



NEWSLETTER

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JOURNEY MENTAL HEALTH CENTER

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ADULTS GRIEVING THE DEATH OF A SIBLING



When a sibling dies, the world changes in a heartbeat. Oftentimes when such a loss occurs, others fail to recognize that the surviving sibling faces emotional battles on many fronts while working through the loss. Largely ignored, surviving siblings are often referred to as the “forgotten mourners.”

Within this group of surviving siblings is one that is unique—the adult survivor who lives away from home and is mourning the death of an adult sibling. In the case of an adult sibling, attention and words of comfort are usually aimed at the parents, spouse and children.

The Loss of History

Each family has its own special history and the shared bonds that are a part of that history. When a sibling dies, the bonds are shattered and the history forever has a void that cannot be filled.

As they grow, children develop certain characteristics and talents. Brothers and sisters tend to complement each other by developing a balance of interests in different areas. However, surviving siblings will need to redefine their roles in the absence of this relationship.

The Loss of Future

When a sibling dies, all future special occasions will be forever changed. There will be no more shared birthday celebrations, anniversaries or holidays. The sharing of life’s unique and special events will never again take place.

What Adult Siblings May Expect

• Survivor guilt is normal. Siblings usually have a relationship where they seek to protect each other. Despite the physical distance that may separate them

as adults, this need to have provided protection weighs heavily in the aftermath of the loss.

• Guilt about how the relationship was maintained is common. So often as adults, the sibling relationship has changed from younger years. Each travels a separate path, and sometimes communication is lacking and ambivalent feelings about maintaining the relationship surface. No matter how good a relationship may have been, the survivor often believes it should have been better.

• Anger over a new role within the family often occurs. A surviving sibling may now be the one expected to care for aging parents, and he or she may have to step into the role of guardian for nieces and nephews. Remaining family members may look to surviving siblings for guidance. All these situations are possible reasons to feel anger over a sibling’s death.

Fear of mortality

When a brother or sister dies, it is natural for the surviving sibling or siblings to look at their own lives and

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“The comfort of having a friend may be taken away, but not that of having had one.”

— Seneca

what their deaths would do to the family.

Surviving siblings may find positive changes within their lives. These may include greater emotional strength, increased independence, and a soul-searching reexamination of spiritual beliefs. Some survivors feel the need to make a change in their life's work, such as becoming a therapist, or working to effect a change in the area that took the life of the sibling.

Even when a sibling has died, a connection still remains. Surviving brothers and sisters think about them; talk about them; remember them at special times such as birthdays, holidays, and death dates; and may create a memorial of some type. This connection with the sibling who died does not have to be given up to move forward in life.

Understanding from Others

Society often encourages bereaved individuals to feel guilty for grieving too long. This failure to receive validation of their grief can cause siblings to hide their feelings, causing a type of depression with which they may struggle.

If the surviving sibling is married, stress may also be introduced into the spousal relationship. Individuals grieve differently, and the spouse may be bewildered and even unsympathetic that this loss is causing so much sorrow in their own family. This situation may provoke comments such as, "Why are you so upset? You haven't been close to your family for years." While this may sound reasonable, the emotions of grief and mourning are seldom reasonable—or even rational. Spouses may need to be told how they can be supportive. One woman simply asked her husband for a hug whenever she felt especially sad about the death of her sister.

College Students Who Lose a Sibling

Those away at college in an unstructured environment often find the death of a sibling particularly difficult at a time when they find themselves extremely stressed. This may be the first experience with death within the family, and upon returning to college the bereaved sibling tends to find little support.

Instead of helping, these habits hinder the ability to confront the loss. Many colleges have counseling and support centers. Consideration also may be given to

delaying college for a period of time, reducing stress by decreasing difficult activities, and enjoying creative pursuits that provide positive ways of releasing frustrations.

Senior Citizens Who Lose a Sibling

Too often no support or comfort is offered and the loss is not acknowledged. In reality, whether the sibling who died is nine or 90, the loss still wounds the heart. When a senior citizen is grieving the death of a sibling, their grief is oftentimes compounded by the fact that perhaps a spouse, other family member or good friend have preceded the sibling in death. This leaves a void for receiving comfort, and sharing memories with those who knew the sibling well.

Finding Support

Many siblings find help by talking with others about their brother or sister. However, even good friends can quickly become uncomfortable with the subject, often at just the point when their support is most needed.

Adult siblings (18 and older) are encouraged to attend meetings of The Compassionate Friends. A number of Chapters of The Compassionate Friends have separate sibling subgroups for 14 years of age and older. The national organization provides information through private Facebook groups, chat rooms in its Online Support Community and the national website. TCF National Conferences allow another opportunity for bereaved siblings to bond.

Often, simply finding another bereaved sibling with whom to share concerns and feelings provides a path toward healing. Adult siblings may be living in areas where no one knew their deceased brother or sister—or even of their existence. This can be painful at a time when the surviving sibling longs to share memories.

When your parents die, it is said you lose your past and when your child dies you lose your future. However, when your sibling dies, you lose a part of your past, your present, and your future. Because of this tremendous loss, it is important that everyone works together to ease the path toward healing and hope.

*Taken from a brochure sponsored by Karen Snepp
in memory of her brother, Dave
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"Grief is a very tough game of feeling the weakest you have ever felt and morphing it into the strongest person you will have to become."

— Unknown

BEREAVED SIBLINGS EXPERIENCE MANY LOSSES



by P.G. White, PhD

Bereaved siblings still feel sorrow and sadness from the many losses associated with the death of a brother or sister.

- The loss of companionship and future with their sibling
- Loss of their parents, at least for a time, while they were grieving
- Loss of parts of the self that were projected into the deceased sibling.
- Loss of innocence.
- Missing out on peer-related activities.

- Feeling left out.
- Not getting the attention they needed to deal with such a profound loss.
- Being lonely.
- There is a hole when they visit their other siblings (if they have them} because it is then obvious that one is missing. The presence of other family members reminds them forcibly of this fact.
- Sorry that they cannot go back and make up for something they said or did.

ANGER & BLAME



Negative emotions surround the suicide survivor, complicating our road back from sorrow. **Anger is a natural part of the grieving process**, but survivors of suicide are far more susceptible to it—and not without justification.

Anyone who mourns may feel anger—frustration at being powerless in the face of death or rage at some real or perceived culprit. However, those who mourn a suicide know the identity of the responsible party—and who wouldn't feel anger toward the person who ended the life of someone we love and who devastated everyone around us? Many will be loath to view their loved one in such harsh light, but the concept is there in our minds, at the core of our despair.

At some point, that anger may surface. If you feel such anger, don't try to repress it—let it out. It's a natural part of your healing process. You won't hate them forever. Quite the contrary—once expressed, it will be easier for you to let go of your anger and begin

to embrace positive thoughts and happy memories of your lost loved one.

Blaming others. Some survivors feel the need for a culprit, again out of a reluctance to place responsibility on the suicide victim.

"It's the doctor's fault." "His wife/mother/brother drove him to it." "If only the government had a better program..." Some even pour their frustration into crusades against some perceived social evil that is responsible for their loved one's suicide. While these people seem to have a productive focus for their grief, they are only hurting themselves by not facing the truth of their loved one's suicide. **Their road back to peace is made longer and rockier by misdirected anger.**

*From SOS, A Handbook for Survivors of Suicide by Jeffrey Jackson, copyright © 2004 Jeffrey Jackson
Published by American Association of Suicidology
Copies of the Handbook in.pdf format can be downloaded from the internet, free of charge, at <http://www.suicidology.org>*

RESPONSIBILITY



I have a responsibility to those I love...
To be loving, patient, considerate, and kind;
To be loyal, respectful, and honest;
To be appreciative, encouraging, and comforting;
To share myself and care for myself.
To be the best possible "Me."
BUT
I am not responsible for them...
Not for their achievements, successes, or triumphs;

Not for their joy, gratification, or fulfillment;
Not for their defeats, failures or disappoints;
Not for their thoughts, choices, or mistakes.
And not for their suicide.

For had I been responsible
This death would not have occurred.

Reprinted from SOS newsletter, Batavia, IL, April 2010

THE SUICIDE SURVIVOR'S AFFIRMATION



by Jeffrey Jackson

Someone I loved very much has ended their own life. I will never truly know all that was happening in their mind that brought them to that tragic choice. However, there are things of which I can be reasonably certain...

- If they were here, even they could not fully explain their mindset or answer all of my questions.

- In their state of mind, they could not have fully comprehended the reality of their own death.

- They could not have fully appreciated the devastating impact their suicide would have on the people in their life.

As such, by their last act, they made their most tragic mistake, unknowingly creating unparalleled pain in the hearts of those whom they most loved.

The person I lost is beyond my help now in every way but one:

I can help them by working to ease the pain they have caused and by not allowing their most enduring legacy to be one of tragedy. They benefit from this help whether or not I perceive them as welcoming it, in the same way that we help the aggressor whenever

we nurse his victim — by minimizing the damage he has caused.

As a result, each and every day, I can help the person I lost by...

... enjoying life.

... smiling and laughing.

... not dwelling in feelings of sadness or remorse.

... loving others.

... taking new steps in life toward positive new horizons.

... helping those who feel their loss to do the same.

... and, in short, not letting their mistake continue to create sorrow, neither in the world around me, nor in myself.

I will try to picture my lost loved one asking me to do this every day — to please help undo the damage they caused in whatever little ways possible.

And I promise I will.

From SOS, A Handbook for Survivors of Suicide by Jeffrey Jackson, copyright © 2004 Jeffrey Jackson

Published by American Association of Suicidology

Copies of the Handbook in.pdf format can be downloaded from the internet, free of charge, at <http://www.suicidology.org>

A SINCERE THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS



Dan & Virginia Behring

in memory of their son Jonathan

April 1976 – May 1994

18 years old

Robert Miller

in memory of Michael McNerney

Donna Harvey

in memory of Michael McNerney

Jeannine Catalano

in memory of Michael McNerney

Vito Miulli

in memory of Michael McNerney

Journey Mental Health

for sponsorship

To make a tax deductible donation online by credit card, visit www.journeymhc.org/donate and designate "Survivors of Suicide (SOS) Support Group" in the pull-down menu option.

To make a tax deductible donation by check, make it payable to Journey Mental Health Center with SOS in the memo line. Mail to:

Survivors of Suicide Support Group
c/o Journey Mental Health Center
25 Kessel Court, Suite 105, Madison, WI 53711

Please Consider —

* A donation in memory or honor of someone.

* A donation towards our Quarterly Newsletter so that we might continue to bring it to you and others.

* A donation toward resources that are provided to new survivors.

ONLINE (ZOOM) SURVIVOR SUPPORT GROUP CONTINUES FOR NOW

With no definite date set as to when in-person meetings might resume, we continue to offer **online group support**. We offer this option to survivors who would have normally desired to attend our in-person groups.

The following criteria are needed for participation.

- Be a survivor of a suicide loss and wish to interact with other survivors.
- Be over 18 years of age.
- Have technology available to use ZOOM either through computer, phone or another device.
- Be willing to register and speak with a Journey Mental health provider to be assured that a group experience would be appropriate and then receive an online invitation (Group entry codes).
- Be able to provide your email and phone contact information.

- Be aware that this is a discussion, support group and is **not** a “therapy” group.
- Be able to provide a quiet space, without interruptions when participating, insuring confidentiality of the group.
- Be available at the group starting time.
- Do not invite or include others who have not been specifically invited to the session.

All group discussions are led by a trained volunteer fellow survivor and supported by a Journey Mental Health professional.

Meetings, for now will be held on our regular meeting nights, the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. The length of the meeting (usually 1½ hours) will be determined by the facilitator.

To request participation please email sos@journeymhc.org or call and leave a message for call back at SOS Confidential Voicemail (608) 280-2435.

SOS SUPPORT GROUP PURPOSE

To share experiences for living and coping beyond suicide loss

SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE SUPPORT ZOOM MEETING 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 – 8:30 p.m.

For extra support please use Crisis Intervention 24/7 phone line at 608-280-2600 or leave a message at SOS voicemail 608-280-2435.

JULY							AUGUST							SEPTEMBER							OCTOBER						
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		12														13											
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		26														27											
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CONNECTING WITH JOURNEY MENTAL HEALTH

SOS Confidential Email: sos@journeymhc.org

SOS Confidential Voicemail: (608) 280-2435

24/7 Year 'Round Mental Health Crisis Line: (608) 280-2600

Journey Mental Health Center Website: www.journeymhc.org

Select Programs & Services, Community-Based Services, Survivors of Suicide

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Along with survivor support from Journey Mental Health many other resources are listed in our “Help After Suicide” brochure which is posted on our website, journeymhc.org.

General groups along with specific loss groups for Moms, Spouse & Partner are available online throughout the U.S.



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- By phone message to (608) 280-2435
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