

# Local Outreach to Suicide Survivors (LOSS) Resource Handbook



*"The most authentic thing about us is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love and to be greater than our suffering."*

- Ben Okri



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# Foreword

Losing someone to suicide is an extremely traumatic experience. Not being able to say goodbye, feeling like your loved one abandoned you, and struggling to live again - these are all part of a survivor's experience. Although it seems unbelievable right now, it is possible to survive this terrible loss.

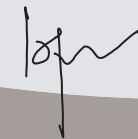
Going through this journey may be tough for you as you wrestle with multiple emotions such as guilt, anger, despair, and plenty of unanswered questions.

This resource booklet was created with the inputs of our Local Outreach to Suicide Survivors (LOSS) clients as we worked with them in our counselling and support group sessions. We have compiled their sharing and hope that it will be helpful to guide you through this journey.

The first section, **Understanding My Grief**, provides you with information about the suicide grief journey. The second section, **The Healing Journey**, shares with you on how you can take care of yourself and that it is possible to manage the grief. The third section, **Grieving with Others**, covers how we might share our grief with people around us. The last section, **Resources**, offers the services of SOS and other books that might be insightful for you.

We truly hope that this booklet will be a helpful resource for you in your time of distress. We believe that in time you can regain balance and new meaning in your life. We will journey alongside you and may your journey of healing begin.

Warm Wishes,



**Gasper Tan**  
Chief Executive Officer





SECTION 1


# Understanding My Grief

## Introduction on Grief and Complicated Grief

Grief refers to feelings of sadness in response to a loss (of a person, relationship, job, identity, lifestyle, etc). Unlike depression, grief is often highly dependent on how we view the loss (and the person/thing associated with it). Grief can abate or increase in ebbs and flows as time passes.

Most of the time, grief is a normal reaction to any form of loss experienced by individuals. However, a prolonged state of grieving can result in complicated grief.

**Complicated grief** occurs when grieving is so intense and excessive, that it hinders one's ability to carry out everyday activities.

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- COMPLICATED GRIEF SYMPTOMS:**
- \* INTENSE LONGING OR PINING FOR THE PERSON/OBJECT LOST.
  - \* INABILITY TO ACCEPT THE LOSS.
  - \* PROLONGED ANGER AND IRRITABILITY.
  - \* NUMBNESS AND DETACHMENT.
  - \* FEELING LIFE IS MEANINGLESS BECAUSE OF THE LOSS.
  - \* TROUBLE CARRYING OUT EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES.
  - \* SELF-ISOLATION AND AVOIDANCE OF SOCIAL ACTIVITIES.

# Grief in a Box

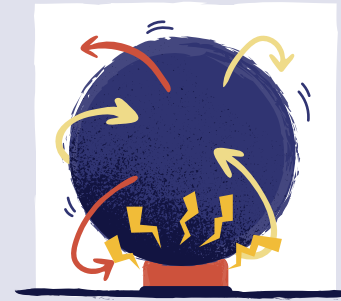
## The Grief Experience

While the grief journey seems to be an unpredictable one that is filled with emotional struggles, suicide survivors often share that with *time* and the *right social support*, adjustments to a new state of normalcy can be achieved.

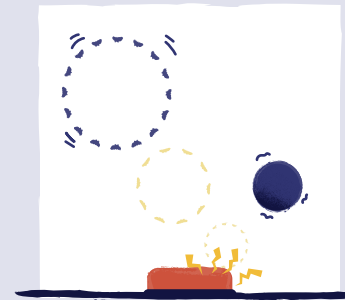
When we lose someone we love, the most painful part is that the loss is often irreplaceable. However, our hearts can begin to heal, and begin to remember the person as they were in life.



Imagine **your life is a box** and the grief you feel is a ball inside the box. There's a pain button present as well.



At the start, when the loss is so fresh and new, the grief tends to become overwhelming, and **it feels like it could possibly drown us**. Every time you move through your daily life, the grief ball can't help but press the pain button. You can't control it, and you can't stop it.



Over time, however, **the ball starts to shrink on its own**. You still go through life, and the grief ball still rattles around inside the box. However, the ball has shrunk, and **it presses the pain button a little less frequently**. On most days, you could get through them without the ball pressing the pain button. But on days where the pain button is triggered, it can still be completely random and unexpected.

Most of us will never forget the loss we experienced because it's a part of us that we continue to love and cherish. Holding on to the love and stories of hope and memories will allow us to be kinder to ourselves and others. Most of us walk through life carrying our own box with a ball of grief inside of it. Remember that the next time you see someone, they may be struggling with their own ball in the box.



## Suicide Grief

### The 'what' and 'why' of suicide grief

Grief which takes place in the wake of a suicide is an entirely unique situation, that poses its own set of challenges for survivors of suicide loss.

Suicide grief differs from other forms of grief and distress, because of the abruptness and intentionality of the act. Suicides are often abrupt and unexpected, leaving many suicide survivors in a blank state of shock.

Because suicides are intentionally carried out by the deceased, a dimension of confusion is mixed in with this shock. Survivors of suicide loss may struggle to comprehend why the deceased ended their lives.

## The Emotional Rollercoaster

Many suicide survivors describe their experience following their loss like an "Emotional Roller Coaster", where there are intense periods of ups and downs that can be difficult to manage.

### 1. Grief may not be a linear journey

You may have some days when you do feel better and then some periods when you go back to having those strong emotions overwhelming you. You will learn new ways to manage the grief.

### 2. Reminders/memories of your loved ones

Triggers may occur when you see items that your loved one used to own. Like a treasured toy, or their favourite food item or maybe a photograph. These items could bring back painful flashbacks or memories as you go about your regular routine. Stay calm and be in the moment when these reminders happen. Deep breathing and practicing mindfulness might help in such situations.

### 3. Insensitive remarks from others

Suicide may not be a topic that everyone is comfortable talking about and some people may unknowingly make insensitive comments or ask inappropriate questions. You can choose whether you would like to respond to them or give yourself space not to.

### 4. Preparing for questions

Sometimes, suicide survivors may face uncomfortable, insensitive or probing questions from others. Even among family, as everyone copes with grief and loss differently, tense situations may arise when a topic like suicide is broached. However, do remember that it will be hard to prepare for this, and that you can choose what to reveal or hold back.

### 5. Others may not be willing to listen to you

You might feel the need to talk about your loss and loved one, but your close family and friends may not feel the same way, and some might ask you to let go and move on. In such situations, support groups may provide an alternative space for you to connect with other fellow suicide survivors who are going through a similar journey.

### 6. Holidays, birthdays, and the anniversary of the suicide

The first year after the event has happened is probably the most difficult. Anticipation of the significant day/events can be emotionally struggling. Some survivors find it helpful to plan a routine for the day e.g., spend the day with others.

### 7. New events/accomplishments may bring feelings of guilt/betrayal

As you move forward with your life, there will be new events, accomplishments, changes happening in your life. You may experience guilt and some survivors express fears that they might forget about their loved ones. Be kind to yourself and you can continue to honour and remember your loved one through the things you choose to do.

### 8. Starting to enjoy the smaller things in life again

A breath of fresh air, some good food, a nice joke, some of these things may help you regain some positivity again. However, guilt may accompany these feelings as well. Acknowledge these feelings but also learn to be kind to yourself.

### 9. You may have suicidal thoughts

It is a deeply painful experience to lose your loved one to suicide and some survivors may struggle with suicidal thoughts as they grapple with the loss of meaning and hope. Please do seek out help and reach out to a professional.

## The 'Why' Questions

In your journey of processing grief, survivors of suicide may commonly seek to answer the 'why' questions. Understanding the emotions and motivations of the deceased at the time of their death is an important part of gaining closure for many survivors of suicide loss.

Going through the reflective exercise of answering the 'why' questions, can be helpful to **come to terms** with the facts of the death. However, we should be careful that we approach the 'why' questions as a way to **accept the facts** leading up to the death, rather than as a way to pin blame on ourselves or others.



There may be many unanswered questions running through your mind as to why they did it. While often times, there can be no way to figure out the real reasons or have the answers we seek, research efforts on suicide have shed light on some possible/common reasons people choose to end their life:

### 1. Mental Pain

Edwin S. Shneidman, a clinical psychologist, defined psychache as an acute state of intense mental pain associated with feelings of guilt, anguish, fear, panic, angst, loneliness, and helplessness. An accumulation of all these emotions might have overwhelmed the individual. When a suicide happens, people assume that the reason would be something like the loss of a job, break up of a relationship. However, this is only the final trigger for the suicide. There may have been years of emotional distress and mental health issues that your loved one may have been suffering from.

### 2. Perceived Burdensomeness & Low Sense of Belonging

Thomas Joiner conceptualised the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicidal behaviour where individuals who choose to end their lives by suicide often experience perceived burdensomeness and a sense of low belongingness or social alienation. Many have tried their best to live on because of their family members and loved ones but they might have felt that they are burdening them.

### 3. Prior Attempts

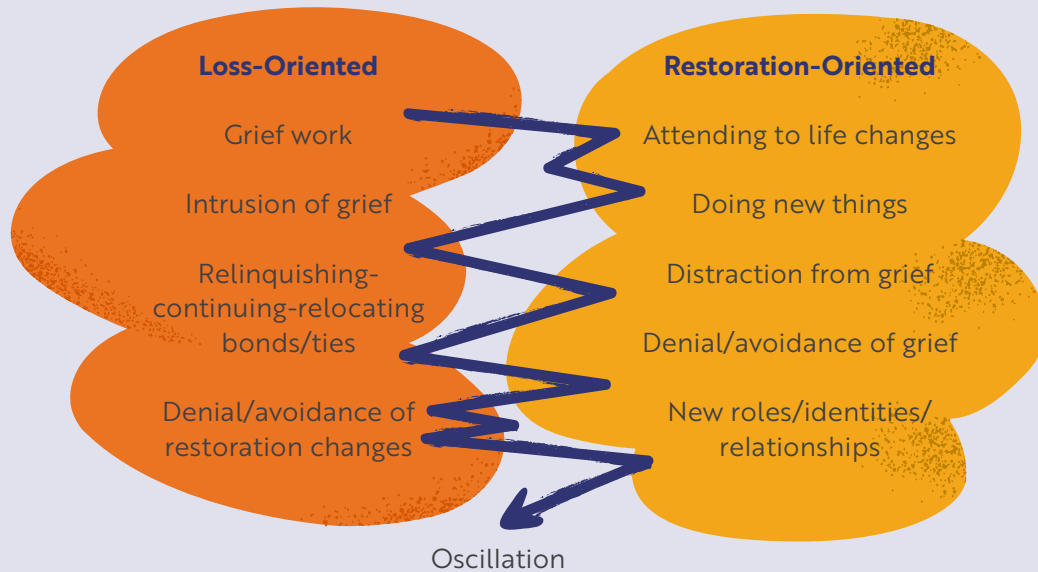
Individuals who struggle with suicidal behaviours may have prior attempts and sometimes, it may be due to impulsivity as their thinking patterns could have been constricted. Studies have also shown that males tend to choose more lethal methods to end their lives as compared to females.

### 4. Sense of Control

For some individuals, they may feel a sense of helplessness in having control over their lives and the only thing that they believe they have control over is their own lives. They may not want to end their lives, but the pain is too great for them to bear.



## Dual Process Model of Bereavement



The Dual Process Model of Bereavement (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) is a contemporary model of grief that says that grieving is a dynamic process. It is normal for you to experience the oscillation between avoidance and confrontation of their grief in the coping process.

In your daily life, you might find yourself engaging in loss-oriented activities such as looking at a photograph or a treasured belonging and remembering them. There is a deep need to connect with your loved one in ways that are unique for you. You might also engage in restoration-oriented activities where you might dive back into work, find new routines, develop new roles etc.

It is healthy and adaptive for you to oscillate between the two orientations. An individual who might be focusing on restoration-oriented activities at one moment and may switch to loss-oriented activities the next. For instance, after a long day of work, you may find yourself setting aside time after work to remember your loved one in your own ways.

## Common Suicide Grief Symptoms

You might experience grief cognitively, emotionally and physically in your body.

### Cognitive Symptoms

'Why' questions, intrusive flashbacks of events and other incidents related to loved ones could occupy your mind a lot. You may notice changes in memory as well, where brain fog can also occur.



### Psychological Symptoms

Anger is a common emotion that often comes up for suicide survivors. As the grieving process continues, the survivor may feel powerless and frustrated at their loved one who decided to end their life. At some point, that anger may surface. If you feel such anger, it is alright to express it or let it out.

Guilt, Relief, Denial, Irritation, Agitation, Anguish, Nightmares, Disbelief, Frustration, Confusion, Forgetfulness, Anxiety, Fear (e.g., fear of being alone/the dark/abandonment), Helplessness, Hopelessness.



Self-blame or attributing responsibility to others might be part of a way which suicide survivors try to find meaning in the loss journey. Some may feel the need to pursue after authorities, professionals to seek for answers. In this process, they may be unknowingly causing hurt to others and/or themselves.

### Physical Symptoms

Nausea, exhaustion, crying spells, shortness of breath, shivering or trembling, physical pain, changes in sleep and appetite, restlessness.

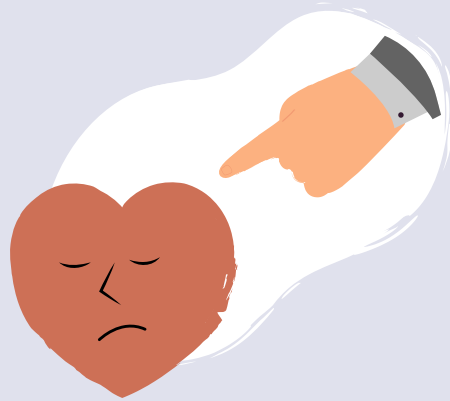


# Guilt, Trauma, Stigma

## Guilt

### Feelings of Guilt

Many survivors of suicide loss report experiencing guilt. Often, survivors feel guilty for not knowing what the deceased had been going through before the suicide. Some survivors may spend copious amounts of time imagining the 'what if...' scenarios, such as by wondering whether the suicide would have happened had they done something or other.



These ruminations are a natural response to coping with a suicide loss, as many questions remain unanswered. These include the uncertainties about what the deceased was thinking, which cannot be determined easily by survivors of suicide loss.

While we struggle with these feelings and it is normal, it is crucial to remember that we are not responsible for our loved one's suicide.

## Processing Suicide Grief

It may not be accurate to look at grief as something to 'get over'. It certainly isn't the case that after a period of time, we will never feel sad or think about the deceased again with longing. That is not what healing, or processing grief, means.

Rather, we should focus on **accepting the facts** of the suicide and **finding meaning**. This means that we recognise the suicide as something that has happened which we cannot change.

At the same time, we remember the deceased by all the good memories we have shared with them, and the endearing parts of their personality and demeanor. We do not just **remember** them by their suicide and the toll it took on us, but we also hold on to our love for them, and their hope for us to continue living for them.



## Trauma

### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Death by suicide can be unexpected and sometimes violent. You may have recurring thoughts of your loved one's death and its circumstances. Some suicide survivors may develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

In PTSD, the trauma is **involuntarily re-lived** in the forms of intrusive images. These images can create **anxiety**, and result in a tendency to **avoid anything that might trigger the memory**.



### Symptoms of PTSD

PTSD is diagnosed after a person experiences symptoms for at least one month following a traumatic event. However, symptoms may not appear until months or even years later. This disorder is characterised by three main types of symptoms:



Re-experiencing the trauma through intrusive, distressing recollections of the event, flashbacks and nightmares.

Emotional numbness and avoidance of places, people and activities that are reminders of the trauma.

Hyper-vigilance symptoms such as difficulties in sleeping and concentrating, feeling jumpy and being easily irritated and angered.

## Stigma



Unfortunately, there is still a great deal of stigma associated with suicide and survivors of suicide loss. Many people may mistakenly assume false things about the deceased and the people they leave behind. For example, they may wrongly assume that a husband who took his own life must have had marital problems, or disagreements with his spouse and family.

In other cases, stigma may manifest through **silence**. It would not be unusual to find that some of your friends and family would go to great lengths to avoid the subject of the suicide, or to even try and pretend that it didn't happen.

We should be prepared for these potentially stigmatising behaviours by the people around us, as well as their potential to cause hurt and trigger unhappy memories. It is perfectly fine to tell people that you are not feeling good, and are unable to continue conversing with them or attending a certain event, etc.

It is important to ensure that stigma does not affect the way we view suicide. While we do not have to publicly announce that our loved one died by suicide, we should not aim to keep it under wraps either. **Talking about the suicide with a support group or empathetic loved ones can be very helpful in helping us process grief.**

## Types of Losses (Spousal, Child, Sibling, Parent)

### Child Loss

When parents lose their child, it can be extremely distressing, as parents do not expect their children to go before them. A Chinese saying describes how the white-haired should not be sending off the black-haired, meaning that it is not in the natural order of life that the older generation witnesses the passing of those of a younger generation. Parent survivors commonly question their parenting ability. This sense of failure may affect their relationship with their other children, and they may become hyper-vigilant.



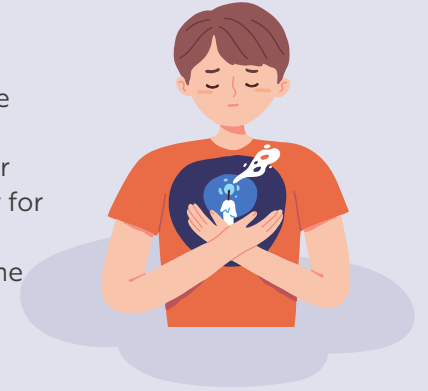
### Spousal Loss

Spouses are sometimes considered to be responsible for the well-being of their partner, so that when a suicide happens, the surviving spouse may be a target of blame. Spouses may also experience this sense of abandonment and loneliness. When they move on to a new relationship, there is also a feeling of guilt which comes up again.



### Sibling Loss

Siblings often share a very close bond with each other and may often feel the loss more keenly. You may feel angry that your sibling who chose suicide has left the caring of your parents to you; then immediately feel guilty for such a thought. Sometimes, parents may become over-protective and anxious, and the surviving sibling may feel stifled.



### Parental Loss

When a parent dies by suicide, children suffer from what is called as traumatic loss. Some of the feelings that may come up include anger, confusion, guilt, rejection. Young children losing their parents might try to avoid the emotions and feelings that naturally surface with the suicide. However, it is important for them to process their feelings so that there is a healthy grieving process. They need to know that the feelings being experienced by them are quite normal. Along with it, it is important for them to get into a regular routine as soon as possible.

### Loss of Relative or Friend

For some of us, we lose a relative/friend by suicide, and we might question our own role and blame ourselves for not being able to pick up the early signs. It can also shatter your worldview of relationships and trust as you grapple with the unanswered questions. The person whom you lost could also be a role model or figure that you looked up to and wonder how you can continue living without him/her. However, it is important to realise that your presence mattered to them, and they may have their reasons for not disclosing their pain to you.



## Other Difficult Circumstances

### Did you witness the suicide?

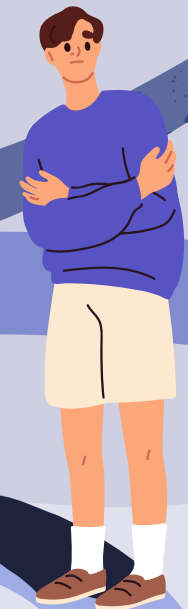
Suicide “witnesses” are those who saw the suicide act or discovered their loved one’s body. Some survivors may have been with their loved ones in their last moments, trying to pull them back, but did not manage to do so. Often, if you are a suicide witness, you may have disturbing flashbacks of your loved one’s anguished look, or their final physical state. Try your best to displace that unpleasant image with a more pleasing one, for instance, a photo or a memory which is a better reflection of who your loved one was.

### Was it in a public place?

When the suicide takes place in a public place, there may be added complications. The media may try to intrude during your time of grief and create unwelcomed attention. You may find it helpful to get a relative or friend to ward off the media, or simply tell them, “Sorry, I don’t wish to talk.”

### Was your last contact a negative one?

Perhaps you had unfinished business with your loved one, for instance, an argument that was never settled. The self-blame and guilt can be overwhelming but try to make peace with yourself. Forgiveness can take place, usually with the help of an understanding friend or counsellor who might be able to engage you in a healing conversation.



SECTION 2

# The Healing Journey



## Moving Through Grief

It's crucial not to pressure yourself in the early stages of grief to heal.

### Some things to remember:

There are no absolute right ways to grieve

There is no specific timeline - let the process run its course

Allow yourself and others permission to grieve

Don't be afraid to ask for help if you think you're not coping



**"Time heals."**

**"Life goes on."**

**"Stop dwelling on it."**

Easier said than done - accepting that your loved one has died by suicide is more than just believing the event has happened, but also being able to move forward with your life. Being able to let go is very difficult for survivors as there are often unanswered questions. Letting go sometimes just means coming to a place where you accept the reality and irreversible nature of the death.

Letting go does not just mean losing the person you once loved but finding a new relationship with them. It might mean that you find a new emotional or spiritual relationship with them, and you are at peace with yourself for doing so.

You did not ask for this to happen. What happened is a tragedy, however, suicide survivors often tell us that out of this painful journey, they have restructured their life priorities and developed more compassion towards others. Material possessions become less important and some start to discover more of what they value in life and live each day meaningfully. As one survivor aptly puts it, "...death taught me how to live."

We hope that you will hold on to hope and find the support that you need for yourself. You are not alone in this journey.

## Looking After Yourself

### Let Others Support You

Not everyone will be helpful in this journey as you mourn the death of your loved one. However, having someone to journey with you helps to reduce the sense of isolation. Support is available if you would allow others to come into your life. Friends, family, spiritual leaders, or even professional support might help to share your burden and support you in making difficult decisions along the way. If you notice prolonged depressive symptoms, do seek psychiatric help either by going to the polyclinic to get a referral or to a private clinic.

### Let the Grief Come

Grief is emotional and at the start of the journey, we might feel the need to suppress it and to stay strong. In our culture, sometimes, males do find it hard to express their emotions. It can be helpful to let those whom you trust know how what you might need and how they can be helpful. Some of our survivors find it helpful to be linked up with someone else who have experienced a similar type of suicide loss as well. Grief tends to come in waves, so allow yourself the space to ride through the waves.

### Grieving takes Time

Sometimes, survivors tell us that they are afraid if they stop grieving, they will forget about the loss. Healing does not mean that you forget about your loved one. It is about being able to take care of yourself and you are not dishonouring them when you heal, laugh and live life again. Indeed, your life will never be the same again, but it does not necessarily need to be worse than before. The pain and joy often sit side by side and a balance can be found in the days ahead. Grief is a different form of love. While time may not heal, time gives you the space to find new ways of coping and to remember your loved one differently as they are not defined by the death but by the many years that they have lived and the impact that they have created while they live.

### Express your Love

Many survivors share that they like to talk about their loved one as talking about them makes them feel like people have not forgotten about them. While some of you might prefer to be private about it, some might continue to share publicly and find meaning in advocating for others that might be struggling with suicidal thoughts. You can find your own ways of expressing your love and do what feels right for you and continue to express your love in different ways.

### Self-Compassion

You may find it hard to have self-compassion in the beginning of this journey, but it might be helpful to extend a bit of warmth, kindness, and patience to yourself in the midst of the suffering. Take one step at a time and allow yourself space to breathe. Your reason to continue living might come from other places and we hope that you will draw the strength and find the motivation to do so.





## Activities to Cope with Grief

This list is not exhaustive, and you might find alternative ways to cope with your grief differently.



- \* FIND DISTRACTIONS, TO PROVIDE TIME OUT FROM THE PAIN.
- \* PRIORITISE DAILY TASKS, DO ONLY WHAT IS ESSENTIAL.
- \* TAKING CARE OF YOUR PHYSICAL BODY BY SLEEPING AND EATING WELL.
- \* EXERCISE TO BOOST ENERGY AND TO RELIEVE TENSION.
- \* EAT A HEALTHY DIET, FREQUENT SMALL AMOUNTS OF NUTRITIOUS, EASILY DIGESTED FOOD.
- \* DEVELOPING A BEDTIME ROUTINE BY LIGHTING SCENTED CANDLES AND LISTENING TO A RELAXING MUSIC PLAYLIST.
- \* SPEND TIME WITH NATURE.
- \* SPEND TIME ALONE TO THINK, REMEMBER, MEDITATE, SOUL SEARCH AND MOURN.
- \* READ SIMPLE BOOKS ABOUT SURVIVING SUICIDE WHEN YOU ARE READY.



- \* FIND WAYS TO HONOUR THE LIFE OF THE PERSON WHO HAS DIED E.G., SHARE FREELY ABOUT FOND MEMORIES OF THEM, ETC.
- \* CREATE A MEMORY BOOK FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS TO WRITE STORIES, MEMORIES, MESSAGES.
- \* KEEP A JOURNAL TO RECORD YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS, ESPECIALLY IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO SLEEP.
- \* REVIEW PICTURES AND MEMENTOS.
- \* REARRANGE AND STORE THE PERSON'S BELONGINGS ONLY WHEN YOU ARE READY TO.
- \* VISIT THE BURIAL SITE OR SOME OTHER SPECIAL PLACE.
- \* ATTEND INDIVIDUAL COUNSELLING OR A SUPPORT GROUP.
- \* TALK TO A TRUSTED 'OTHER' WHO WILL LISTEN WITH UNDERSTANDING TO YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.
- \* DEVELOP A RESOURCE LIST, PHONE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE AND PLACES TO CONTACT WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH.



SECTION 3

# Grieving with Others

## Telling Children about the Suicide

Talking to children about a suicide can be difficult. But doing so can greatly benefit those who are facing this type of death. It is not advisable to hide the fact of a loved one's death from a child, as this might sour the relationship between you and them.



### For Children Between 3 and 9 Years Old

There may not be a need for younger children to know the full details of how the deceased took his or her life. You could tell the child that the deceased had “an illness, and it made them so sad that they did not want to live anymore.”

It is important that children understand what death means. In talking about death with them, you should try to ensure that they understand that:

- Death is permanent. They did not take a trip somewhere, only to return in the future.
- A person's bodily functions stop at death. They are not simply ‘asleep’.
- Death is inevitable. Everyone will die at some point in time, even if the cause of death differs from person to person.



### 10 Years Old and Above

With older children, you could start the conversation with questions. Make use of their current understanding to talk about the suicide. Some things you can ask are “What have you heard about i) Depression, ii) Suicide, or iii) What [the deceased] was going through?”

It is important to ask clear questions and not dance around the issues. This is so that children know it is safe to talk candidly about their thoughts and feelings with you.

Asking questions gives us an opportunity to correct any misconceptions. Do not make the suicide victim out to be a bad person, but make it clear that their choice was bad, that ‘they made the wrong decision’.

This is to teach the child that suicide is not a solution to solve problems.



### Grieving in Children

Children are able to experience grief and any relationships formed impact them. They are encouraged to participate in mourning rituals. Children often take cues from the people around them. When they observe that grief is normal and expressed by others, their own feelings and reactions are normalized and validated. They learn that they are allowed to express their sadness and other emotions to others.

### Children's Concerns

It's important to understand that grieving children are not miniature versions of grieving adults. Children process grief and loss in their own ways.

- Some children may not wish to return to school and may want to be with their parents more often. They may worry that other close adult figures might die and leave them too. Assuring them of your safety and informing them when you are leaving (for errands, work trips, etc.) and returning may help.
- Some children may believe that it was their fault that the deceased took their own life. It is crucial to reassure them that they were not blamed, and that the deceased loved them very much.
- Some children worry about how to tell their friends about what has happened. If children are uncomfortable talking about it, they could be taught to say, “My [insert relation of lost loved one] has died and I'm very sad. I do not wish to talk about it now. Please don't ask me anymore.” They can end the conversation with that.



### Additional Tips

- Allow them to be a part of the family's grieving and listen to their worries.
- Talk with them about the family member they lost. They can also write or draw if they prefer.
- Try to maintain a normal routine as much as possible to help them feel secure.
- Inform the school of what has happened so they are alerted to any behavioural changes.



### Supporting a Grieving Parent/Spouse

If you are journeying with someone who has experienced suicide grief, you may find yourself at a loss for what you should say or do for the person. At the start of the grief journey, the suicide survivor will often be preoccupied and distracted with the funeral arrangement but once the dust settles, that is when he/she needs the most support in the months ahead.

We often do not want to remind a person of the loss. Sometimes, it is painful for us to sit with the emotional grief and pain that the survivors are going through. In response, we might avoid talking about the loss, tiptoe around the conversation and hope the person gets back to normal life.



If it seems that nothing you can do or say helps, don't give up. You can't take the pain away, but your presence is more meaningful than it seems. Some things to consider:



**What not to say: "How are you doing?"**

Sometimes we say this out of habit and although it sounds like a simple question, the survivor might struggle with answering the question. They might interpret the question as "Please tell me you are doing alright" as most people tend to respond with "I'm fine".



**What to say instead: "I know it's really tough for you but I'm here for you."**

It is helpful to acknowledge and validate the pain that the survivor is going through and to extend your presence and make it known to him or her. The survivor may not know what kind of support is required at the moment but knowing your presence helps to alleviate feelings of isolation.





**What not to say: "You can always..."**

When the survivor is grieving and you might try to reassure or encourage them by telling him/her that remarriage or having another child is still possible, this can come across as dismissive and the survivor might interpret it as you suggest that their loved one can be replaced easily. Sometimes, parents who lost a child hear others telling them, "You still have other children to care for..." and this can be really painful for them.



**What to say instead: "Tell me about your loved one."**

Most survivors are afraid others will forget about their loved one and by inviting them to share more, you communicate that you want to be here listening to the pain and the memories that come with the pain. Many of them appreciate the gesture.



**What not to say: "I know how you feel."**

Grief is a deeply personal experience. You may never truly understand what the survivor is going through and claiming you do can feel invalidating.



**What to say instead: "I can only imagine how you're feeling."**

It helps to give survivors the chance to articulate how they feel instead of assuming that we know better.

**Additional suggestions for supporting others through grief:**

- Listen with your heart and refrain from judgement.
- Be empathetic to their need to search for the reasons behind the death.
- Express your feelings if words fail. Understand that sometimes they want to be alone and sometimes they prefer your presence.
- Withhold your assumptions and be open to hearing about their experiences with you.
- Use the name of their loved one and invite them into conversations surrounding their lives if they are willing to engage.
- Sit with the intensity of their grief and feelings if you are able to.
- Remind them that their feelings and responses are valid and normal.
- Be aware that they may be experiencing guilt and self-blame. Remind them that they did what they could in those moments already.
- Remind them that their feelings are valid and normal considering what has happened.
- Be sensitive to difficult days like the anniversary of their loved one's death, birthdays, and holidays. You can invite them to spend time together if they wish to.
- Be respectful of their grieving process.
- Be patient and continue to offer help, even if they refuse it.
- If you suspect they are suicidal, ask them directly about suicide and get help immediately.

# Resources

## SOS Suicide Bereavement Services

### 1. Grief Specialist Counselling

SOS offers individual counselling services for suicide survivors. Our caseworkers will journey with you and process your grief together. The duration and frequency of counselling will be discussed together with your counsellor. You can call our 24-hour hotline at 1767, or message us at our 24-hour CareText service located on our website to refer yourself or others that might need our service. Both our counselling and support group services are currently non-chargeable.

## 2. Support Groups

### a. Structured Support Group – Healing Within

There are usually two to three runs a year and the groups are anchored by staff facilitators where guided topics are processed within the group over 6 sessions. The group size is usually 6 – 8 participants and they will be invited to join the open support group (Healing Bridge) after they complete Healing Within.

All interested participants will need to go through intake session to be assessed for suitability for group work by SOS caseworkers.



The pain of loss and grief can feel very overwhelming. SOS' 6-week structured support group provides a safe environment to share, learn and grow while coping with the pain of your loss.

In journeying together through grief, we hope to lend our support to one another whilst learning new ways of coping with suicide grief.

For more information or to sign up, please write to [hb@sos.org.sg](mailto:hb@sos.org.sg)

### What will we cover during the 6 sessions?

#### Session 1

Unpacking the Language of Grief

#### Session 2

Common Grief Reactions

#### Session 3

Grief in Our Body

#### Session 4

Stories of Strength

#### Session 5

Discovering the Imprints

#### Session 6

Wall of Hope & Next Steps

#### THINGS TO NOTE

- \* SUPPORT GROUP IS HELD IN ENGLISH AND IS ONLY OPEN TO SUICIDE LOSS SURVIVORS (LOSING SOMEONE TO SUICIDE).
- \* ALL REGISTRANTS WILL NEED TO GO THROUGH AN INTAKE SESSION TO BE ASSESSED FOR SUITABILITY BY OUR CASEWORKERS.
- \* PARTICIPANTS HAVE TO BE AVAILABLE TO ATTEND ALL 6 SESSIONS AS THE CONTENT ACROSS SESSIONS IS LINKED.
- \* PARTICIPANTS HAVE TO BE IN A QUIET AND PRIVATE ENVIRONMENT WHEN ATTENDING EACH SESSION.



### b. Open Support Group – Healing Bridge

Open support group focuses on processing the emotions that come up during sessions and there are no fixed topics that are covered in each session. New members can also join the group at any time. Healing Bridge is held in two groups – English and Mandarin, facilitated by staff and long-term suicide loss survivors.

## 3. Healing Conversations

At times, our clients find it helpful to connect with someone who has experienced a similar loss e.g., spousal loss. We can link you up with someone who might be able to share with you from their lived experiences to offer you some understanding and guidance in this grief journey. They are familiar with the isolation that often accompanies the suicide death of a loved one and they can offer a safe presence for difficult conversations to take place.

## 4. International Survivors of Suicide (ISOS) Loss Day

This is a once-a-year event in which suicide survivors come together to find connection, understanding and hope through their shared experience. It usually takes place in the last quarter of the year where SOS will bring in suicide survivors and experts in various fields to share their experience and knowledge. The event might consist of talks and experiential workshops by experts in various fields, as well as personal stories of healing from suicide loss survivors.



## Testimonials of Encouragement from Clients

“

我的先生在两年多前因为抑郁症永远离开了我和儿子。比起噩耗降临时候的恐惧,无助,担忧和自责,我可以说现在已经慢慢恢复正常的生活,重新拥有获得开心的能力。

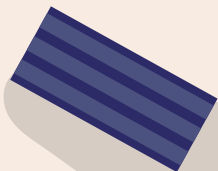
加入了 SOS 的互助小组可以说是我在康复的路上最重要的。在这里,我内心的伤痛能被聆听和完全理解,组员说的点滴也对我很大触动。在这里我有我的榜样,我看着他们能走出来让我内心更加坚强和坚定。

在 SOS,让我学到了我可以减少自责,因为“你在那一刻你所做的已经是最好的”。让我明白“虽然悲痛不可能消除,但我可以和它共存”。

To 所有的幸存者, you are not alone, we are always with you.

”

YUTING



“

We lost our 17-year-old son five years ago. The loss was so painful that I found it hard to believe those who had walked before me on their journey that the grief would soften after about two years. Even as I had felt that there would always be a void in my heart, I wanted the pain to abate quickly but I felt this void in my heart that will always be around and the prospect of getting better was so bleak back then.

I found life meaningless and my thoughts alternated between guilt and regrets everyday. Attending regular support group meetings early on in our grief had helped both my husband and me as we found comfort in our commonality.

Looking back, I could see that my grief had softened sometime in the third year. I had chanced upon a Facebook group of grieving mothers of suicide loss. Some of the members were transparent about their guilt and that was when I faced up to my own accusing thoughts.

I was especially comforted by a quote by Father Charles Rubey, the founder of LOSS programme for suicide survivors, “It is important to realise that our imperfections, though they can cause hurt and pain, do not cause someone to take their lives.

”

Best regards,  
**LAY HONG (PARENT OF THREE CHILDREN,  
HEALING BRIDGE VOLUNTEER CO-FACILITATOR)**

YOU  
ARE  
LOVED



“

I was at my lowest point of my life when my late father-in-law took his own life in May 2019. I was very devastated and traumatised during the first few months of grieving. I was on the verge of sinking into depression that I could not cope with the loss of my loved one. I would like to thank my counsellor for her patience, advice, encouragement, and emotional support during my grief period. She has helped me to survive the emotional pain, accept, cope during my healing journey. I am thankful as I am in much better emotional state now and have made significant progress in my healing. From my experience, I strongly advise those who need counselling for their emotional support to seek help from SOS.

”

YY

“

I've been seeing my counsellor, Janice after losing a close friend to suicide. Janice has helped me tremendously through my healing process, always checking up on me in between our sessions, and helping me find ways to deal with my grief, and also making me realise what I had to do to take better care of myself.

”

CY

“

I still miss my son after more than two years. It seems that every moment we spend together as a family, his absence will remind me that we are, alas, somewhat incomplete. Yet, I count myself blessed to see how my other sons, my daughter-in-law, and my wife have become closer.

One could say, we cherish and treasure every little moment of our life as a family more purposefully and more deliberately. My son is no longer here with us, but his memory continues to live and flow through every one of us. Being part of the SOS' support group, Healing Bridge, makes this appreciation all the more significant and meaningful. In many ways, it is another much-loved family of which every "broken" member shares openly our pains, sorrows, regrets, deep sense of loss, and much more...

Yet, the great solace and comfort are knowing that we cherish and hold each other with such delicate and sensitive care that we just want to be beside one another in all intents and purposes. Perhaps, such is also the irony and the beauty of life and companionship; in our loss, we also gain – we don't have to walk alone...

”

**THOMAS TSANG (PARENT OF FOUR SONS,  
HEALING BRIDGE VOLUNTEER CO-FACILITATOR)**



“

Ms Fu Danfeng is a very professional counsellor. She did her best to guide me to be more positive in my life and taught me to accept who I am today and be more compassionate and love myself unconditionally. She had also put in extra mile effort to provide me with a lot of useful handouts for reading. She is always very attentive to listen to my problems and the counselling sessions had helped me how to cope with my problems better because everyone would do the mistakes and learn from the mistakes. Overall, I have great positive change and feel more optimism in approaching life. I also have noticed a better bonding ties with my hubby and son after the sessions.

”

SS



“

Coming to grief counselling with SOS Counsellor Naomi gave me a safe space to tell my stories. For me, I'd love to be heard, I want to share my stories, I want to talk about it over and over again. But I'm always scared that people will get annoyed if I keep bringing up my grief, or if they have a second-hand trauma that might affect them emotionally in some ways. I could always pour out whatever I'm thinking or feeling, without being invalidated, and Naomi always reassured me that whatever I'm feeling is valid. For those who are struggling with grief, I just want to say that with time and the right help, we will eventually adapt to this new normal. And please do reach out, you'll be surprised how many people are genuinely wanting to help you.

”

CLIENT A



PRACTISE  
SELF LOVE



# We walk together



I've always kept privy on personal life. I still do. Ironically, here I am sharing with you, my friend, on the most tragic loss in my life – my Dad.

I fully understand the immense grief when recollecting our most beloved we lost. Raw emotions of pain, guilt, helplessness and sadness make our hearts ache every now and then, without warning. We live with constant triggers that remind, such as their favourite foods, memories together, birthdays and celebrations.

Our "condition" fluctuates and manifests in various ways, with only one conclusion. We have been forever changed. Our healing path can be lifelong, and we still need to carry on with our lives while caring for our families.

It is natural to sometimes wonder how can we cope, so while each one of us may be different, I love to share the Top 3 Heartfelt Tips that have been working for me, and from what we discuss in SOS Healing Bridge sessions that I volunteer to help facilitate:

## Accept Loss

I know it is not easy but this is the first and perhaps most important step to self-recovery. One way to help is to draw from our love and do our best to understand their decision. It pains me to know my Dad must have been suffering so much that he wanted relief and not burden me. I see it as his final noble act of love so I respect his decision and remind myself to make his sacrifice worthwhile.

## Self-Discovery

I started to attend courses, learn new skills to understand myself and others better, and this helps in managing our emotions, our families, friends and at work. Knowledge and skills are life-long, and improve our lives for good! Learning new interests stimulate our brain and keep us occupied.

## Find Purpose

We may feel lost after such a huge blow, so take this time to really search our hearts to find what we are passionate about. What makes you excited and gets you talking on and on without feeling tired? Our life purpose gives us a goal to look forward to, and makes us feel happy because we are contributing meaningfully with our strengths and talents. This also prevents us from going through the "mid-life crisis" because we have found ourselves.

Always remember to start with Self-Care and Self-Love because you need to be strong enough first, before you can care for others. Remorse due to unanswered questions may lurk, so remember it is natural to not have answers for everything.

Useful Reminder: How would you wish your loved one to see you now?

I wish you abundance, my friend!



Love,  
**PO (PASSION & OBLIGATION)**  
**HEALING BRIDGE VOLUNTEER CO-FACILITATOR**



## Recommended Readings

### Local Publications

1. **Yin. WHY? When Both My Parents Took Their Lives. Epigram, 2008.**  
*A Singapore publication written from the first-hand experience of Yin, who lost both her parents to suicide.*
2. **SOS. A Smile for Mummy.**  
*An in-house production by SOS about a child whose mother has passed away. Helpful in explaining to children about their feelings arising from the loss.*

### Others

3. **Bolton, Iris & Mitchell, Curtis. My Son...My Son... Bolton Press Atlanta, 2005.**  
*First-hand account of the authors' loss of their son and grandson respectively.*
4. **Brown, Laurie Krasny & Brown, Marc. When Dinosaurs Die- A Guide To Understanding Death. Hachette Book Group, 2009.**  
*A story to help young children learn about what death means, and how best to cope with their feelings.*
5. **Bryson, Karen Mueller. Those They Left Behind. 2006.**  
*In this collection of interviews with survivors of suicide, individuals talk about how their lives were impacted by the suicide of a family member or close friend. Also contains poems by survivors of suicide.*
6. **Cammarata, Doreen. Someone I Love Died By Suicide. LTK Litho, New York, 2000.**  
*A story for child survivors and those who care for them.*
7. **Erika, Leeuwenburgh & Goldring, Ellen. Why Did You Die? New Harbinger Productions, Inc., 2008.**  
*A self-help book for parents and kids, filled with activities to help children cope with grief and loss.*

8. **Fine, Carla. No Time To Say Goodbye. Broadway Books, 1997.**  
*Drawing on her own experiences and the experiences of the many other survivors with whom she has spoken to, as well as the knowledge of counsellors and mental health professionals, the author offers a strong helping hand and invaluable guidance through the various stages of the survival process.*
9. **Requarth, Margo. After A Parent's Suicide-Helping Children Heal. Healing Hearts Press, 2006.**  
*The author is a children's bereavement counsellor and psychotherapist, and has also lost her mother through suicide. This is a "how-to" guide for parent survivors: how to manage both the immediate and long-term implications of the suicide for your children.*
10. **Healing after the Suicide of a Loved One - Ann Smolin and John Guinan, Simon and Schuster, 1993.**  
*Many survivors struggle with the questions "why?" and "what if?" This book shares case studies and offers advice to help survivors begin to heal.*
11. **Suicide of a Child - Adina Wroblewski, Centering Corp., 2002.**  
*A basic guide for early bereavement after your child's suicide that offers comforting, compassionate, easy-to-read observations and personal messages.*
12. **The Wilderness of Suicide Grief: Finding Your Way - Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. Companion Press, 2010.**  
*Using the metaphor of grief as a wilderness, this guidebook, written by a grief counselor, offers ten wisdom teachings, including being open to the presence of loss, misconceptions about suicide and grief, and reaching out for help. The author also offers an expanded version titled *Understanding Your Grief: Ten Touchstones of Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart*, and the companion workbook, *The Understanding Your Suicide Grief Journal*.*

13. **Supporting Children after a Suicide Loss: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers.** Sarah Montgomery, LCSW-C, and Susan Coale, LCSW-C, Chesapeake Life Center, 2014.

*This unique book provides parents and caregivers with helpful information to better understand and communicate with children grieving a loss to suicide with a special focus on child development and how to talk with children of various ages.*

14. **A Long-Shadowed Grief: Suicide and Its Aftermath -** Harold Ivan Smith, Cowley Publications 2006.

*Written from a Christian perspective, this book by a former funeral director who survived his cousin's suicide explores the aftermath of suicide through the lenses of spirituality and theology.*

15. **From the Ashes Flies the Phoenix: Creating a Powerful Life after a Suicide -** Gretta Krane, Inspiring Enterprises, 2006.

*The survivor of her husband's suicide, Krane shares her journey with the hope that it will inspire others to find self-discovery, growth, and hope in the aftermath of suicide loss.*

#### Chinese Books

1. 苏绚慧。请容许我悲伤。张老师文化事业股份有限公司 Living Psychology Publishers, 2008.
2. 克里斯多福 路加斯 & 亨利 塞登。译-杨淑智。难以承受的告别- 自杀者亲友的悲伤旅程。心灵 工坊文化事业股份有限公司, 1997.
3. 罗瑞 克拉斯尼 布朗 & 马可。译-远流小小科学馆。恐龙上天堂-了解与面对死亡的最佳指南。远流出版事业股份有限公司, 2009.

#### Websites



Alliance of Hope



Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide



American Foundation for Suicide Prevention




Suicide Awareness Voices of Education



American Psychological Association



988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline



*"The pain you hid overtook you like  
the darkness overtakes the sun.  
But I comfort myself in knowing  
that even on the darkest night,  
stars still shine."*

– Jennifer Betts

*"A person never truly gets over a  
suicide loss. You get through it.  
Day by day. Sometimes it's  
moment by moment."*

– Holly Kohler

*"Grief is like a long valley, a winding  
valley where any bend may reveal  
a totally new landscape."*

– C. S. Lewis

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