



# INSIGHT

A Newsletter for the Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition

Fall 2015, Volume 4, Issue 3

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## From the Vice Chair – Judy Broward

The fall edition includes information for loss survivors. A survivor from Alachua County who published a newsletter for several years wrote the “Managing the Holidays”. I think it is very well written and helpful to both old and newer loss survivors.

The Day at the Capital is January 14 because the legislature begins earlier in a presidential election year. Big Bend Hospice will again host an Evening of Remembrance on Jan 13, the Florida Suicide Prevention Council meets on January 13<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 and this year, we plan to have a program beginning Jan 12 in the afternoon, with a reception that evening. More information on these activities will be coming soon.

## International Survivor of Suicide Loss Day is Nov 21 - Florida events

### Clearwater

<http://www.survivorday.org/event/clearwater-fl/>

### Deerfield Beach

<http://www.survivorday.org/event/florida-southeast-fl/>

### Ft. Meyers

<http://www.survivorday.org/event/fort-myers-fl/>

### Gainesville

<http://www.friendsofthecrisiscenter.org/>

### Jacksonville

<http://www.survivorday.org/event/jacksonville-fl/>

### Merritt Island

<http://www.survivorday.org/event/merritt-island-fl/>

### Ocala

<http://www.survivorday.org/event/ocala-fl/>

### Orlando

<http://www.survivorday.org/event/orlando-winter-park-fl/>

### Pensacola

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/annual-seeds-of-hope-5k-tickets-18623695976?aff=eac2>

### Sarasota

<http://www.survivorday.org/event/sarasota-fl-international-survivors-of-suicide-loss-day/>

### Stuart

<http://www.survivorday.org/event/stuart-fl/>

### Tampa

<http://www.survivorday.org/event/tampa-fl/>

### Tallahassee

<http://www.survivorday.org/event/tallahassee-fl/>

### Weston FISP

<http://www.survivorday.org/event/weston-fl/>

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## Managing the Holidays

It's that time of year. "The Holidays" draw near once again. And for those of us who have experienced the death of a loved one to suicide, we await the holidays with mixed emotions. We are fearful that we will be overcome by unmanageable feelings of sorrow and loss, or by an exacerbation of accompanying feelings of anger or of guilt. We dread potentially uncomfortable social situations such as parties and gatherings attended by insensitive persons. We desire positive memories of past holidays shared with our deceased loved ones, yet we worry that joyful memories will become painful ones. As we are assailed with invitations by loving friends and family, we feel confused and torn. We do not wish to hurt others in our decision-making, yet we know we must also protect and care for ourselves. How can we plan for the approaching holidays in a manner that will lead to the highest probability that we will have calm and peaceful, warm and loving observances?

To ensure the least pain and the highest probability of joy during the holidays, it is important for us to actively plan for the holidays. We must be introspective, examining ourselves - our current emotional state, our strength and stamina (both physical and emotional) - and plan accordingly. If we are feeling particularly fragile, we may wish to limit our activities. If we are feeling strong and positive, we may wish to plan new activities. But we must always remember that there is no "right way" to observe the holidays. There may be old ways, old traditions, that felt right in the past, but, as we have learned, what was right and what felt right "before" may no longer feel right or be right for us now. We must navigate slowly and carefully as we continue our journey through the holiday season.

Following are some suggestions for how to survive the holiday season, whether your grief is young or you have been living with it for some time. Each suggestion may not work for you - in fact none of the suggestions may work for you. But pondering the suggestions provided below may trigger thoughts and ideas of what will work for you.

- Discuss your feelings with family members. Address the desires and concerns of persons involved in previous holiday gatherings and celebrations. Expect that there may be

differences in desires, and be prepared to talk through each person's feelings.

- Make your feelings known to those who are close to you. Friends and family cannot be sensitive to your wishes if they do not know what they are.
- Expect that there will be pain. Knowing that pain is unavoidable to some extent can allow you to accept it when it arises and to move on.
- If holiday celebrations previously took place in your home or you previously were responsible for planning or creating the holiday activities, e.g., decorating, cooking, shopping, etc., give yourself permission to pass on such involvement this year. Someone else can accept responsibility for cooking and cleaning and decorating.
- Should you desire to continue to be actively involved in traditional holiday activities, consider scaling them down this year, e.g., invite fewer people, hire a caterer and/or a cleaning service, buy sweets from a bakery instead of baking them yourself, etc.
- Give yourself permission if necessary to refrain from attending holiday gatherings, whether of friends or of family. It may be too painful to be with others in such a setting this year.
- Should you decide to attend holiday gatherings, consider taking your own car instead of riding with others. That way you can leave if feelings become overwhelming and you need to "escape."
- Determine if there are those with whom you feel close and comfortable and with whom you can spend time alone or in small groups during the holidays. While escape is sometimes desirable, continuing to connect with others and being around others who can support you is also important. Perhaps these individuals can help you create new holiday traditions. Perhaps you can spend time with them even if there are no "holiday accouterments" present and no new holiday traditions are created. A quiet meal at home or out might suffice.

- Create new holiday traditions or rituals that include the memory of your loved one. For example, create a time during gatherings for family and friends to share memories of your loved one; Hang a Christmas stocking and ask others to write down a special memory that can be placed in the stocking and read together at an appointed time; Plant a poinsettia, a small Christmas tree, or other type of plant on the grave at Christmas; Hang a wreath on the grave marker; Create Christmas tree ornaments that celebrate the life of the loved one - perhaps including photographs; Leave an empty plate at the table in honor of your loved one; Light a candle in memory of the person who died.

- Go away during the holidays. Choose a place that you've never been, that will not have inherent in it memories of your loved one that might be difficult to handle -Or travel to some place that was important to you and your loved one, some place that will bring you good memories, joyful memories.

- Change your routine - Attend religious services at a different time and/or attend a different church or synagogue; Host the holiday meal at a restaurant instead of at home; Have a holiday dinner instead of a luncheon; Serve the holiday meal as a buffet instead of a sit-down meal; Serve the meal in a different room; Open presents Christmas Eve instead of Christmas day, or vice versa.

- Don't let yourself be overly sensitive to the normal actions of people during the holiday season. It is natural for people to wish each other Merry Christmas, Happy Chanukah, and Happy New Year. Most people would be distressed to know that their words or actions had inadvertently hurt you. Try not to feel hurt if someone's words are unwittingly painful.

- Shop by mail or over the internet to avoid the commercialism and forced gaiety of the retail establishment during the holiday season. If you must go out, shop early.

- Do something for someone else during the holidays - Visit someone in a nursing home or hospital; Collect toys for needy children; Cook a meal at the local homeless shelter; etc.

- Cry when you feel like it - without feeling embarrassed, no matter where you are when the tears arrive! Laugh if you feel like it - without feeling guilty!

- Talk about your loved one if you wish. Spend time with friends or family members who will allow you to share memories, and who will share their memories as well.

- Attend religious services. Use the occasion to find solace in your beliefs. In many communities various churches and synagogues have special holiday services dedicated to the memory of loved ones who have died. Consider attending one of these holiday memorial services.

Holiday times can be very draining physically and emotionally, even during the best of times. Spend time alone with yourself, at home, outdoors, in a house of worship, etc. Be gentle with yourself. Give yourself permission to feel, whether you are feeling grief, sadness, anger, joy, etc. Take care of yourself physically - eat well and sleep well. And, importantly, monitor yourself and be flexible, prepared to make online changes to plans if necessary.

~~~Donna Watson Lawson

Reprinted from December, 2005 issue of Solace  
<http://www.alachuacounty.us/Depts/CSS/Documents/3-6December2005.pdf>

# Surviving After Suicide

Carson J. Spencer Foundation



## Traumatic Grief - The Initial Impact

### *Symptoms of Trauma often Experienced After Suicide*

1. Shattered sense of order and trust
2. Increased feelings of vulnerability
3. Difficulty sleeping and eating
4. Disorientation - feeling like you are in a fog
5. Flashbacks or intrusive recollections of the trauma
6. Nightmares
7. Uncontrollable crying or intense anger
8. Feeling numb
9. Denial and disbelief

## Coping with Suicide Loss - Complex Healing Process

### *Beyond Surviving*

No two people will grieve in the same way. Some will find support groups helpful; others may rely on friends' support. Some may turn to books; others may go to therapy. Some may take weeks to get back to "normal life"; others may find that life as they remember it no longer exists and they need to redefine themselves. Our response to the aftermath of suicide is shaped by a number of things - past experiences with death and loss, other current life stressors, our mental health, our family cultural traditions, our relationship with the deceased (e.g., strength of bond, presence of conflict, etc.), the circumstances surrounding the death, our support system, and our personality.

People feel a range of emotions in the aftermath of suicide - not everyone will go through all of these experiences and the length of each may differ, but these are common emotional reactions that often come like a tidal wave unexpectedly and repeatedly.

- Guilt and self-blame for not being able to prevent the suicide
- Anger at the person who died, at the world, at God, at yourself
- Experiencing suicidal thoughts yourself
- Depression and incredible sadness triggered by anything from major life milestones to a song on the radio

During the healing process, it is important to be patient with yourself and take each day as it comes. Surround yourself with caring people who do not try to fix things, but just listen without judgment. Set limits and postpone any major decisions if you can during this time. Basic self-care - eating, sleeping, hydration - are very important to feeling more stable and better able to handle the intense emotions. Avoid alcohol abuse and other mood altering substances - while they may alleviate the pain in the short-run, they tend to exacerbate depression and pain in the long run.

### *Coping with Holidays, Anniversaries and Birthdays: New Traditions and Healing Rituals*

With an empty chair around the table, important celebrations can be particularly hard for suicide survivors. Before the holiday arrives, talk with the family about the expectations and consider creating some new traditions. For some, it may be better to be all together while others might prefer to be by themselves. Usually the anticipation of the holiday is worse than the actual day. There is not a right way to approach these days - find a way that works for you.

The death anniversary can also be a difficult time for survivors. Many find comfort in participating in some form of healing ritual of remembrance to honor the life of the loved one. Rituals serve many purposes for the suicide survivors. They make

changes manageable and mark transitions. Rituals communicate values and beliefs while providing containment for strong emotions. The power of rituals comes from the fact that they often provoke deep emotional experiences that hold a level of meaning that words cannot capture. These practices may be done alone or with others: Plant a memorial garden or tree. Dove release or balloon release. Candle lighting ceremony. Write a poem or letter and release it to the universe by burning it.

## **Types of Survivors**

### *Young Children Survivors*

Children often experience the same range of emotions that adults do; however, children have fewer tools for communicating their feelings. They may act out their feelings through play, art, and other nonverbal communication. Even older children often lack a firm concept of death as an irreversible process. Children are especially vulnerable to feelings of guilt and abandonment; they may feel that their bad behavior caused the deceased to leave. Caretakers should work toward assuring them that the death was not their fault and that care and love will continue. Often people feel that they need to protect children from the truth about suicide - this may cause further complications. Honest explanations (though not necessarily detailed) about the situation and age-appropriate responses are recommended. Allow them to memorialize the deceased by letting them participate in funerals and memorial services. Routines are very stabilizing for all children; especially those dealing with trauma. Try to stick to normal meal times and bed times and allow children to see their friends and engage in regular activities and let others who care for the children know of the suicide.

### *Parent Survivors*

Children are not supposed to die before their parents - this is a worldview held by most, and when it is shattered, it is devastating. The suicide of one's child raises difficult questions, doubts and fears. Many parent survivors are filled with feelings of failure knowing that they were not able to save their child. "If only" is a phrase that may reverberate in the parents' mind. It is not uncommon for parent survivors of suicide to experience thoughts of taking their own lives. The stigma of suicide may lead some parents to try to keep the cause of death a secret; however, this may further complicate the healing process and isolate parents from helpful support resources. Rather, families can benefit by talking about death with one another and with support systems. Some find it helpful to write a letter to the deceased child, expressing all the things they were not able to say before the death. Support groups for parents and other survivors can help provide on-going support when the initial rally for help begins to fade.

### **Sibling Survivors**

"Sibling survivors are often called the forgotten mourners," says author of "Do They Have Bad Days in Heaven: Surviving the Suicide Loss of a Sibling" Michelle Linn-Gust. Siblings living at home will often "lose" their parents for sometime as the parents try to cope with the loss of the child that died. The sibling bond is often the longest relationship we'll have in our lives, and thus, we witness more life events with our siblings than anyone else. With 31,000 suicides per year, 24,800 people become sibling survivors annually. Most siblings will carry this loss through their lifetime as presence is missed for the remaining life milestones we anticipated sharing with them. For more information: ([www.siblingsurvivors.com](http://www.siblingsurvivors.com))

### **Getting Support**

Support from other suicide survivors is one of the most powerful connections one can make in the aftermath of a suicide. Many people find great relief in being able to talk openly and honestly about the range of complicated experiences they are going through with people who really understand. Survivor support groups offer a safe haven to share and build new healing relationships. Some survivors go weekly; others go when they need it most - around birthdays, anniversaries and other difficult times.

### **Helping Survivors of Suicide:**

What Can You Do? Suicide survivors often suffer in silence. People often feel uncomfortable dealing with death in general, and helping someone through the aftermath of suicide often increases these feelings manifold. Helping your friend or family member through this tragedy may be the most important thing you can do - by taking action you will help lessen the social stigma the survivors are experiencing and move them toward eventual healing.

### **Things to consider when helping suicide survivors:**

- Ask the survivor what you can do to help and do it. During the acute aftermath phase you can help them in many concrete ways:
  - Keep a list of phone calls, visitors, and people who bring food and gifts
  - Help keep the mail straight - bills, cards, newspaper notices

- Offer to make calls to people they wish to notify
- Help with errands - walk the dog, shop for food
- Offer to help with documentation - for insurance, newspapers, services
- Write down a story or create a collage of photos about the deceased

- The emotional intensity of the grief is great. Survivors may need to talk, cry, scream, or sit silently for hours at a time. Repetition is part of healing. Listening with your heart and without judgment is most helpful.
- You do not need to take the pain away; your presence helps contain it.
- Use the deceased's name and ask for and tell stories - hearing the name and remembering can be comforting to the survivor. Don't worry about saying the wrong things; just concentrate on what is being shared with you. Think of yourself as someone who is walking with the survivor not in front or behind.
- Give them permission to grieve.
- Clichés such as "Everything has a reason" and "Time heals all wounds" are not helpful at this time.
- Be patient - grief takes its own course and may go on for a long time. Often the support is most needed after the initial chaos of the trauma has diminished.
- Be mindful of holidays, birthdays and anniversaries.
- Offer to help find support groups or other resources such as books and pastoral care. The American Association of Suicidology has a Survivors of Suicide Kit complete with literature and a directory of suicide support groups.
- Avoid statements like, "I know how you feel" - everyone goes through this in a different way.

Reprinted with permission of the Carson J. Spencer Foundation. The Carson J. Spencer Foundation was established in 2005 to preserve the memory of Carson J. Spencer, who took his life after a difficult battle with bipolar disorder, on December 7, 2004. *Carson was a loving husband and father, a caring son and brother, a dynamic and successful entrepreneur, an accomplished athlete, and a friend to many.*

[www.carsonjspencer.org/awareness\\_suicide5/htm](http://www.carsonjspencer.org/awareness_suicide5/htm).

# *Memory Tree of Lights*



*In memory of those lost to suicide*

*Make a decoration with your loved one's name on it.*

*Choose your own materials or pick a natural branch slice provided on site and decorate it. Place decoration on the cedar tree at*

***Survivors of Suicide Memory Garden***

***Cofrin Park***

***4810 NW 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue***

*For further information contact:*

*Judy Broward*

*Gatorjudy2@gmail.com*

## **Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition**

### **Mission Statement:**

Collaborate to develop and implement suicide prevention, intervention and postvention strategies and programs.

### **Officers of the Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition**

**Chair.....Betsey Westuba**

**Vice Chair.....Lisa Zeller**

**Vice Chair.....Judy Broward**

**Secretary.....Laura Meyer**

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**Newsletter Editor.....Judy Broward**

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**Region 2 - Bay, Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Taylor, Wakulla and Washington, Region Director – Pam Mezzina, (850) 878-5310 x 799, [Pam@bigbendhospice.org](mailto:Pam@bigbendhospice.org)**

**Region 3 - Alachua, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Levy, Putnam, Suwannee & Union, Region Director – Ali Martinez, Director 352-264-6792, [amartinez@alachuacounty.us](mailto:amartinez@alachuacounty.us), [www.alachua.fl.us/government/depts/css/crisis/](http://www.alachua.fl.us/government/depts/css/crisis/)**

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**Region 6 - Hillsborough - Manatee - Pasco, Region Director Betsey Westuba, Cell: 813-406-4621, [ewestuba@gmail.com](mailto:ewestuba@gmail.com),**

**Region 7 - Brevard, Orange, Osceola & Seminole, Region Director – Tara Sullivan, Central and Northern Florida Area Director – American Foundation for Suicide Prevention 407-415-8757 [tsullivan@afsp.org](mailto:tsullivan@afsp.org)**

**Region 8 - Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry & Lee, Region Director Vicki Snyder Clark, 239-850-1159 [vsnyderclark@gmail.com](mailto:vsnyderclark@gmail.com)**

**Region 9 – Palm Beach, Region Director - Rene Favreau, The Center for Information & Crisis Services (211), PO Box 3588, Lantana, FL 33465-3588, 561-818-3856 c, [rene.favreau@gmail.com](mailto:rene.favreau@gmail.com)**

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**Region 11 – Dade and Monroe. Region Director - Diana Flores, Switchboard Of Miami, 190 NE 3rd Street, Miami FL 33132, Tel: (305) 358-1640 x162, Fax: (305) 377-2269 24-Hour HELpline: (305) 358-4357 or 211, TTY: (305) 644-9449 or 211, opt 4 <http://www.switchboardmiami.org>**

**Region 12 - Flagler & Volusia, Region Director - Lisa Grubbs, 386-767-2883 [heavyhittercharters@cfl.rr.com](mailto:heavyhittercharters@cfl.rr.com)**

**Region 13 - Citrus, Hernando, Lake, Marion & Sumter, Region Director – Judy Broward, 352-213-6308, [gatorjudy2@gmail.com](mailto:gatorjudy2@gmail.com)**

**Region 14 - Hardee, Highlands & Polk, Region Director – Betsey Westuba, Cell: 813-406-4621, [ewestuba@gmail.com](mailto:ewestuba@gmail.com)**

**Region 15 - Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee & St Lucie, Region Director Doris Carroll [director@drugfreepartner.org](mailto:director@drugfreepartner.org)**

If you or someone you know is suicidal, in crisis or emotional distress, please reach out for hope by calling:

**1-800-273-8255 (TALK)**

**<http://www.floridasuicideprevention.org/>**

In order for FSPC to survive and thrive, it needs funds to pay for travel for the Directors and Chair. Please consider reviewing your membership using the form below.





**Membership Form:**

(Print this from)

|  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
|  | Individual (\$25)              |
|  | Corporate/Organization (\$100) |

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

In Memory of: ( \_\_\_\_\_ )

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

FL County: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (home): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (cell): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (work): \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Which committee(s) would you be interesting in serving on?

Youth Suicide \_\_\_\_\_

Middle Age Suicide 35 – 54 \_\_\_\_\_

Elder Suicide \_\_\_\_\_

Support Groups \_\_\_\_\_

Police Suicide \_\_\_\_\_

Veterans & Armed Forces Suicide \_\_\_\_\_

Bullying & Cyber Bullying \_\_\_\_\_

Work Place Suicide \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

|                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Send to:</b> | <b>Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition</b><br>Attn: Mr. Rene' Favreau<br>710 Valley Forge Rd<br>West Palm Beach, FL 33405<br>561-818-3856c<br>561-547-1195h<br>Email: <a href="mailto:rene.favreau@gmail.com">rene.favreau@gmail.com</a> |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|