

Letter to Survivors



Dear Survivor,

On behalf of the Santa Cruz County Behavioral Health Services Suicide Prevention Task Force please accept our deepest and sincerest condolences for the tragic loss of your loved one. This loss can trigger several thoughts and emotions for you. Our goal is to let those affected by loss know they are not alone and to share information about local resources to help navigate through this difficult time.

In this packet, you will find information on suicide loss grief, which can be a very different experience compared to grief for other losses. You will find tips and suggestions for taking care of yourself during this time. There is also information about resources such as books, support groups, and grief counseling.

Sincerely,
Suicide Prevention Task Force

HELPFUL RESOURCES

SUICIDE PREVENTION SERVICES OF CENTRAL COAST
1-877-663-5433 (ONE LIFE)

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE
1-800-273-8255

CRISIS TEXT LINE
741741

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
1-800-952-2335

For information about general resources and needs, dial 2-1-1. It is a directory of services based upon need.

Survivors of Suicide Loss A Survivor's Bill of Rights



I have the right to be free of guilt.

I have the right not to feel responsible for suicide death.

I have the right to express my feelings and emotions, even if they do not feel acceptable, as long as they do not interfere on the rights of others.

I have the right to have my questions answered honestly by authorities and family members.

I have the right not to be deceived because other feels they can spare me further grief.

I have the right to maintain a sense of hopefulness.

I have the right to feel peace and dignity.

I have the right to feel positive about the one I lost through suicide, regardless of the events prior to or at the time of the untimely death.

I have the right to maintain my individuality and not be judged because of the suicide death.

I have the right to seek counseling and a support group to enable me to honestly explore my feelings and further explore the acceptance process.

I have the right to reach acceptance.

I have the right to a new beginning.

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 that 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 in your family and friends.
- 17 Be patient with yourself and 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 or 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 reaction 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.

TIPS FOR SURVIVORS

- Remember the basics of life. Eat, sleep, exercise, drink plenty of water, and breathe...just sit back and take a deep breath.
- Allow yourself your feelings. Remember feelings are not "good" or "bad." They are just feelings, and they are ALL normal.
- Keep a journal. Write your feelings, your dreams, your memories. Journaling is a great way to work out your emotions, and it allows you to look back later to see your progress.
- Allow yourself to talk about your loved one. Find a safe place to do just that...whether you call a friend, speak with your church leader, or join a support group.
- Remember that you have suffered a great loss and a horriic trauma. Allow yourself the time you need to heal. And remember that we all deal with loss in our own way. Give those around you the space and time that they need to grieve, as well.
- Find special ways to honor the memory of your loved one. Plant a tree, make a memory album, donate money in his name, light a candle on her birthday... whatever works for you, do it!
- Learn more about suicide. Read books, surf the web, talk to other survivors.

Survivors of suicide are in a high-risk group for taking their own lives. Learn the warning signs, decide on a plan of action with family members, make a pact with a friend...If you are having thoughts of suicide, tell someone and nd help.

STOP THE LEGACY OF SUICIDE

AWARE OF YOUR OWN NEEDS

Feelings of grief and loss can be overwhelming after the loss of a loved one, yet there are often a number of practical steps one must take and persons to contact, even during this difficult time. We hope you will find the below checklist helpful in managing those tasks. (Note that in some cases you may need to present a death certificate.)

Faith leaders

Notify Social Security
(800) 772-1213 for phone appointment

Veterans needs (800) 827-1000 using DD214
(Order Presidential Certificate)

Notify employer; le for pension, annuity, death, or
survivor retirement benefits

File for life insurance

Examine any effect on family health insurance

Request health care directive

Notify doctor, dentist, and other medical providers
the deceased was connected with

Notify utility companies

Notify/cancel any memberships and subscriptions

Contact DMV

Review automobile insurance policy

Credit cards, bank accounts, and investments

Mortgage provider/lender

Initiate funeral prearranging

Additional family needs

Have you lost a friend, family member, loved one, or someone close to suicide?

Losing someone to suicide can be painful, confusing, and overwhelming. Grieving the suicide of a loved one is different than grieving other kinds of loss. You may feel alone, and may not know where to turn for support. You may not realize that there are other survivors who are suffering too. You may be looking for others who have had your experience to help you through your healing process. You do not have to struggle with this alone – there is support available.

For more information about support groups, counseling referrals, and helpful information and materials for you and others in your life, please call our office at 831-459-9373.

