



Surviving After Suicide

Summer Newsletter

June, 2019 Edition

Falls Park
Farmer's
Market
Shelter



Sunday,
June 9, 2019
8:30 am -
12:00 pm

Registration: 8:30am

Walk/Run: 9:00am

Remembrance Ceremony following the Walk/Run

The 2019 Step Forward to Prevent Suicide Walk in Sioux Falls is fast approaching, but there's still plenty of time to get lined up to participate!

The Step Forward to Prevent Suicide events are held in South Dakota for suicide awareness and prevention. As our communities and state continue to experience the loss of family and friends to suicide, the Step Forward to Prevent Suicide event promotes hope and healing for all that participate. There is hope through raising awareness about suicide and funding prevention programs. The dates are Sunday, June 9 in Sioux Falls, and Saturday, August 3 in Yankton at Riverside Park.



Step Forward offers a 1.5 mile walk, 5K fun run and a remembrance ceremony. The event raises awareness and support for the Helpline Center's local suicide prevention services and survivor support programs. 100% of proceeds stay local. To be a part of this important, healing event, visit <http://bit.ly/2019SFWalk> or contact walk coordinator Janet Harvey by calling 211 or by email at events@helplinecenter.org.





Please join us for a survivor get-together in Sertoma Park (under the large shelter) on Tuesday, June 18th at 5pm.

Each individual or family is asked to bring their evening meal or snack with them, and also lawn chairs or picnic blankets. Helpline will provide water, lemonade, and dessert.

This is a family-friendly event and children are welcome. Pets are also welcome if they

are leashed (per city ordinance) and socialized to other pets and humans.

There will be activities such as corn hole (bean bags), horseshoes, ladder ball, croquet, etc. **NOTE:** If you own any outdoor or "lawn" games that you could bring for the evening, we would really appreciate it. Please contact Jennie at griefsupport@helplinecenter.org if you have any of these or other items that you could bring or if you have any questions.

Stay as long as you like (or until 9pm, whichever comes first. If you choose not to play any games – *that's ok!* You're welcome to hang out and visit with other survivors. RSVP's are encouraged, but not required.

Stay in the know about upcoming survivor events and news by texting "mysupport" to 898211. You may opt out at any time simply by texting "STOP" to 898211.

Surviving After Suicide Monthly Support Group First Thursday of Every Month

Next Meeting: Thursday, June 6th 7:00–8:30pm

The Surviving After Suicide Support Group is held at the Helpline Center in an atmosphere that is warm, friendly, and nonjudgmental. Anyone who has lost a family member or friend is invited to attend. We are here to support you whether your loss is recent or even years ago.

Feelings shared are kept confidential and discussed only within the confines of the group meeting. Thus, our SAS support groups provide a comfortable, non-threatening setting to share our experiences and thoughts. Questions are encouraged to help in coping with the grieving process and with the feelings that are particularly intense in the aftermath of suicide. As there is a different group dynamic each month, we

encourage you to attend more than one meeting to determine if support group is helpful to you. There is no fee and no registration is required. Monthly meetings are held on the first Thursday of each month, but **please note** that due to the July 4th holiday, the July support group meeting will be held on Thursday, July 11th.



Call for Art!

Join us in prevention and healing by bringing your artistic side to life! September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness month. Once again, Rehfeld's Art Gallery in Sioux Falls has graciously offered to host the Helpline Center's second biennial Hope and Healing Art Show in honor of the show in their gallery. The show will be held on Friday, September 6, 2019.

We would like to invite anyone who has been touched by suicide, whether by the loss of a loved one or having a lived experience, to submit their artwork.

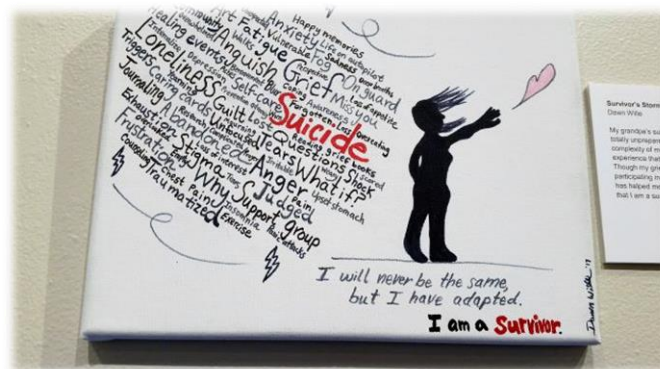
All visual art mediums are welcome. Artists must include an artist statement to accompany their work which details how suicide has touched their life.

Please submit your work to Sheri Nelson at the Helpline Center no later than Monday, August 12, 2019. You may contact Sheri at (605) 274-1406 or sheri@helplinecenter.org for more information.



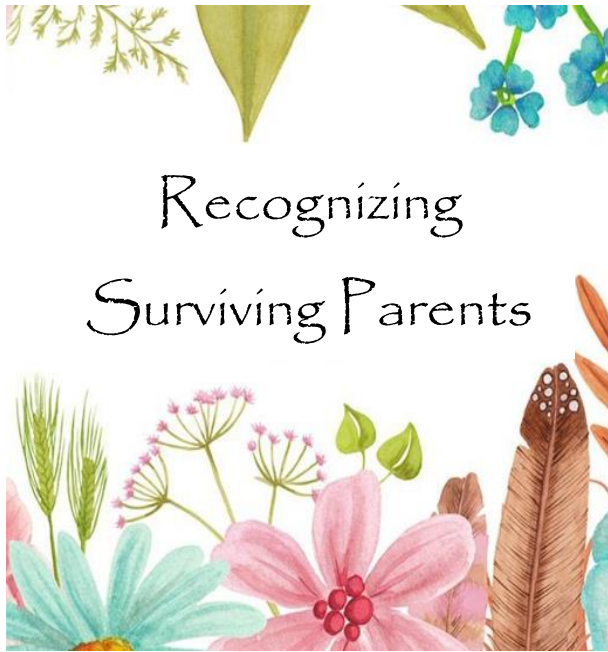
Vonna Marcus with her untitled submission in the 2017 show.

Dawn Wille displayed her work, "Survivor's Storm" at the 2017 inaugural show.



The Helpline Center offers children's and teen grief groups for those who have been impacted by suicide loss. We are looking at starting an upcoming group. If you would like to inquire or register for this group, please call Jennie Marks at 339-4357 or email her at griefsupport@helplinecenter.org.





Mother's Day has just passed and Father's Day is not far behind. These are great holidays for our society to celebrate parenthood, and for children to show their gratitude to their parents. And yet, these holidays can be extremely difficult times for parents who have lost their children to suicide. The loss of a child violates the natural order we understand—that we should be buried by our children, not the other way around.

A surviving mom might feel that she wants to find a place to hide from the rest of the world on Mother's Day. She doesn't want to feel like an unwelcome intrusion to all those around her eagerly anticipating what, to them, is a happy, special occasion. A surviving dad finds friends and co-workers may avoid talking about Father's Day or their own plans, probably because they don't know what to say. Losing a child to suicide is one of the most

painful, life-changing experiences for so many. They have endured the pain in silence and searched for answers that may never come.

The loss of a child by suicide does not mean that mothers and fathers are no longer parents if they've lost their only child, or only parents to their remaining children. As Dr. Alan Wolfelt, a noted grief educator and author says, "*Death ends a life, not a relationship.*" Whatever has happened to that life, the love lives on and parents have the right to acknowledge that they did the very best they could before the suicide and continue to love that child following their death.

It can be helpful to focus on Mother's and Father's Days that were filled with special memories. Other parents choose to focus on mental images of their child as they were as little ones and think about those pleasant bygone days as they observe those occasions.

One of the biggest worries that survivor parents have is that their children will be forgotten. It's important that we acknowledge those lives and support those parents who may be feeling their loss especially deeply on those days.

At Helpline, we acknowledge the sacrifices you made for your child. We appreciate the beautiful lives you created and know that they are all unique and unforgotten. Celebrate those lives, and yours, and know that we are here for you now and always as you continue your healing.





Seeking Online Suicide Grief Support

Today a wide range of websites, forums, Facebook pages, and the like exist for survivors. While they may be of tremendous value to those who are seeking to connect with other survivors, there are also some factors that need to be considered when going online to find support.

Some positive aspects of online grief support may include:

- **Access is convenient** and you can reach out for support from any device, at any time. Chances are, someone somewhere is online at the same time as you, even when everyone physically around you may be unavailable.
- **It can be an anonymous outlet** for expressing your feelings and opinions. It can be hard to openly talk about your feelings with family and friends, especially in communities where it seems like “everyone knows everyone.” You may want the freedom to voice your true feelings online with a group of people who might not know you in person but who have all experienced a loss by suicide. Talking about your feelings is an important part of the healing process, and online forums can be a good avenue for that.
- **Sites dedicated to specifically to suicide can be a great source of empathy and support** for the unique grief that comes with surviving a suicide. People most capable of empathy are those who are going through the same thing and can therefore understand you best; they often know what helps and what can provide emotional support when you need it most. Even people closest to you can be incapable of understanding the depth of your pain, but it’s very good to find those who know and understand what you’ve experienced.
- **This may be a safe way to express your grievances** about friends and family members who may have responded to you in hurtful ways, no matter how unintentional. While you might not wish to confront them with all of the other feelings you’re dealing with, talking about this and sharing your emotions with a group is a great way of getting it off your chest.
- **The internet allows access to a huge amount of information** and may be a great way to educate yourself on suicide and grief issues. There is so much to learn about grief, especially suicide grief. Teaching websites with valid information can help you understand what to expect and it may help you to normalize your grief in such a way that you no longer feel isolated or set apart from others. Understanding why you’re feeling what you’re feeling can go a long way in being able to tolerate it.



Drawbacks of online grief support may be:

- **Trolling** is nothing new in the online world, and grief sites are not immune to this. The hazard here is that you are emotionally fragile already when you visit the site and you don't need to be further hurt by being bullied, treated with disrespect, or victimized in any other way.
- **Information provided may be unreliable and even harmful.** "It must be true – I read it on the internet" is a popular humorous meme, but point out the reality that sometimes it's the wild, wild, west out there and others who may be misinformed may have the loudest voices.
- **Watching the suffering of others** can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can be helpful to see that you are not alone and that there are others who are going through the similar experiences. On the other hand, it can be painful to see others suffer. If you spend too much time on suicide grief sites alone, it may begin to seem as if the whole world is in mourning and there is nothing but suicide loss all around you. Instead of finding a way out, you might get dragged even deeper in.
- **It can be hard to develop close personal friendships** because other survivors you meet may be geographically widespread. Online survivors come from all over the place and it might be difficult to find someone who would live near enough to meet, if that's what you truly wish to do.
- **You should avoid adopting a new identity as a griever.** While many people post about experiences that helped them deal with their grief, there are also those who end up developing and building their new identity based on grieving. Some people reject all attempts of help that could lead to transformation of their pain and instead adopt grief as a lifestyle.



The Helpline Center neither endorses nor discourages any specific online grief sites. This article is solely for the purpose of helping survivors balance their options when exploring a different type of support alternative.

Some tips on dealing with the downside:

- **Resist the temptation to argue and avoid power-plays.** You are not there to get hurt or to hurt others. You are there to give and receive help. If anyone makes that hard for you, simply block them and do not engage in clashes that lead nowhere and can only make everyone feel uncomfortable. Don't get mired down in negativity.



- **When considering advice found online**, be sure and ask yourself, “Who is saying this, who do they represent, and what do they base their statements upon?” Trust your gut – once again, if it sounds too good to be true it probably is. Give more weight to evidence-based suggestions and less weight to individual advice that seems to contradict conventional wisdom.
- **It can be hard to develop close personal friendships**, but this is not necessarily a bad thing. Especially in the initial stages of suicide grief, you might be too wounded and weak to be able to expend the energy forming a new friendship may require. Getting involved but keeping people at arm’s length might be the best way to move forward until you’re ready for more involvement.
- **Developing the identity of a griever** is not uncommon in cases of complicated grief. Complicated grief can happen when a problem isn’t just suicide loss, for instance, but also unresolved issues in the relationship with the deceased that it may be now difficult to repair. You might feel guilty and unable to forgive yourself for what you think you did wrong or feel anger because the person who died left you. If this is going on for years with no improvement, counseling is probably a good idea. Try to understand that staying in this state indefinitely and using a support group to build your new identity around your grief can have a negative effect on your mental health and close relationships.

Surviving After Suicide 10-Week Class

It's not too early to register for the fall Surviving After Suicide Class, which begins on **Tuesday, September 10th, 2019**. The class is held for 10 consecutive Tuesdays at the Helpline Center from 7:00 p.m. until 8:30 p.m. **Registration is required** and we ask that you commit to attending all of the 10 sessions. The supportive mourning process is guided by participant needs and a handbook that addresses important topics and issues after a suicide loss. It includes straightforward information and practical strategies for coping and healing. The course and related materials are free of charge to all participants. To register, visit <http://bit.ly/SASClass> or call the Helpline Center at 605-339-4357 or 211 and ask for Jennie or you may email her at griefsupport@helplinecenter.org.



If you or a loved one is struggling with thoughts of suicide, please contact the Helpline Center 24/7 at 1-800-273-8255. A caring, nonjudgmental specialist will be happy to listen and provide help, hope, and





A member of our survivor community, Kaya Moninger, shares how the suicide of her father has changed her life. Kaya found Helpline soon after her father's death on August 18, 2017.

What was your dad like?

My dad was a very hard worker and so he was always working. I suppose when you have a wife and four kids, you work all day and night to support them so they don't ever go without. I know he tried to be a good dad, but I know he was stressed most of the time. I always tried to make him proud, even though he never really said it. Our relationship wasn't the best, but I was trying to make it better. Then he took his life and mine fell apart.

What emotions surprised you the most?

Well, at first it was a total shock. My (maternal) grandfather had died 10 days prior to that and the family was mourning his loss. I was still grieving for my grandfather and then my dad died, which was so complicated. I tried to stay away from any feelings of anger about my dad taking his own life. He was dead, so I put him on a pedestal. Later, I had to deal with the anger that his suicide had caused for me.

How did you find Helpline, and what led you here?

I wasn't actually looking for resources for myself. I tend to be the "fixer" in the family and was online looking for help for my mother and for my three brothers. Different members of the family did not want to admit that Dad had killed himself because that might mean that he was mentally ill. As I looked for information and support for my family, I came to realize that there were things that could help me, too.

I attended the 10-week class and was able to work through my grief; figuring out how to sort through all of my emotions and how to put things in perspective and in order. I was really nervous at first and there were class times that I didn't want to go, but I am glad that I did. It made me a stronger person.

I also like the monthly support groups. The people there are like family and I know I can open up without feeling ashamed. There are long-term survivors who attend support group who have been so helpful to me and have supported me. I like my new family.

Even calling 211 has been helpful. I called one day when I knew I couldn't handle my grief alone anymore and they directed me to a therapist that I still see monthly. This experience has changed me and I wouldn't have been able to survive it if it wasn't for the Helpline Center.

Have you made peace with the "why"?

It depends on the day. Some days it's easier than others. I'm still working on that.

Approaching two years since your dad's suicide, what has changed for you?

I've stopped trying to fix things for everyone else as much as I did. I'm taking more time for me and not really worrying about everyone else.

What things do you hope for in the future?



I want to break the stigma of mental illness and talk about it to the point that my nieces and nephews don't have to stay quiet about it if they have struggles. Now that all the firsts have passed, I hope to be the friend that someone new is going to need.

