

Suicide survivors' experience of grief is often different to those who grieve after other forms of death. Bereavement by suicide presents additional unique problems due to the sudden and often violent nature of the death as well as the stigma that accompanies death by suicide. Suicide Bereavement Support Groups allow survivors to come together in a safe environment to share their experiences and feelings with others who understand because they have gone through a similar experience.

"Thank God for the Bereaved by Suicide Group, it saved my life". (John, 56)



This fact sheet provides information about support groups for suicide survivors, what to look for in an effective support group and contact details for existing support groups.

What to look for in a support group

Support groups are all different; some may be facilitated by survivors, others by trained professionals. Some will be just for survivors of suicide; others may be designed to also support those who are grieving from other forms of death. There is no clear way to know if a support group is going to work for you until you give it a go, however, there are a number of guidelines that you may like to keep in mind when considering attending a group in your area.

Look for support groups where:

- Group members acknowledge that each person's grief is unique - they respect and accept both what members have in common and what is unique to each member.
- Group members understand that grief is not a disease, but a normal process without a specific timetable.
- All group members are made to feel free to talk about their grief. However, if some decide to listen without sharing, their preference is respected.
- Group members understand the difference between actively listening to what another person is saying and expressing their own grief. They make every effort not to interrupt when someone else is speaking.
- Group members respect others' right to confidentiality. Thoughts, feelings, and experiences shared in the group are not made public.
- Each group member is allowed equal time to speak; one or two people do not monopolise the group's time.
- Group members don't give advice to each other unless it is requested.
- Group members recognize that thoughts and feelings are neither right nor wrong.
- They listen with empathy to the thoughts and feelings of others without trying to change them.

(From *Understanding Grief: Helping Yourself Heal* by Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD, Accelerated Development, 1992. Cited in Linda Flatt (2007). *The Basics: Facilitating a Suicide Survivors Support Group*. Used with permission).

Some reflections from people who have attended a support group

"I am not alone in this pain". (Bill, 23)

"I am normal and I'm able to cope through the pain". (Sally, 19)

"I never believed this group could influence me in such a powerful and positive way".

"It was tough going, but it opened me to live again". (Margaret, 29)

"The group helped me have faith in relationships. I don't withdraw from my kids anymore. I'm free of guilt, the shame and living beyond the pain". (Jules, 36)

A full list of support groups available across Australia can be found at http://files.suicidepreventionaust.org/Website/B_S_G.pdf



Useful resources and websites

- <http://salvos.org.au/need-help/suicide-prevention-and-bereavement/bereaved-by-suicide-support.php#AboutTheGroups>
- http://www.spanusa.org/files/General_Documents/The_Basics_Facilitator_Guide.pdf
- <http://www.wingsofhope.org.au/index.htm>
- <http://www.supportaftersuicide.org.au/home/>

Contact Us:

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