



SIEC ALERT

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SIEC ALERT is a topical review of current literature from the field of suicide prevention.

Suicide Information & Education Centre (SIEC)
201-1615-10th Ave. SW
Calgary, Alberta CANADA T3C 0J7

phone: 403-245-3900 fax: 403-245-0299
email: siec@siec.ca web: <http://www.siec.ca>

Supporting Suicide Survivors

More than 3,600 Canadians and 30,000 Americans complete suicide each year. Compounding this critical loss of life is the profound and often debilitating despair and grief experienced by surviving families and friends. Using a modest estimate of six survivors for each suicidal death, researcher John McIntosh estimates that one out of every 68 Americans is a survivor of suicide.

Stigma

Survivors may find that their social network, perhaps even their clergy or caregivers, have judgemental or condemning attitudes or beliefs about suicide. Cultural and religious taboos combine with our tendency to avoid death and bereavement issues and can serve to isolate and stigmatize suicide survivors. A lack of social support can increase a survivor's risk of complicated grieving, depression, and suicide.

Some Common Survivor Responses

- a struggle to make sense of the suicide
- anger
- guilt over failed responsibilities, real or imagined
- isolation caused by a sense of self-imposed shame
- aloneness when others keep their distance
- blame towards those perceived to have contributed to the suicide
- awkwardness when others don't know how to respond
- having to face the traumatic & sometimes unexpected nature of the death
- difficulty accepting that the death was by suicide
- fear that powerful grief reactions may not be normal
- remorse over lost opportunity

excerpted from: *Healing After a Suicide: the Legacy of Suicide: Caring for the Bereaved*, by B. Turley, Lifeline Australia, 1999 see "Australia" on verso for details.

What Helps & Heals Us as Survivors?

- acknowledge that the death is a suicide
- learn more about suicide and grief
- acknowledge our feelings & our loss
- find formal & informal rituals to honour loved one's life
- call upon our personal strengths & ways of coping from other difficult times
- read, write, express our grief in a way & at a time and place that is comfortable for us
- find other suicide survivors, share our stories & build mutual support
- understanding & thoughtful offers of support from others:

"I'm here if you need someone to talk to"

What Hinders Our Healing as Survivors?

- hide or deny that the cause of death is suicide
- blame others, or ourselves
- internal & external pressure to 'finish' or 'stop' grieving
- self-destructive behaviours, e.g. drug or substance dependency
- thoughtless or cliché comments from others:

"It was so sudden!"

"You can't live in the past."

"Didn't you know this was going to happen?"

How Can Caregivers Assist Survivors?

- listen without judging
- accept the intensity of an individual's grief
- communicate with compassion - not cliché
- offer & provide information - literature, community resources, support group information
- reassure the survivor that their feelings are normal
- be vigilant about suicidality: ASK!
- be sensitive to difficult times: holidays, anniversary dates

Being there is important. Let the bereaved know they are not alone. Offer oneself, and expect that they your invitations may be refused. Have patience, and continue to offer oneself over time.

sources & resources >

SIEC Sources & Resources

Photocopies available from SIEC for documents on this list.
(Cost per article: \$8.00 plus postage. Prepayment is not necessary. Please quote SIEC # when ordering.)

SIEC #981110

Calhoun, L. G., & Allen, B. G. (1991). Social reactions to the survivor of a suicide in the family: A review of the literature. *Omega*, 23(2): 95-107.

SIEC #920372

Dunne, E. J. (1992). Psychoeducational intervention strategies for survivors of suicide. *Crisis*, 13(1): 35-40.

SIEC #930208

Farberow, N. L. (March 1993). Understanding inappropriate remarks to survivors. *Survivors After Suicide Newsletter*, 6 (1): 1-2.

SIEC #970398

McIntosh, J. L. (1996). Survivors of suicide: a comprehensive bibliography update, 1986-1995. *Omega*, 33(2): 147-175.

SIEC #960233

Moore, M. M. & Freeman, S. J., (1995). Counseling survivors of suicide: Implications for group postvention. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 20(1): 40-47.

SIEC #920256

Range, L. M., Walston, R., & Pollard, P. M. (1992). Helpful and unhelpful comments after suicide, homicide, accident, or natural death. *Omega*, 25(1): 25-31.

SIEC #920373

Rudestam, K. E. (1992). Research contributions to understanding the suicide survivor. *Crisis*, 13(1): 41-46.

SIEC# 911139

Wagner, K. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (1991). Perceptions of social support by suicide survivors and their social networks. *Omega*, 24(1):61-73.

SIEC #950584

Zinner, E. S. Survivors of suicide: Understanding and coping with the legacy of self-inflicted death. In P. Cimboic & D. A. Jobes (Eds.), *Youth Suicide: Issues, Assessment, and Intervention*. (pp. 67-85). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1990.

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All prices and conditions are subject to change.

SIEC Reading Lists for Suicide Survivors & Friends

These reading lists are available free of charge from SIEC:

Parental Loss: Titles for Families & Friends

Child Loss: Titles for Families & Friends

Spousal Loss: Titles for Families & Friends

Sibling Loss: Titles for Families & Friends

**Child Bereavement, Grief & Loss:
Titles for Parents & Caregivers**

**Bereavement, Grief & Loss:
Titles for Children & Adolescents**

**Bereavement, Grief & Loss:
Workbooks for Children & Adolescents**

**Bereavement, Grief & Loss:
Titles for Family & Friends**

Other Non-Profit Organizations & Their Resources for Survivors

CANADA

Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention

• "Directory of Canadian Survivor's Groups" (on website)
web address: www.suicideprevention.ca
phone: CASP c/o The Support Network 780-482-0198

AUSTRALIA

Lifeline Melbourne

• "After Suicide" information on website
web address: www.lifeline.org.au/connect/AfteSui.htm
Phone: 03 9662 2355
email: livingworks@bigpond.com

USA

Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network (SPAN)

• advocacy, conference information, survivors quilts
web address: www.spanusa.org
Phone: (Toll free): 1-888-649-1366

American Association of Suicidology (AAS)

• publishes: "Surviving Suicide" Newsletter for Survivors
"National Directory of Support Groups for
"Survivors of Suicide" (on website)
web address: www.suicidology.org
Phone: 202-237-2280

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

• videos, survivor information, survivor stories,
survivor's conference info
web address: www.afsp.org/support/support.html
Phone: 212-363-3500