toward the deceased, themselves, or others, such as therapists, family, friends. You may lash out at life, at others, at God.

Many questions may arise such as “This just does not make any sense!” And “Why did God allow this to happen?”

8. SEARCH FOR EXPLANATION

Some survivors express a strong desire to make sense of and understand why the person died by suicide.

9. RELIEF

Interactions and relationships with suicidal individuals are often difficult and troubled, disrupting the lives of those close to them. With the death, these difficulties lessen and may lead to feelings of relief and then guilt to feel relieved. Another source of relief may occur if survivors perceive that the psychological pain felt by the person who died is now ended and they are no longer bearing it.

10. SHOCK & DISBELIEF

With the death, loss survivors may experience the fact of the death as unreal and feelings of numbness. Other

sudden deaths also often experience these feelings — this feature is not unique to suicide loss survivors.

11. FAMILY & SUPPORT SYSTEM EFFECTS

After a death by suicide the family might be troubled and splintered by their loss. However, in some cases families will become closer, while others might experience a combination of these two outcomes. Social interactions might be affected, reflecting perhaps the feelings of shame and stigma and uncertainties about how to interact with others after the death. Others may not know how to interact with or what to say to the loss survivors. These feelings can produce social isolation, with avoidance effected by the loss survivors and/or their social network. Common forms of social support provided after deaths from other causes might not be extended because of uncertainty and discomfort. Rituals might also be affected or avoided, lessening the social support usually associated with them.

12. PREOCCUPATION WITH THE TOPIC OF SUICIDE AND PREVENTION EFFORTS

Most often this feature is viewed as a positive result among suicide loss survivors. These behaviors may be therapeutic for the survivors. The activism may lead to meaning making and even re-empowerment for survivors. Feelings of making something good from their tragic loss may be a demonstration that the individuals are “survivors” in the positive connotation of that designation.

Survivors do not necessarily display all or most of these features in their individual grief, but these themes and issues occur frequently among suicide loss survivors. Following suicide loss, many (but not all) suicide survivors will manifest some (but not all) of these features. Suicide survivors will have the universal aspects of bereavement, such as sorrow at the loss and yearning for the individual they lost, but their response to their loss by suicide may lead to these non-universal

features as well. The individual course and intensity of the grief and bereavement experiences following suicide loss are complex and affected by many factors.

HOW TO COPE WITH GRIEF

Coping with your loss and your grief is important to your overall mental and emotional well-being. Here are some strategies you can use to help yourself effectively cope with the pain and grief you are feeling.

Accept Your Feelings

Individuals experience grief and loss in different ways. The feelings you are experiencing are unique to you. They are your own individual feelings. It is common to experience a wide range of feelings. Many of these feelings are painful, uncomfortable, and may even contradict one another. All of these feelings are appropriate to your grief journey.

Share Your Feelings

Discuss how you feel and what you are experiencing with a loved one or friend. Be open and honest. Share all of your feelings, even those that are confusing or appear to make no logical sense. Often, people want to isolate when confronted with loss. This may lead to more distress and delays the healing process. Sharing your feelings may help to ease your pain and distress.

Take Care of Yourself

The grieving process can be quite grueling, taking its toll on your physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health. In order to heal and manage daily activities, be sure to make it a priority to take care of the various dimensions of your personal health. Eating healthy, doing some type of physical activity, getting quality sleep, and tending to your emotional health really can be beneficial to your healing process.



Spend Time with Your Loved Ones

Spending time with loved ones may help you to process and cope with what has happened. Sharing stories and cherished memories often aid in the healing process, and also serve to build positive and intimate connections with others. Also, just being with each other can lend itself to feelings of support, cohesion, and togetherness. It is important to realize that you are not alone in this loss. Others are also grieving. Spending time with each other allows you and your loved ones to collectively grieve and rely upon one another.

Attend a Survivorship Support Group

You are not alone. Know that there are others who have survived the loss of a loved one or close friend to suicide. Attending a support group can help provide you with support from individuals who have gone through what you are going through. It often can be especially healing to hear the stories of how others have traveled along their grief journey.



SLOW EVERYTHING DOWN & FOCUS



Allow Yourself the Time to Grieve

Grieving the loss of a loved one or friend takes time. You will experience many thoughts and feelings and have many questions. There will be shifts in moods and changes in emotions. Sometimes things may seem very overwhelming. This is common and appropriate to grieving. Be patient with yourself. Be gentle and kind to yourself. Be nurturing. This will take time. Allow yourself the time to process and feel.

Focus on the Present Moment

You may feel inundated with questions and uncertainties. Avoid thinking way off into the future. Try to slow everything down and just focus on the present moment. Focus on the current moment and what is happening in front of you. Try staying in each moment and addressing the needs of that moment. Remember that there are many other survivors who have endured and grown through what you are experiencing. The feelings of emotional distress and depression will not

remain forever. Stick to the present moment. This will can help to make things more manageable for you.

Contact a Mental Health Professional

Mental health professionals are often trained to help people process and express feelings of grief and intense emotion. If you feel that your grief is overbearing and unmanageable, then please contact a mental health professional. There are mental health professionals located throughout communities who are willing and able to help. Help yourself by reaching out to one for assistance. Sharing your feelings with a mental health professional is another possible way to help you process your grief and move towards healing.

CARING FOR YOURSELF

GRIEVING FOR A LOVED ONE OR FRIEND IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT, EMOTIONAL, AND EXHAUSTING. THE ACTUAL ACT OF GRIEVING CAN BE QUITE TAXING AND TAKE A TOLL ON YOUR MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PHYSICAL HEALTH.

Everyone grieves differently and uniquely. The intense feelings associated with the loss of your loved one or friend may persist for quite a while.

Therefore, taking care of yourself during this time of grieving is extremely important. While you may not be interested or invested in caring for yourself right now, please know that this can be one of the most helpful things you can do for yourself. Here are some things

you can do each day to help care for yourself mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually:

- 1. Develop a Daily Schedule and Routine**
- 2. Do Something Physically Active Each Day**
- 3. Eat Healthy**
- 4. Try to Get a Quality Night's Sleep**
- 5. Slow Down and Breathe**
- 6. Focus on the Present Moment**
- 7. Go Outside and Enjoy Nature**
- 8. Do Things You Have Enjoyed**
- 9. Do Not Use Alcohol or Drugs**
- 10. Connect with a Pet**
- 11. Open Up and Connect with Others**

DEVELOP A DAILY SCHEDULE & ROUTINE

Following a daily schedule and routine can help you by giving each day some much needed consistency. It can help build an overall sense of stability and solidness. Establishing a daily schedule lets you know what to expect. Simply following a regular schedule may promote feelings of ease and manageability. You are resilient and you will quickly get used to having a set schedule. Routines can help reduce any anxiety and uncertainty you may feel about daily event. It also can help you feel more confident in accomplishing daily tasks and activities..

ALLOW YOURSELF TO FEEL & GRIEVE

Individuals experience grief and loss in unique ways. Try not to judge your feelings as right or wrong. The

feelings you have are your own. You may experience many different feelings, some of which seem to conflict with one another. That is completely fine. These are your feelings and this is your grief journey.

If you can, try to open yourself up to truly feeling your feelings. Accept your feelings as they are, knowing that they are just fine. You will survive this. Remind yourself of this fact.

Remember that grieving takes time. Grief is a journey you are now on, and you will need time to accept and process the loss of your loved one or friend.

As you move along the journey, know that it's okay for you to take breaks and deep breaths along the way. Grieving is a process. Be gentle with yourself. Be nurturing to yourself. This will take time.



EAT HEALTHY

Often when we are grieving, depressed, or distraught, we succumb to eating high-fat foods and snacks. Some people may do just the opposite and not eat at all. Changes in appetite, eating habits, and diet are extremely common in times of grief. However, it is essential to eat high-quality food. Instead of eating high-fat, high-calorie foods or not eating at all, try eating a variety of foods that are nutritious and lower in fat. Eating regular meals of good food will help you feel more resilient, more energetic, and more capable of managing your days. A diet that's low in fat and high in healthy foods can help improve your mood and allow for clarity of thought. This, of course, can be really beneficial for your mental health and emotional well-being.

DO SOMETHING PHYSICALLY ACTIVE EACH DAY

Exercising helps reduce feelings of depression, frustration, and anxiety. It's an excellent way to boost your mood, enhance clarity of thought, and increase your energy. You, like many people who are grieving, may feel tired, lethargic, and completely devoid of energy. Adding even just a little physical activity into your day can help boost your energy levels.

Physical activity does not have to be "exercise" either. It can be anything that gets you moving or that requires physical exertion. Try going for a walk, bicycling, gardening, doing yardwork, hiking a trail, playing sports, going shopping, taking a run, using a treadmill, walking on the elliptical, or anything else that you enjoy – as long as it gets you moving.



Incorporating physical activity into your day can greatly help your emotional health, as well as boost your energy levels and clarity of thought.

TRY TO GET A QUALITY NIGHT'S SLEEP

Being able to get to sleep, stay asleep, and wake up fully rested can be extremely challenging in times of grief and sadness. You may even experience different types of insomnia following the loss of your loved one or friend. You may have difficulty falling asleep (early insomnia), staying asleep (middle insomnia), or waking up extremely early (tertiary insomnia).

Sleep difficulties are quite common when grieving. Be gentle and comforting to yourself. Remind yourself that grieving takes time. Reassure yourself that getting a quality night's sleep is important because it can help you think more clearly and handle the many emotions

and challenges that come throughout the day. Make getting a quality night's sleep a top priority in your self-care regimen.

Here are some things you can do to get a good night's sleep:

- 1. Go to bed at the same time each night.**
- 2. Establish a regular bedtime/sleep routine.**
- 3. Keep your bedroom dark and cool.**
- 4. Listen to soft, relaxing music before you drift off.**
- 5. Disconnect from social media.**
- 6. Meditate.**
- 7. Slow down your breathing.**
- 8. Use aromatherapy.**

9. Read a calming book.

10. Limit daytime naps, if possible.

11. Avoid alcohol and caffeine, especially at night.

Remember that quality sleep each and every night is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. Add a good night's sleep to a lifestyle that also includes healthy foods and physical activity.

FOCUS ON THE PRESENT MOMENT

Try to slow everything down and just focus on the present moment. Even though you currently may be feeling emotionally distressed and depressed, it does not mean that your feelings will be with you forever. Focus on the current moment instead of thinking way off into the future. Know that others have felt, managed, endured, and progressed through many of the same

feelings you're experiencing now. There is hope. Allow yourself the time you need to get through this moment before worrying about the next. Sharing your feelings with someone you trust can also help you stay in the present moment.

SLOW DOWN & BREATHE

When feeling distressed or in crisis, you might feel like your mind is racing and that everything is simply going too fast. If this is you, try slowing down your breathing. The act of focusing on your breathing can boost emotional health and help you feel more centered, more aware, and more resilient. Mindfully breathing can help reduce depression, anxiety, and feelings of being overwhelmed. Breathing slowly and focusing on each inhaled breath has been shown to help slow down the central nervous system. It can also give you clarity in how to handle the challenges of your day.

Try this: Inhale slowly, taking a big, deep breath. Focus on your breath while you are inhaling. Tell yourself, "I am slowly breathing in, 1, 2, 3." Exhale slowly and tell yourself, "I am slowly breathing out, 1, 2, 3." Do this slow inhale/exhale for 1 minute. Slowing down your breathing and focusing on your breath can help you decompress. It can help relieve some of the pressure you may be feeling. It also can help you in making the decision to talk to someone about how you feel. This breathing exercise can be practiced anywhere, anytime, and may be helpful for your overall mental health.

GO OUTSIDE & ENJOY NATURE

Go outside and enjoy nature. Look at the sunshine. Feel its warmth. Breathe in clean, crisp air and acknowledge the beauty that surrounds you. Pay attention to the trees, the leaves, the grass, and the wind.



SPRING WILL
COME IN TIME

Feel the awesomeness of nature all around you. Take time to walk and enjoy everything that nature provides. This is great anytime but is especially important in times of grief. You may feel overwhelmed by everything that is happening around you or by anyone who's asking something of you. In contrast, nature asks for and demands nothing. It is simply there. It accepts us as we are. It allows us to appreciate its wonder and beauty.

When you're grieving, you need time to think and to process. This can be difficult sometimes. Getting out into nature can give you the time and solitude you need to process your feelings and emotions. Going outside and being with nature also can shed some light on the natural cycle of life and death. Nature's seasons remind us that life begins in spring, continues through summer, fades in autumn, and dies in winter.

To a great extent, our own lives parallel the seasons. You may feel that the loss you've experienced has thrown you into the deepest grief of winter that you have ever

experienced. You may feel that you will never be able to experience joy or happiness again. However, like the seasons, spring will come in time.

DO THINGS YOU ENJOY

It's important to take care of yourself, especially when grieving. So, think about the things you have truly enjoyed doing in the past. Then, if you are able, try to start doing at least one of those things each day. These things could be all kinds of different activities, such as reading, playing a musical instrument, listening to music, drawing, cooking, playing with a pet, writing, talking with friends, shopping, participating or watching sports. Try to do something you enjoy each day.

DO NOT USE ALCOHOL OR DRUGS

Alcohol and drugs can worsen feelings of grief, sadness, and emotional distress. Alcohol and drugs do not solve

problems. Avoid such substances whenever you're feeling sad or depressed. Instead, talk to someone and share how you're feeling.

CONNECT WITH A PET

Pets can be great emotional healers. Pet parents often report higher levels of happiness and emotional health. Many say how helpful pets are in elevating their mood and bringing them a sense of joy. Having a pet may help keep you from becoming overly consumed with thoughts of depression, pessimism, frustration, or hopelessness. Instead, pets may help you put your focus on other things – like their wants and needs. Pets are really good at giving and receiving affection, too, making them truly therapeutic. They're so therapeutic that many counselors use pet therapy in their practices.

OPEN UP & CONNECT WITH OTHERS

One of the most important psychological needs we all have is the need to build positive connections with others. Research shows that people who feel positively connected with others are significantly less likely to experience sustained depression and more likely to demonstrate resilience. Building positive connections greatly contributes to a feeling of overall life meaning, purpose, and satisfaction. People who are connected with others are more likely to open up and authentically share their feelings of grief and hurt. With this in mind, when you are ready you can begin to connect with others by opening up and allowing yourself to interact with them. Talk, listen, and spend time with other people. What counts is that you're talking, listening, and interacting – and you are not alone.



EMOTIONAL
HEALERS

FINDING SUPPORT

REACHING OUT TO OTHERS AND ATTENDING A SUPPORT GROUP CAN PROVIDE YOU WITH SUPPORT FROM INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE GONE THROUGH WHAT YOU ARE GOING THROUGH.

It can be especially healing to hear the stories of how others have traveled along their grief journey. These individuals can relate to your feelings because they have personally felt them. They can offer you help, support and guidance as you move along your journey of healing.

Suicide loss support groups have been developed and are available in many communities. There are

some resources to find listings of groups in states and communities below. Suicide loss support groups are often available as face-to-face experiences but not every suicide loss survivor will find their community has a support group and some individuals are uncomfortable or do not prefer group experiences in person. There are some virtual or online suicide loss support groups that can be accessed from any location. These formats might be a better match for some survivors and can provide support when there are no accessible or convenient groups available. A few of these online resources are also found below.

You may well discover that to find someone who understands your experience as a suicide loss survivor, you need to find others who have also had a suicide loss.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Listed below are links to SUPPORT GROUPS

which can help you.

Alliance of Hope Community Forum provides healing support for people coping with the loss of a loved one to suicide. Thousands of loss survivors come together in this online forum to exchange information, understanding, and hope. This healing space, available 24/7, is moderated by a mental health counselor and trained volunteers.

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forum.allianceofhope.org

allianceofhope.org [main website]

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) lists U.S. and international suicide bereavement support groups as a public service to loss survivors.

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afsp.org/find-a-support-group

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation is aimed at ensuring that all Ohio communities have the resources and capacity to reduce the risk of suicide among their residents, lessen the effects of suicide on families and communities, and improve mental health statewide. The following link provides information regarding support groups in Ohio counties.

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ohiospf.org/postvention/support-group/

Suicide Awareness Voices Education (SAVE) keeps an updated list of support groups across the country. Click the following link to go to the interactive map to find support groups near you.

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save.org/what-we-do/grief-support/find-a-support-group

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) has supported thousands of survivors of military suicide loss by offering them hope, healing, and renewed opportunities for personal growth. TAPS provides resources and programming to all survivors of military suicide loss.

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taps.org/suicide

MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Mental health professionals can help individuals to process and express feelings of grief and intense emotion. If you feel that your grief is overbearing and unmanageable, then contact a mental health professional. There are mental health professionals

located throughout communities to assist you. Reach out to one for assistance.

Sharing your feelings with a mental health professional can help you to process your grief and move towards healing. Mental health professionals can be found in a variety of locations, including community mental health facilities, private practices, hospitals, and health agencies.

After identifying possible mental health professionals, some additional effort on your part is recommended. To find a therapist that fits your personal needs best you might interview possible counselors in advance or in an initial meeting. You will be able to determine for instance if they have experience with suicide loss or even if they have had specialized bereavement training. You need a counselor who fits your needs best. In such a meeting or conversation, you might ask questions such as: How often have you worked with people impacted by sudden or traumatic loss? How often have you worked with people impacted by grief? Have you worked with people who have been impacted by suicide loss? Have you received any specialized training on working with suicide loss survivors? Have you ever been impacted by a sudden or traumatic loss?

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation is aimed at ensuring that all Ohio communities have the resources and capacity to reduce the risk of suicide among their residents, lessen the effects of suicide on families and communities, and improve mental health statewide. The following link provides information for each Ohio County regarding coalitions, LOSS teams, crisis numbers, and local health provider information.

- ohiospf.org/coalition-map/

SUICIDE SURVIVOR RESOURCES

Listed below are links to SUICIDE SURVIVOR and SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCES which can help you.

American Association of Suicidology

The American Association of Suicidology (AAS) provides resources regarding suicide prevention for professionals, researchers, crisis intervention centers, schools, and lay persons. AAS operates The National Center for the Prevention of Youth Suicide and offers an array of suicide prevention resources, including: Facts and statistics, training and accreditation, the Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior Journal, Resources for Attempt Survivors, and a list of accredited crisis centers. The American Association of Suicidology also offers an array of suicide prevention materials including suicide survivor resources

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suicidology.org

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suicidology.org/suicide-survivors/suicide-loss-survivors

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) is a voluntary health organization that is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide. AFSP is committed to helping those affected by suicide through research, education, advocacy and support.

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afsp.org

Suicide Prevention Resource Center

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) provides helpful resources for survivors of suicide loss.

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sprc.org/sites/default/files/resource-program/Help-and-Hope-For-Survivors-of-Suicide-Loss.pdf

The Jason Foundation

This organization is dedicated to youth suicide prevention.

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jasonfoundation.com

The Trevor Project

The Trevor Project provides suicide prevention and crisis intervention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) young people. It offers free, 24/7, confidential counseling through the following:

- Trevor Lifeline - toll-free phone line at 1-866-488-7386
- TrevorText - text START to 678-678
- TrevorChat - instant messaging at [TheTrevorProject.org/Help](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/help)
- TrevorSpace - an affirming social networking site for LGBTQ youth at [TrevorSpace.org](https://www.trevorspace.org)
- [thetrevorproject.org/](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/)

Jed Foundation

The Jed Foundation provides suicide prevention information and resources.

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jedfoundation.org

Crisis Text Line

The Crisis Text Line provides free emotional support and information to teens in any type of crisis, including suicide. If you are currently suicidal or in any crisis, you can text a trained specialist 24 hours a day. Text "4HOPE" to 741-741.

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crisistextline.org/

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline [Formerly: National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-Talk (8255)]

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline provides free and confidential emotional support to individuals in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 180 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. Note: The 1-800-273-TALK number will continue to function indefinitely.

If you are currently suicidal, call this Lifeline to get the help you need.

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988lifeline.com

National Alliance on Mental Illness

NAMI provides educational materials regarding mental health.

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nami.org

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1-800-950-NAMI (6264)

National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

This federation offers information regarding youth mental health.

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ffcmh.org

National Institute of Mental Health

The NIMH provides an array of materials on mental health and suicide prevention.

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nimh.nih.gov

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation

The Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation provides information concerning suicide prevention and its relationship to mental illness, substance abuse, and other issues. The focus of this organization is to act as a catalyst for suicide prevention activities across the state.

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ohiospf.org

Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide

This website contains a teen section which provides information to help teens who are thinking about suicide. Information is also offered on how to help a friend and how to cope if a friend dies by suicide.

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sptsusa.org/teens

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

SAMHSA provides educational materials and resources regarding suicide and substance abuse prevention.

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samhsa.gov/prevention/suicide.aspx

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE)

SAVE offers information aimed at enhancing suicide prevention awareness and education.

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save.org



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