



# Supporting Survivors of Suicide Loss: A Guide for Funeral Directors

*Second Edition*



This second edition of *Supporting Survivors of Suicide Loss: A Guide for Funeral Directors* was written in 2020 by Samaritans, Inc., and Education Development Center (EDC). The first edition was co-authored by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center at EDC and the Suicide Prevention Action Network USA.

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Education Development Center (EDC) ([www.edc.org](http://www.edc.org)) is a global nonprofit that designs, implements, and evaluates programs to improve education, promote health, and expand economic opportunity worldwide, with a focus on underserved populations. EDC is the home of the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, ([www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org)), which is the only federally supported resource center devoted to advancing the implementation of the [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#).

Samaritans, Inc. ([www.samaritanshope.org](http://www.samaritanshope.org)) provides a 24/7 crisis line for calls and texts, helps people who have lost a loved one to suicide, and educates the public about suicide prevention. Samaritans provides services that emphasize confidential, nonjudgmental, and compassionate listening. In its 45 years, Samaritans has trained more than 4,500 volunteers, answered more than 2.5 million phone calls and text messages, instructed more than 100,000 individuals on suicide prevention, and supported over 10,000 individuals who have lost a loved one to suicide. Samaritans, Inc., serves communities throughout Greater Boston and MetroWest, as well as across Massachusetts.

# Supporting Survivors of Suicide Loss: A Guide for Funeral Directors

*Second Edition*

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*Supporting Survivors of Suicide Loss: A Guide for Funeral Directors* is an essential resource for any funeral professional who works with people who have lost a loved one to suicide. This comprehensive guide takes a thoughtful approach to educating funeral professionals about the effects of suicide loss and offers insight into the unique grief responses that follow. It provides the critical information and resources funeral professionals need to help suicide loss survivors create a meaningful tribute that honors the life of their loved one and begin the very difficult grief journey.

**– National Funeral Directors Association**

A death by suicide is disturbing for almost everyone. The history of stigma, confusion, and misunderstanding about suicide often creates complications in the grieving process for loss survivors. It also makes providing support and services for suicide-bereaved families and friends more challenging for funeral professionals. *Supporting Survivors of Suicide Loss: A Guide for Funeral Directors* is a concise but information-rich resource to help funeral personnel better understand the needs of their clients bereaved by suicide. It offers a compassionate perspective about the experience of suicide loss and a wealth of practical ideas and suggestions for how funeral directors can help new survivors in their journey toward healing. It will be of value to any funeral professional who truly wants to do a better job of serving suicide loss survivors.

**– John R. Jordan, PhD**

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particularly suicide loss survivors.  
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## Opening Message: The Importance of Funeral Directors

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide and to learn about the needs of those who have lost someone to suicide. The role of the funeral home director in caring for those bereaved by suicide loss is incredibly important. By shepherding people through their initial shock and helping to facilitate the mourning rituals, you can help people begin a healthy grieving process.

Death by suicide in the United States remains a public health crisis. Researchers estimate that for every suicide, 15–30 people are directly impacted, and a total of up to 135 people are exposed in some way because they knew the person.<sup>1</sup>

*As a funeral director, you can play a vital role in helping survivors of suicide loss, and the communities that support them, in the immediate aftermath of a death by suicide.*

You are in a unique position to offer valuable resources that can help with healing and potentially lessen the risk of suicidality among those who are vulnerable. From how you speak with people about their loss to the options you present them for memorializing their loved one, you can communicate that death by suicide is not something to be ashamed of. They and their loved ones are worthy of quality professional services, and there is support and hope for healing.

In addition to serving individuals and families, as a funeral director you also serve as a community leader. You help people mourn their loss in the presence of a broader community by assisting them in writing obituaries, working with faith leaders and others to find ways to memorialize loved ones, and collaborating with schools when a student has died by suicide. Your role is a huge gift to survivors of suicide loss.

*Supporting Survivors of Suicide Loss: A Guide for Funeral Directors* provides critical information about understanding death by suicide and what it is like to lose someone to suicide. It offers practical advice for funeral directors about talking with those who are bereaved by a suicide loss and suggestions for providing high-quality services to them. Finally, the guide provides useful resources for suicide loss survivors and suggestions for how you as a funeral director can access support for yourself.

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<sup>1</sup>Cerel, J., Brown, M., Maple, M., Singleton, M., van deVenne, J., Moore, M., & Flaherty, C. (2019, April). How many people are exposed to suicide? Not six. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 49(2), 529–534. Retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/1943278x/2019/49/2>

## Causes of Suicide

There is no single cause of suicide. Suicide is caused by a complex combination of factors that vary with each individual. Sometimes there is an immediate stressor that is a trigger or tipping point when someone is already vulnerable, and it can look like that stressor is the single cause. People may believe that the loss of a job, a relationship breaking up, or the accumulation of too much debt, for example, is the one event that caused the suicide of a loved one.

However, there are almost always other biological, psychological, and sociological contributing factors that have been developing over time, such as depression or other mood disorders, chronic illness, long-term job difficulties, or the lack of a support system. Most people who take their own lives do not want to die, but they feel like it is the only option to end the intense and ongoing pain they are experiencing.

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## Survivors of Suicide Loss: Common Experiences

People who have lost a loved one to suicide, known as *suicide loss survivors*, face the same emotions as anyone who mourns a death, but they also face an additional set of complex feelings on top of their sorrow and grief. ***Understanding these feelings can enable funeral directors to be more prepared to help the people they serve.***

### Why?

When people arrive at a funeral home to lay to rest a loved one who has died by suicide, they will likely be dealing with many emotions, including trauma, disbelief, shock, anger, and grief.

A question that many suicide loss survivors will be grappling with is “Why”? Why did my loved one take their own life? Why did it happen now? Why didn’t I see it coming? Why couldn’t I stop it?

***Funeral directors will not be able to answer why a loved one has died by suicide. They will not be able to stop those who are bereaved from blaming themselves or others in the midst of their intense grief and loss. However, with the knowledge that most suicides are caused by a variety of biological, psychological, and sociological contributing factors that have developed over time, funeral directors can offer compassion and provide perspective when appropriate.***

### Responsibility

Trying to make sense of a loss to suicide often raises for suicide loss survivors the issue of responsibility: Who is responsible for this death? Who can or should I blame? What could I have done to stop it? Many loss survivors, at least initially, feel some responsibility for the

suicide. Sometimes, someone else is blamed, perhaps a romantic partner or a peer group. It can take a long time for people to realize or accept that no one is to blame for the suicide.

***Funeral directors will not be able to convince suicide loss survivors that a suicide was not their fault. In fact, the loss survivor is perhaps best served if the funeral director simply listens to their feelings of guilt and expresses how difficult those feelings must be to deal with. This type of empathetic listening can help the survivor feel understood and cared for.***

### **Anger**

Suicide loss survivors sometimes feel angry after a death by suicide. Not all people feel this way, but it is not unusual for someone to feel a sense of having been rejected or abandoned by their loved one. Even worse than these feelings, loss survivors can feel betrayed by the person who took their life. For those who do feel anger, it can be a powerful and uncomfortable emotion for them, one they are not used to grappling with. This anger can sometimes unintentionally be directed against the funeral director.

***Funeral directors can be of tremendous help to suicide loss survivors by allowing them to express their anger in safety and without judgment. When anger is directed at the funeral director, it is important for them to remember that the person is in deep mourning and that they may not be in full control of their emotions at the moment as their feelings over the suicide begin to surface in full force.***

### **Shame**

Some people have been conditioned to view suicide as a sin, a crime, or a form of cowardice. As a result, it is common for some suicide loss survivors to feel ashamed of what has happened. Also, they may experience prejudice, discrimination, and misunderstanding from other people. For example, an old friend may turn around in the grocery store aisle when they see the loss survivor coming or a faith community may not host a funeral because the cause of death is suicide.

***The funeral director's ability to engage with suicide loss survivors in the same way they engage with all bereaved people—in the most caring and thoughtful way possible—is vital. Shame comes from feeling judged by others, and funeral directors should be careful to refrain from judging those who have experienced a suicide or treating them differently from other bereaved individuals. Also important may be proactively doing things such as helping to find a welcoming faith community when a survivor's faith community is unable to provide that support.***

### **Social Disruption**

Losing a loved one to suicide can cause a serious disruption in a person's community connections. People may isolate themselves as a result of not feeling understood by those around them, because they are depressed, or as a result of their grief compelling them to turn inward and self-isolate.

***Funeral directors can encourage connection with others by encouraging and facilitating the communal grieving that comes through having a funeral or memorial service. They can also refer suicide loss survivors to support groups and other community-based services where those who are grieving can feel a sense of belonging and acceptance as a suicide loss survivor. There is a list of resources at the end of this guide to assist funeral directors in locating these types of support.***

### **Trauma**

People who witness the suicide death or who find the body have to cope with feelings of shock and horror, which can generate tremendous stress and trauma and leave a lasting impression. Even hearing about the way their loved one died, imagining it, or seeing the body with its injuries on display can be traumatic.

***The key to helping people who have been traumatized is to go slowly, maximize the choices the bereaved have, and prepare people for what to expect. Great care must be taken to prepare suicide loss survivors for what to expect when they view the body, and great effort should be made to present the body appropriately.***

***For example, if the family has opted for a private, basic viewing before cremation, a quilt or blanket over the body and pillow under the deceased's head may be so much more comforting to view than simply a body wrapped in a sheet laid out on a table.***

### **Relief**

Some suicide loss survivors, particularly people whose loved one had endured a long struggle with internal pain, may feel some relief after the suicide. This feeling makes sense since the death may also bring an end to their loved one's suffering. However, this feeling of relief can, itself, engender feelings of guilt and shame.

***Empathetic listening and using phrases such as "it is understandable that you feel this way" can be very helpful in this situation.***

### **Denial or Ambiguity**

It is not always clear to suicide loss survivors whether the death of their loved one was actually a suicide. Particularly in the case of an overdose or a car accident, there can be ambiguity. This uncertainty can leave loss survivors feeling deeply confused and unsettled. Even when the coroner has ruled the death a suicide and the facts of the death seem pretty clear, people may deny the reality that their loved one has taken their life. This denial might stem from the survivor's own guilt or shame at not having realized their loved one was hurting so badly. Or it might be because suicide is still seen by some individuals and groups as a sin, a failing, or an act of cowardice on the part of the deceased.

***It is not the role of the funeral director to convince suicide loss survivors that a suicide has taken place. The best help you can provide is compassionate listening, patience, and help in creating a safe space for those grieving to come to terms with the reality of the death, in their own time and manner. It is also important to know and, when necessary, to validate for survivors that different members of a family or community may have different opinions about whether the death was a suicide.***

### **Suicidality**

It is very common to hear the wish expressed by a suicide loss survivor to simply be dead themselves (e.g., not wake up in the morning at all or to develop cancer and die). It is also common for loss survivors, at different points in their grief journey, to have more explicit suicidal thoughts, although most do not act on them. Suicide loss survivors are at a somewhat increased risk for dying by suicide themselves, although this risk is small.

If you are in doubt about someone's intentions or safety, you can ask them directly, "Are you thinking of suicide?" "How strong are those feelings?" "How close have you come to acting on them?" It is okay to ask these questions. You will not plant the idea of suicide in the person's mind.

***The following three behaviors should prompt you to immediately call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or a mental health professional.***

- ***Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself***
- ***Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online or obtaining a gun***
- ***Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live***

***If any clients or staff at your funeral home show any of these three warning signs, please take action to help them stay safe.***

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## **Talking with Suicide Loss Survivors**

### **Cultural Considerations**

Creating funeral or memorial services that fit with the ideals and values of various cultural groups can be difficult, especially if a funeral director is not familiar with the family's customs. Layer onto this difficulty the nuance of different cultural approaches to dealing with suicide, and funeral directors may feel as if they are in truly unfamiliar territory. It is critical to ask direct questions, to not make assumptions, and to be sensitive and open to different cultural preferences. At the same time, it is important not to reinforce any negative associations that come up surrounding a death by suicide.

## Language

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The language we use in talking about suicide is important.

The term *committed suicide* brings up a strong negative image. The word *commit* is a verb that means to carry out or perpetrate (e.g., a mistake, crime, or immoral act).

As a result, using the term *committed* can increase emotions like shame, guilt, and anger that suicide loss survivors may already be experiencing.

Funeral directors should consider using neutral language that does not have negative connotations when talking about suicide:

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<b>He died by suicide.</b>		
<b>She took her life.</b>	<i>rather than</i>	He committed suicide.
<b>He ended his life.</b>		

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### Listening and Providing Support

Funeral home directors are among the very first professionals that suicide loss survivors meet after the loss of their loved one. Loss survivors may still be in shock and feeling numb from the death, or they may be reeling with strong and conflicting emotions. Both states are completely normal. How you interact with people at this critical time will become part of their grieving stories. You can be of tremendous help to survivors traumatized by a suicide.

When you listen, it is important to convey compassion and comfort with both your words and your body language. Listen without judging and accept each person where they are. Survivors may not want to talk about what happened with their loved one, and that is okay. Or, they may go into detail, sharing everything including the means by which their loved one took their life, and that is also okay. Your role is to try to listen empathetically without getting too drawn into their emotions or overwhelmed by their grief.

## Suggestions for Interacting with Suicide Loss Survivors

DO	DON'T
» <b>Begin by asking open-ended questions about how the suicide loss survivor is feeling.</b> Example: "How are you doing?"	» Jump right into business.
» <b>Give them the time they need to share.</b>	» Rush through the meeting.
» <b>Be comfortable with silences and the survivor's conversational pace.</b>	» Show impatience with conversational lulls.
<p>» <b>Reflect back what you are hearing to demonstrate your understanding of what they are saying.</b></p> <p>» <i>Example:</i> "I'm hearing you say that you're feeling a lot of anger. That must be very hard for you right now."</p>	<p>» Try to talk them out of their feelings.</p> <p>» <i>Example:</i> "It isn't your fault at all," or "You shouldn't feel that way."</p>
<p>» <b>Validate their feelings.</b></p> <p>» <i>Example:</i> "It must be difficult to feel like you could have prevented the suicide."</p>	<p>» Offer platitudes such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Everything happens for a reason."</li> <li>• "You're never given more than you can handle."</li> <li>• "Time heals all wounds."</li> <li>• "He's in a better place."</li> </ul>
» <b>Be open to hearing details of the death if loved ones need or want to tell their story.</b>	<p>» Ask questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "What happened?"</li> <li>• "How did she die?"</li> </ul>
» <b>If you hear reactions such as asking why, feeling responsible, feeling shame, etc., reassure them that these are common feelings for survivors to experience.</b>	» Be afraid to share what you have learned about suicide and suicide loss when it seems appropriate to do so.
» <b>Communicate compassion through your facial expressions, body language, and eye contact.</b>	» Multitask by answering the phone, emails, or texts while working with a survivor.

## Services Provided by Funeral Directors

How funeral directors interact with survivors of suicide loss can affect their stress levels immediately following the death, and in the days and months to come. Providing the highest-quality services tailored to suicide loss survivors in a sensitive, nonjudgmental manner can lessen feelings of stigma and shame they may be experiencing. Consider the following services when assisting loss survivors.

### Guidance

Those who have lost someone to suicide have, in almost all cases, just endured a terrible shock. Few suicide loss survivors were prepared for the suicide of their loved one. Funeral directors can do loss survivors a great service by carefully preparing them for each stage of the funeral process.

Loss survivors often wonder if they are able to view their loved one. Funeral directors should have an honest conversation with them. If the body is viewable, the funeral director should explain what they will see before the viewing. If the funeral director advises against seeing the whole body, they may suggest that seeing just a hand or foot is a possibility.

Funeral directors should engage the loved ones in a discussion about the details of the visitation, funeral, memorial services, burial, and/or cremation in which they may be participating. If people select cremation and your firm owns a crematory, offer them the opportunity to be present for the cremation. Some suicide loss survivors request to know the time of day that their loved one is being cremated so that they can be in prayer or silence during that time. If this information will not be available, let them know that in advance.

### Roles During the Funeral

- Funeral directors can collaborate with faith leaders by finding ways for people to express their grief through speaking, reading, singing, being a casket or urn bearer, or participating in other roles at the funeral or memorial service.
- However, funeral directors should also be alert to instances when it may do an individual more harm than good to play a particular role. They can help that individual find a way to participate that is not too stressful and does not provoke even more grief for those gathered to mourn.

### Personal Items

- Do not dispose of personal items (e.g., garments, jewelry, footwear) without first asking loved ones if they would like to see or keep them, as these may be precious and irreplaceable to the loved ones.
- Even if it is soiled, provide the option of seeing the item (after you have clearly described it) so that they can decide for themselves whether or not to view or keep it.

### Funeral Memorial Keepsakes

- Creating a memorial keepsake (e.g., fingerprints, a lock of hair, fingerprint jewelry, a memorial urn) is a simple way to enable suicide loss survivors to memorialize their loved one.
- It is helpful if examples of these items are on display in the funeral home, or if the director mentions them as an option.
- Loss survivors often feel regret when they learn about memorial keepsakes when it is too late to make any of their own.

### Resources

It is important that the funeral director be able to offer the appropriate resources for support to suicide loss survivors. Having this information ready when it is needed, and even posted on your website, is incredibly helpful. The resource list at the end of this guide can serve as a starting place for putting together your own local resource list. It is recommended that your list include information from the following categories:

- Local support groups
- Online support community
- Local mental health professionals
- Books and websites

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## Funeral Directors as Community Leaders

Funeral directors used to be called undertakers in the United States because they “undertook” the role of preparing and burying the dead—a role historically played by families. Assuming this role was an act of community leadership, although rarely recognized as such. Today, with community life much more complex, the role of the funeral director requires advanced leadership skills. In the case of suicide, leadership is especially challenging because it requires working collaboratively and sensitively with individuals, families, faith and school leaders, and others to provide the best service to suicide loss survivors while also sending appropriate messages to the community.

### Writing Obituaries

When you assist suicide loss survivors in deciding how to honor their loved one publicly through the newspaper or online print media, you help them determine what is best for them and the community at large.

It is important for the funeral director to discuss with loss survivors whether they would like to include the cause of death in the obituary. Many people prefer not to include this information. However, there are reasons to walk them through the pros and cons.

Being public about the cause of death can end speculation and possible rumors that many find hurtful. It can also provide people with an opportunity to name a suicide prevention charity in honor of their loved one for memorial donations. Finally, by being open about the cause of death, suicide loss survivors can model for the community at large that they are not and will not be shamed by this death. Of course, the choice belongs to the loss survivors, and your job as a support person for them is to not make the decision. Rather, it is to compassionately help them weigh the pros and cons of what they want to say to the community about the death.

Traditionally, suicide deaths were coded in obituaries with language such as “died suddenly” or “died at home” without a cause of death included. Suicide loss survivors who are public about their loved one’s cause of death can be offered language options by the funeral director such as “died after many years of living with mental illness” or “died by suicide.” These phrases do not hide the death by suicide but also—and importantly—do not attach stigma to the death. It is important for safety reasons not to include the means by which the deceased took their life.

### **Planning Services**

Suicide loss survivors are sometimes reluctant to plan a funeral or memorial service. Gathering the community to celebrate their loved one’s life may feel hard to do when they are still struggling to come to terms with the death and how it happened.

Funeral directors are able to assist loss survivors and their broader communities by encouraging the bereaved to at least consider having a service. Here are some suggestions directors can offer:

- Consider a small, private service for close loved ones and friends.
- If culturally appropriate, consider a memorial service at a later date. This delay can give people some time to process what has happened and gather strength.
- Allow the funeral director and a family friend or relative to help plan the service so that the weight of planning is not entirely on the loss survivors’ shoulders.

### **Benefits of Having a Service**

Some suicide loss survivors may be hesitant to have a funeral or memorial service due to the stigma associated with suicide. In these instances, it may be valuable to reiterate that the ritual of attending a funeral service delivers many benefits, including the following:

- Providing a time to honor the person’s life and say good-bye
- Providing social support for the loss survivors and their friends
- Providing a safe haven for embracing and expressing emotions

### Collaborating with Schools

Because of the difficult emotions surrounding youth suicide, funerals of children and adolescents must be planned with special care. It is here that the role of the funeral director as a community leader is most evident. Funeral directors working collaboratively with school leaders can help everyone navigate the challenges that emerge after a youth suicide.

Following are some suggestions:

- Encourage suicide loss survivors to hold the funeral or memorial service off school grounds and outside of school hours, if possible. The school should instead focus on maintaining its regular schedule, structure, and routine. Using a room or an area of the school for a funeral service can inextricably connect that space to the death, making it difficult for students to return there for regular classes or activities.
- If the service is held during school hours, discourage the school from closing for the day or dismissing early. Students and staff should be permitted to attend the service on an individual basis.
- Suggest to the school that students and parents be encouraged to attend visitation hours and the funeral together.
- Encourage the school to make counseling services available to students and faculty at the school and also to have counselors available at the funeral.
- Recommend materials that the school can suggest to parents or caregivers to help students deal with the grieving process. Examples include:
  - » [Children, Teens, and Suicide Loss](#)
  - » [When a Child's Friend Dies by Suicide](#)
  - » [Preparing Your Child to Attend the Funeral of a Friend](#)

For more information about working with schools in the aftermath of a suicide, see [After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools](#).

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## Support for Funeral Directors

The effects of suicide ripple through society, including those closest to the deceased and those tending to its aftermath. This ripple effect includes funeral directors.

Given the profound nature of suicide and the complex bereavement that often occurs, suicide loss survivors may direct anger and blame at those who work in funeral services. A death by suicide may take an emotional toll not only on loss survivors but also on funeral directors and staff. This toll can add to stress, which if not addressed, may lead to compassion fatigue and burnout. So, it is important for those providing funeral services to take good care of themselves so that they can remain empathetic, supportive, and effective even when serving individuals affected by suicide.

It can be very helpful to create a self-care plan for yourself to have ready when you need it. Consider making a list of the self-care actions and support resources that would work for you so that you won't need to figure them out in moments of stress. Here are some suggestions for managing stress and difficult emotions:

- Talk with your close colleagues about your work, particularly stressful situations you encounter.
- Consider membership in state and national professional associations. These organizations can provide helpful benefits, such as:
  - » Employee assistance programs that can provide mental health referrals and even a limited number of counseling sessions
  - » Webinars and modules on topics such as stress reduction
  - » Opportunities for professional development that can build confidence and enhance self-esteem
- Practice good health habits:
  - » Eat healthy
  - » Exercise regularly
  - » Get enough sleep
  - » Make time for non-work activities that bring you joy
  - » Cultivate and nurture non-work relationships
  - » Carefully moderate use of alcohol and other drugs
- Consider seeking mental health counseling when stress or other difficult emotions become hard to manage.
- Think about the obstacles that are keeping you from practicing good self-care and practical ways you can overcome them in order to incorporate some of the suggestions above.

Remember: as a funeral director you play a critical role in helping suicide loss survivors begin the grieving and healing process. Taking care of yourself is the first step in caring for others.

Thank you again for reading this guide and learning about the needs of suicide loss survivors. Your role as the funeral director in helping those bereaved by a suicide loss can make a positive difference in their well-being.

***Additional copies of this guide are available online at <http://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/supporting-survivors-suicide-loss-guide-funeral-directors-2nd-ed>***

## Resources List

Here are some resources that you may find useful. You can use this list to create your own list of local and national resources for yourself and the people you serve.

### Resources for Funeral Directors

#### National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA)

[www.nfda.org](http://www.nfda.org)

NFDA supports funeral professionals by providing the information, educational resources, tools to manage businesses, and professional community they need to serve families, run sustainable businesses, and become pillars in their communities. Resources for consumers are available through NFDA's consumer initiative, Remembering A Life ([RememberingALife.com](http://RememberingALife.com)).

#### After a Suicide: Recommendations for Religious Services and Other Public Memorial Observances

<http://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/after-suicide-recommendations-religious-services-and-other-public-memorial>

This guide provides information for community and faith leaders who plan memorial observances and provide support for individuals after the loss of a loved one to suicide.

### Crisis Lines

#### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

The Lifeline is a 24-hour, toll-free, confidential phone line for people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress and those supporting them. An online chat option is available at

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/>

#### Crisis Text Line

<https://www.crisistextline.org/>

Crisis Text Line is a 24-hour, toll-free, confidential text message service for people in crisis. Text HOME to 741741 in the United States.

### Key Suicide Prevention Organizations with Resources for Survivors

#### American Association of Suicidology (AAS)

[www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)

AAS addresses many aspects of suicide prevention, intervention, and survivor support. Its website includes the following:

- Section for suicide loss survivors:

<https://suicidology.org/resources/suicide-loss-survivors/>

- Directory of support groups: <https://suicidology.org/resources/support-groups/>
- Section for clinicians who have lost a patient and/or family member to suicide: <http://cliniciansurvivor.org/>

Also available from AAS in English and Spanish is *SOS: A Handbook for Survivors of Suicide* (scroll down the page): <https://suicidology.org/resources/suicide-loss-survivors/>

### **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)**

[www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)

AFSP provides services and materials related to suicide prevention and coping with suicide.

- Section for suicide loss survivors, with information and a directory of support groups: <http://www.afsp.org/survivingsuicideloss>
- A survivor outreach program: <https://afsp.org/healing-conversations>
- Trainings for support group facilitators and for clinicians working with suicide loss survivors: <https://afsp.org/get-training>

### **Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE)**

[www.save.org](http://www.save.org)

SAVE focuses on public awareness and education about suicide and suicide prevention. Its website has a section for suicide loss survivors that contains information sheets, personal stories, and a directory of support groups: <https://www.save.org/what-we-do/grief-support/>

### **Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC)**

[www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org)

SPRC provides information, training, and technical assistance related to suicide and suicide prevention. Its website has resources for survivors of suicide loss: <http://www.sprc.org/resources-programs?type=All&populations=155&settings=All&problem=All&planning=All&strategies=All&state=All>

## **Organizations and Websites for Survivors**

### **Alliance of Hope for Survivors**

<https://allianceofhope.org>

Alliance of Hope for Survivors provides information, personal stories from survivors, a blog, and a community forum. Through the forum, survivors can contact others with similar losses, share their stories, and discuss healing from a loss by suicide. The forum operates as a 24/7 support group supervised by a mental health clinician and moderated by trained loss survivors.

**Friends for Survival**

<https://friendsforsurvival.org/>

Friends for Survival runs the Suicide Loss Helpline (1-800-646-7322) and offers many informational resources for survivors of suicide loss and professionals who work with them, including a monthly newsletter. It has also published the guide *Pathways to Purpose and Hope*, which provides information on building a community-based suicide survivor support program.

**Parents of Suicides and Friends and Families of Suicides (POS-FFOS)**

<http://www.pos-ffos.com>

POS-FFOS provides a public message board called Suicide Grief Support Forum, email support groups for parents and siblings, and memorial websites.

**Suicide: Finding Hope**

<http://www.suicidefindinghope.com>

Suicide: Finding Hope provides information for suicide loss survivors and suicide attempt survivors.

**The Dougy Center**

<https://www.dougy.org/>

The Dougy Center provides grief resources for children, teens, and adults; a toolkit for schools and community organizations; and training to individuals and organizations that assist children in grieving a death from any cause, including suicide.

**TAPS**

<https://www.taps.org>

TAPS offers help to anyone who is grieving the death of a military loved one. Its website includes a section for suicide loss survivors that provides information on resources, programs, and events: <https://www.taps.org/suicide>

## Books

**After Suicide Loss: Coping with Your Grief, 2nd Edition**

Jack Jordan and Bob Baugher, Caring People Press, 2016

This handbook is organized chronologically to follow the days, weeks, and months after a suicide loss. It includes information about psychiatric disorders, when to seek professional help, and practical strategies for coping and healing.

**Bruised and Wounded: Struggling to Understand Suicide**

Ronald Rolheiser, Paraclete Press, 2018

With chapters on "Removing the Taboo," "Despair as Weakness Rather than Sin," "Reclaiming the Memory of Our Loved One," and "The Pain of the Ones Left Behind," this book offers hope and a new way of understanding death by suicide.

**Myths about Suicide**

Thomas Joiner, Harvard University Press, 2011

This book dismantles many myths to present an accurate understanding of suicide. Drawing on clinical cases, media reports, literary works, and scientific studies, Joiner addresses moralistic and psychotherapeutic clichés.

**No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One**

Carla Fine, Main Street Books, 2011

In this book, Carla Fine speaks frankly about the overwhelming feelings of confusion, guilt, shame, anger, and loneliness that are shared by survivors. She draws on her own experience and on conversations with many other survivors, as well as counselors and mental health professionals.

**The Suicide Funeral (or Memorial Service): Honoring Their Memory, Comforting Their Survivors**

Melinda Moore and Daniel A. Roberts, Resource Publications, 2017

This book was written to assist clergy, chaplains, and other faith leaders as they develop sermons and homilies for a funeral service. A wide range of faiths and denominations are represented in the sermons, services, and perspectives.

**Supporting Children after a Suicide Loss: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers**

Sarah S. Montgomery and Susan M. Coale, Chesapeake Life Center, 2015

This book offers practical suggestions on how to talk with children of all ages about suicide loss, as well as guidance for schools on supporting grieving children in a school setting. All profits go to a nonprofit that supports grieving children and families.

**Voices of Healing and Hope: Conversations on Grief after Suicide**

Iris Bolton, Bolton Press Atlanta, 2017

According to an informal survey of family members impacted by suicide, eight issues were identified to be among the most difficult: why, guilt, shame, anger, pain, fear, depression, and faith. Chapters in the book and on the DVD deal with these and other areas.

**Why People Die by Suicide**

Thomas E. Joiner, Harvard University Press, 2005

This resource explains what we know about what causes suicide, and what can be done to help prevent it.

**A Winding Road: A Handbook for Those Supporting the Suicide Bereaved**

Michelle Linn-Gust and John Peters, Chellehead Works, 2010

This book discusses issues such as why suicide happens, helping children cope, and how culture and religion take a role in how suicide and grief are viewed. The book helps people who are supporting the bereaved understand the winding road so that they can be there for the bereaved.

