

# Surviving After Suicide



*A supportive and informational  
newsletter for those impacted by the  
suicide of a loved one.*

March, 2020



## The Need to Tell Your Story by Jennie Marks

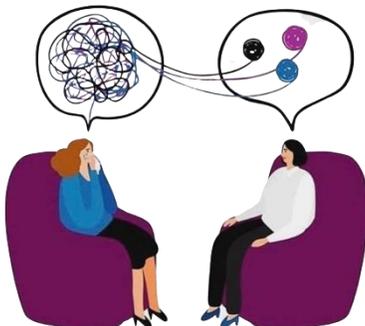
**“A mourner is perforce a person with a story.  
The pity is how rarely it gets told.”**

**- Christian McEwan**

There is a difference between grief and mourning. Grief is all the natural feelings we feel and is a natural response we have after any life loss. Mourning is the expression of those internal feelings, whether through tears, a display of mementos for a lost loved one, through music, or really any expression of loss that is visible to someone other than the mourner.

Think of grief as *internal* and residing only within you and mourning as the *external* expression of that grief. How well we mourn is key to how well we cope and are able to carry on after a suicide loss. One aspect of mourning is in the telling of your story.

Telling our stories is an exceptionally therapeutic way of mourning a loss. The risk of not telling our stories is that they stay bottled up inside and the grief may eventually come out in unhealthy or destructive ways. Sharing your personal narrative may also give you clarity to feelings that have lurked, unnamed, in the back of your mind. Explaining something to others often puts a name to those feelings and “untangles” the confusion and chaos of grief.



What is the story?  
That may vary greatly from one survivor to the next. It may be a retelling of how your loved one struggled through their life. It may be about all of the things you did to help them with those struggles.

The story may be your memories of a child’s first years or of the courtship and marriage you shared with a spouse. Your story may even include details of what you were doing the day that you lost them and any impressions or feelings you had when you found that they had taken their own life.

Important aspects of that story may also include graphic details of the suicide act itself or physical descriptions of the person you lost immediately following their death. While it may certainly be valuable to your healing to recount those details, care must be taken that the person you share them with is not traumatized by them. People of a sensitive nature are not good candidates for this, nor is a grief support group a good venue. Others who have lost someone to suicide or have experienced the traumatic death of any friend or family member may be subjected to a form of secondary trauma by visualizing graphic and upsetting details.

For the more traumatic details of one’s story, it’s important to find a listener who is willing to listen and *really listens* to your story. Also, it should be someone who has enough resilience to hear whatever your reality of that event might be without any emotional harm to themselves. That person may be a trusted friend, your counselor, or a pastor or religious leader. Bereavement professionals at Helpline are also available and willing to listen and can be reached by dialing 211.

One thing to realize is that once a story is told, the urge to tell it again may rise up again in the future. That’s perfectly normal, and as you experience the release of sharing your narrative, you’ll find that the need will lessen and become less frequent over time.

Telling your story in whatever form that takes for you is an avenue to develop integration and acceptance and helps convert grieving to mourning in a therapeutic manner.



The Critical Importance of Seeking Support:

## Learning from the Geese

With permission by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., C.T.

If there is ever a time in life when we need others to support and nurture us, it's when someone we love dies through suicide. In many ways, "grief work" is the most difficult work we will ever do. And hard work is less burdensome when others lend a hand.

Sharing the devastation that results from the suicide of someone precious won't make the hurt go away, but it does make it more bearable. In reflecting on this need to support each other following a suicide, we might be well served to observe the five natural instincts for support and companionship demonstrated by wild geese during migration.

**Observation One:** When the flock is on a journey, the flapping of the wings of each individual goose results in an uplift for the bird that follows. By flying in a "V" formation, the entire flock achieves 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.

**Implication:** When we are grieving the suicide death of someone loved, we too are on a journey. Others who are grieving are on a similar journey, and we can all be uplifted by journeying together. No, you need not travel alone, nor should you try!

**Observation Two:** Whenever a goose falls out of formation, it experiences the drag and resistance of trying to fly alone. The goose then realizes it needs to get back into formation to take advantage of the collective lifting power of the flock.

**Implication:** Just as geese are well served to stay in formation with those on a similar journey, we as humans are better off if we accept the lifting power of those who go before us. We are grace-filled when we open ourselves to the support of our fellow travelers on the suicide grief journey.

**Observation Three:** If any one goose has a problem, two other geese will always drop out of formation and follow the wayward goose to help support and protect it. They stay present to the goose that has special needs until it is able to continue the journey on its own.

**Implication:** If we humans can learn from the wisdom of geese; we will always companion each other in difficult times. Receiving help from others strengthens the bonds of compassion and love that help us survive when we are devastated by suicide loss.

**Observation Four:** When the goose leading the flock gets tired and overwhelmed, it rotates back into the formation, and another goose flies at the point position.

**Implication:** No one person on a suicide grief journey can lead the way all the time. At times, it is wise to acknowledge that you are tired and need others to care for you and protect you from the headwinds.

**Observation Five:** While flying in formation, the geese honk to each other as a form of encouragement and mutual support.

**Implication:** There are times in life when we all need encouragement from those around us to remind us of our interconnectedness. We must allow ourselves to rely on each other, otherwise, we end up feeling totally alone and completely isolated as we experience the grief of a suicide in our lives.

### Where to Turn for Help

"There is strength in numbers," one saying goes. Another echoes, "United we stand, divided we fall." This is a time in your life when you need to let other people in. You needn't let everyone in all the time, but I encourage you to make room for those you trust the most. Carefully chosen friends and family members with whom you feel safe can often be at the center of your support system.

Seek out people who encourage you to be yourself and who acknowledge your many thoughts and feelings. Open your broken heart a little at a time to those people in your life who are compassionate and loving listeners. In an ideal world, this is your family and friends. If this is not true for you, my hope is that you will seek out other sources of support.

Perhaps it is helpful to remember that, by definition, mourning means "the shared response to loss." Help comes in different forms for different people. Find the sources of support that work best for you and then make use of them.





The following reviews are for two books that are among those available to borrow at no charge from the Helpline Center's grief support library. For more information, contact Jennie Marks via email at [griefsupport@helplinecenter.org](mailto:griefsupport@helplinecenter.org) or by calling (605) 274-1416.

### ***The Gift of Second: healing from the impact of suicide***

Brandy Lidbeck  
October, 2016 by Gift Pub

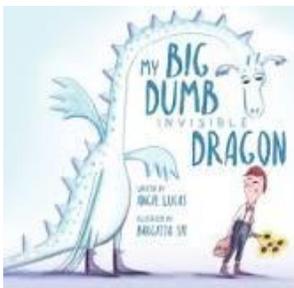


From the publisher:

Brandy Lidbeck is a licensed marriage and family therapist and also a two-time survivor of suicide loss. She is the founder of <http://thegiftofsecond.com/>, a website created for suicide loss survivors. In *The Gift of Second*, the author, Brandy Lidbeck, superbly discusses the feelings, thoughts, resources, and answers for a survivor of suicide. This book is a wonderful companion to have as it contains a multitude of resources. Mrs. Lidbeck offers ideas to help with the healing after a suicide not only through her own personal experience, but from the advice of other survivors.

### ***My Big Dumb Invisible Dragon***

Angie Lucas & Birgitta Sif  
July, 2019



When a young boy loses his mother, an invisible dragon swoops in and perches on top of his head. A most unwelcome guest, the dragon follows him to school, sleeps on his chest at night (making it hard for him to breathe), and even crashes his birthday party. As the boy comes to terms with his mother's death, however, his relationship with the dragon changes in surprising ways. This is a story for children dealing with loss, particularly the death of a parent. Although grief is a heavy topic, Angie Lucas and Birgitta Sif handle it deftly for children, using the metaphor of the dragon, a light tone, and touches of humor. The book shows that healing takes time and that it's OK to experience a wide range of emotions as you process a really big loss.

Recommended for children 4 – 8 years.

**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 is always  
there to listen and provide help and hope.**



## Surviving After Suicide Monthly Support Group

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, from 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.



Do you know someone who is also a survivor of suicide? They may certainly benefit by the resources that Helpline has available. Whether it's a friend, co-worker, member of your church, or a neighbor, please ask them if you may contact Helpline on their behalf to connect them with those resources. Either you or your fellow survivor may request services at [www.helplinecenter.org/survivorreferral](http://www.helplinecenter.org/survivorreferral)

## New Support Class in April

Registration is now open for the April Surviving After Suicide support class, which begins on **Tuesday, April 7th**. 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, call the Helpline Center at 605-339-4357 or 211 and ask for Jennie or email her at [griefsupport@helplinecenter.org](mailto:griefsupport@helplinecenter.org).



**SAVE THE DATES!**  
**2020 Step Forward Events**

**SF Team Captain Kick-Off Day**  
**Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup>**  
**5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.**  
**Helpline Center**

**Sioux Falls Step Forward Walk**  
**Sunday, June 14**  
**8:00 registration, 9:00 walk/run**  
**Farmer's Market Shelter**  
**Falls Park**

**Yankton Step Forward Walk**  
**Saturday, August 1**  
**8:30 registration, 9:00 walk**  
**Riverside Park**

