

WHAT DO SURVIVORS NEED IN THE NEW YEAR?



Those of us who are survivors and those who want to support us often struggle with the same question, "What do we need?" The answers are very individual and can fluctuate from day to day, even moment to moment. Needs are elusive and difficult to articulate. It takes practice to share "I need" statements with others and requires our attention and recognition of how things are going in our day-to-day life. Days of strength and resolve can be overwhelmed by days of confusion and despair.

Identification of need usually falls on the survivor, although we may feel that we know the needs of others through observation or life experience.

After listening to survivors talk about what they need over many years, along with dealing with my own losses, I have seen some general themes repeated. The following survivor "needs" often apply. These needs can be immediate or long term.

REASSURANCE...

- That decisions they made were O.K.
- If they feel guilt, that they did the best they could
- Concern over last or recent contacts or lack of contacts

- That their "power" to influence the deceased's final decision was limited
- That their range of reactions can be "normal," considering the suicide death

ENCOURAGEMENT...

- To talk
- To seek out resources and connect with others
- To move on in positive ways
- To expand on life beyond death events (can get stuck here)
- To forgive
 - *Life, for being cruel
 - *Person, for ending their life
 - *Self, for not being the perfect savior
 - *Others, for not meeting our expectations of support

PERMISSION...

- To "feel" good, bad, angry, overwhelmed
- To grieve on their own timetable

The will to move forward and honest communication about need is necessary. Survivors themselves or support people can be advocates. A thoughtful conversation, action or referral are steps toward counteracting "immobility" when seeking to fulfill survivor needs.

Jeanne Moren, SOS Volunteer Facilitator

APRIL NEWSLETTER TO BE REMEMBRANCE ISSUE

There are many ways to remember the lives of those who have died by suicide. Our April issue will provide an opportunity to name those who have died and make a short statement about them. We invite new readers or those who have been long time readers of this newsletter to honor a loved one.

Please return the enclosed form by Friday, March 2, 2018 in order to be included.



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THE EMPTY CHAIR: SEVEN LESSONS GAINED IN SIBLING LOSS



I never meant to become any sort of expert in sibling loss. That's not a path anyone would willingly choose for themselves. I got a call from my mom on Mother's Day telling me that my brother died. It was unexpected. It's been 10 years now and I have learned a lot. Ten years is a long time for someone who didn't think they'd make it past day one as a freshly deemed only child.

1. **You don't have to be the super kid.** Your world becomes your family and you feel like you have to save your parents. I've learned that you can't save them; they are living and breathing just like you and there is no saving. The best thing you can do is just be you.

2. **Parents are human.** Sometimes parents are grieving together and sometimes they are just coping in their own way. I remember the ups and downs of it all.

3. **Life goes on.** It feels tragic to think, but life really does go on. I wonder as I grow older where and who he would be. I live my life imagining that he would be proud of my choices. This is how I keep him with me always.

4. **Be vulnerable and live your truth.** It is our true authentic self who can make real connections and impact others. Being vulnerable is scary. We are our experiences, and every piece of us was born from something that has happened to us. Being vulnerable

makes us human and reminds us that we are not alone on our journey.

5. **Make time for the people who matter.** All of us have the same 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, the same 365 days in a year. It is up to us to choose how we spend it. Spend your time feeling sorry for yourself or learn to feel grateful for all the love we continue to have in our life. The true you will continually be changing, coping, growing and improving. Spend your time wisely. You might make a difference in another's life.

6. **Anything can happen, anything happens all the time.** Life is short, life is scary, and life is beautiful. Through our loss, we are shown firsthand how all of it can go in a split second. Living my life to its fullest is both a gift and a struggle. Sometimes I hold on too tight and worry too much. I have felt stuck, anxious and scared of losing everyone I love.

7. **But in the end, you choose to live.** Slowly, breathing becomes easier. Each step feels more secure and easier to take. One can choose to accept each day as a gift. Smiles become easier. We must learn that sharing our story, being vulnerable open up to love. Allowing yourself to be your true self will be the best gift you can give to yourself and to those around you.

Amanda Wormann, The Compassionate Friends, We Need Not Walk Alone

WHY?

Survivors inevitably search for a reason, perhaps because having a reason might restore some small sense of control in a seemingly unpredictable world. Trying to understand "why" can occupy our minds for a long time. Ultimately many realize they may never know.

When survivors talk about their loved ones, it becomes evident that there is no one path or cause for suicide. Each story is unique. Some who take their lives have struggled long and hard with previously diagnosed mental illnesses such as Bi-Polar Disorder, Depression, Schizophrenia or Borderline Personality Disorder. Others have never been diagnosed, but in hindsight, had many traits that fit these diagnoses. Some have spoken of suicide at various points in their lives. Others never spoke of suicide or gave any

indication of depression. Some suicides appear to be impulsive following a significant disappointment. Others seem more planned. Many people who take their lives have alcohol or drugs in their system. Others do not. Some leave notes. Others do not.

It appears that each person who dies by suicide has reached a point where they can no longer tolerate their pain and suffering. Most don't intend to leave behind a wake of pain and destruction. They are simply searching for a way out of an unbearable struggle.

from www.allianceofhope.org

You don't have to have it all figured out to move forward. — Unknown



MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS TO DECEASED LOVED ONES

By Anne Cronin-Tyson, M.A., and Michelle Linn-Gust, Ph.D.

It can be a light touch on the arm. A dream in which our loved one comes to us. Or a coin that appears in one's path. Even a butterfly that flutters around our head. The signs and symbols for each of us are unique. They bring to mind that our loved ones who have died by suicide are near us. These signs, called After Death Communications (ADCs), remind us of the unbroken bond that we hold with our loved ones who have died.

For many years, when people mentioned these kinds of happenings they were told they were "crazy" or "hallucinating." Some people felt they couldn't mention what they experienced because they were afraid of the negative comments from others or they themselves doubted the reality of their experience. Grief therapists many times told people that the bond broke because the person had died.

Thankfully, there is openness now for people to feel safe to share their experiences, something that also connects strangers who previously might only know that each has lost a loved one to suicide. William Worden (2002) in his "Tasks of Mourning" doesn't say that the bond is broken after a loved one dies. Instead,

These experiences are gifts that can bring a sense of peace and connectedness that we never realized we could still have.

he says that we "emotionally relocate" that person in our lives. The person is with us, yet in a different way.

For the grieving person, especially after a complicated death like suicide, there is a lot of comfort in knowing a loved one is nearby. And out of pain.

For some people, a sign or message from the loved one is enough to know that it's okay to move forward with life. And for others they might know that they are

forgiven for anything that might have transpired in the relationship while the person lived.

The signs and messages for each of us will be as unique as we ourselves are and as unique as our relationships with our loved ones who died are. For some people, there might be one message and others might experience ongoing signs. Our ability to be open to these messages (sometimes we don't realize they are messages and signs for us at first!) and to give thanks for them might heighten our awareness and more might come. These experiences are gifts that can bring a sense of peace and connectedness that we never realized we could still have.

from www.suicidefindinghope.com

19TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE LOSS DAY WAS HELD AT JOURNEY MENTAL HEALTH CENTER IN MADISON, WISCONSIN ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2017



Survivors and those who care about them joined on this day at locations throughout the world for support and remembrance. The viewing of the documentary films "The Journey: A Story of Healing and Hope" and "The Journey Revisited" created by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention was followed by a facilitated discussion and a sharing of loss experiences. Local Survivor Memory Quilts, food, fellowship, music, remembrance and support resources were all part of the day.

Thank you to the SOS Support Services Team who organized the event, our sponsor Journey Mental Health Center as well as those who attended. This year's documentary films and documentaries from previous years can be viewed at:

<https://afsp.org/find-support/ive-lost-someone/survivor-day/survivor-day-documentaries/>

"There are things that we don't want to happen but have to accept, things we don't want to know but have to learn, and people we can't live without but have to let go."
— Unknown

SOS LIBRARY NOW AVAILABLE



The SOS Lending Library is once again located in our group meeting room at 49 Kessel Ct. Our library includes books, videos and CDs specific to suicide loss, grief, depression, mental illness, and prevention. All resources can be checked out for a few weeks. The SOS Team will be happy to direct you to any books on a particular subject you may be looking for. A binder containing descriptions of the books is available at SOS meetings.

If you have borrowed books in the past and they are still in your possession we would appreciate their return at a support meeting or to the reception area at 49 Kessel Ct. during weekday business hours. Presently there are 19 books that are still out on loan. All are marked as property of Journey Mental Health. Thank you.

H.O.P.E.S. CHOOSES TO SUPPORT SOS SERVICES



HOPES (Helping Others Prevent and Educate about Suicide) has given a financial gift to SOS even after the HOPES group has ended its work as an official organization. Many of those individuals who started, maintained and worked diligently with this wonderful group in its 20 years of existence were originally participants in the SOS Support Group. HOPES focused its efforts on suicide prevention and

partnered with Journey Mental Health on many programs. HOPES has always understood and appreciated the value of services offered to those who have had a suicide loss. We know that postvention — interactive support after a loss — works as a form of prevention.

Thank you HOPES for the generous sharing of your remaining funds.

A SINCERE THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS



Jan & Stephen Asplund, in memory of Matt Peart

Joyce Binder, in memory of sister

John Carrier, in memory of
son Rick Robert Carrier

Patricia Derer, in memory of son Daryl Derer

Edward & Mary Drinkwine
HOPES

Judy Killian, in memory of son Anthony Killian

Pat Kmet, in memory of
grandson Dustin Tarkenton

Cindy Laird, in memory of
brother Rick Robert Carrier

Mary Moldenhauer, in memory of
Dave Moldenhauer

Jennifer Monson, in memory of
John Winter, Tad Lawson

Marc Schnipper, in memory of
brother Steven Schnipper

Tina Neupert, in memory of brother Daryl Derer
Kathy Saunders

For International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day

Shawndell Marks — Gift of Music

Jackie Bradley — Gift of Music, in memory of
friend Jay Lechler

Peder & Jeanne Moren —
Pie from Hubbard Avenue Diner

The SOS Team —
for organizing & hosting the event

Journey Mental Health Center —
for providing the venue and offering staff support

Tax deductible donations can be made:

By mail to **Survivor Services, JMHC, 25 Kessel Court, Ste. 105, Madison WI 53711**

Online at <https://www.journeymhc.org/how-to-help/donate>
Select SOS Services, then click “donate.” Use credit card or PayPal.

SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE SUPPORT GROUP SCHEDULE



A self-help group for adults who are grieving the death of a loved one by suicide.

2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month, 7:00 – 9:00 pm

Journey Mental Health Center, Kessel Ct., Building 49, Madison WI 53711

There is free parking in front of the building. To gain entry, press the call button and indicate that you are attending the SOS meeting. You will be greeted by one of the SOS team. Please arrive by 6:50 as group starts promptly at 7:00. **The building locks at 7:00 PM.** If necessary follow call directions posted on the door by using a cell phone to alert the group if you need late entry.

JANUARY 2018						
	9					
	23					

FEBRUARY						
		13				
		27				

MARCH						
		13				
		27				

APRIL						
		10				
		24				

SOS 2018 SCHEDULE

January 9 & 23

February 13 & 27

March 13 & 27

April 10 & 24

May 8 & 22

June 12 & 26

July 10 & 24

August 14 & 28

September 11 & 25

October 9 & 23

November 13 & 27

December 11

SOS SUPPORT GROUP PURPOSE

To share experiences for living and coping beyond suicide loss

WILL WEATHER CAUSE A SOS SUPPORT GROUP CANCELLATION?

In case of inclement or dangerous weather a determination of whether the group will meet or not will be made by 3:00 pm the day of the meeting.

Call Emergency Services reception (608) 280-2580 or check www.journeymhc.org to find out if JMHC is closed due to weather.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Friday, March 2 – Remembrance Issue forms due

SOS Confidential Email: sos@journeymhc.org for correspondence & information requests

SOS Confidential Voicemail: to leave message **608/280-2435**

For an urgent or immediate need 24/7: Call Emergency Services **608/280-2600**

Journey Mental Health Center Website: <http://www.journeymhc.org>

SOS Support Services: <http://journeymhc.org/community-based-services/#sos-support>

USING WHAT'S HELPFUL

We encourage survivors to seek out supportive people and resources. This can often be an arduous and frustrating process. Initially, feelings and reactions may change daily, by the hour or by the minute. It is difficult to think ahead and some words may seem empty.

The purpose of this newsletter is to present material that will be helpful to survivors at various points in their grief. We invite you to use what applies. You may set

some things aside for future reference. You may want to share some thoughts with others. You may want to respond or comment.

Eventually, a healthy goal would be to integrate the experience of a suicide loss into the continuation of living a satisfying life. Our hope is that the words and experiences of others that we present will support you in your journey.



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- By email at sos@journeymhc.org
- By phone message to (608) 280-2435
- By mail at the address above.