

Surviving After Suicide



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

November 2020



Helpline Observes International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day November 21, 2020

When seemingly happy, travel-infatuated CJ Twomey violently ended his own life at age 20, his family was plunged into unrelenting grief and guilt. In a moment of desperate inspiration, his mother Hallie put out an open call on Facebook, looking only for a handful of travelers who might help fulfill her son's wish to see the world by scattering some of his ashes in a place of beauty or special meaning.

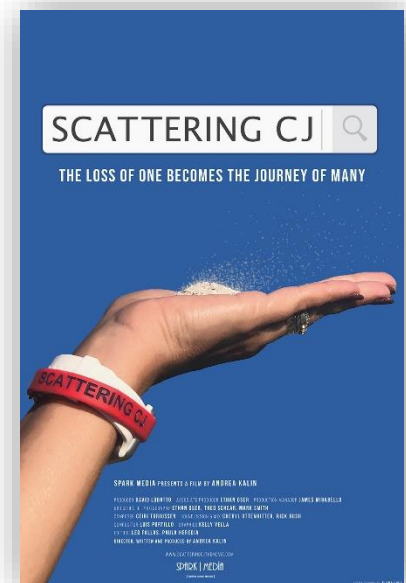
Twenty-one thousand strangers liked the Facebook page, and one thousand volunteers have since taken CJ to over one hundred countries. While crisscrossing the globe, his ashes and his family's story have given rise to a social media phenomenon — a worldwide community — that has congregated in solidarity and empathy in dealing with a still heavily stigmatized and misunderstood form of mental illness.



In honor of International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day, Helpline will be hosting a free online screening of 'Scattering CJ' on **Saturday, November 21, 2020 at 2:00 p.m.** The film will be presented on Zoom, followed by a discussion forum for viewers who wish to discuss the topics addressed in the documentary and give and receive mutual support.

To join us for this moving portrayal of this family's grief and healing, please register at <https://bit.ly/scatteringcj>

As you register, there is an opportunity to enter your loved one's name and instructions on submitting their photo, if you choose to do so. We plan on running a video of those names and photos both before and after the program. Also, there is a limited number of cardinal "pocket charms" that we have available to those who register. They will be given out on a first-come, first-served basis.



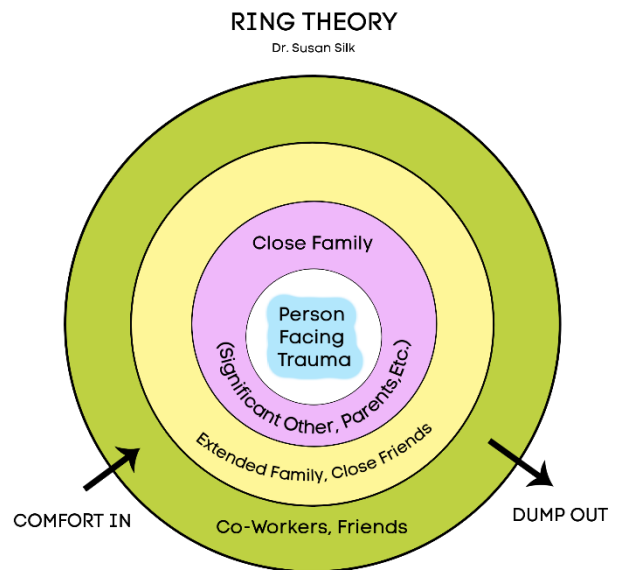
Ring Theory Helps Us Bring Comfort In ... and “Dump” Our Own Stuff Out

By Elana Premack Sandler, L.C.S.W., M.P.H.
Reprinted, with permission, from Psychology Today, May, 2017

A few years ago, psychologist Susan Silk and her friend Barry Goldman wrote about a concept they called the “Ring Theory.” It’s a theory to help yourself know what to do in a crisis. If the crisis is happening to you, you’re in the center of the ring. If the crisis is not happening to you, you’re in one of the outer circles.

Here are the basic tenets, paraphrased from Silk and Goodman:

- 1) Draw a circle. In this circle, write the name of the person at the center of the crisis.
- 2) Now draw a larger circle around the first one. In this ring, put the name of the person next closest to the crisis.
- 3) In each larger ring, put the next closest people. As Silk and Goodman state, “Parents and children before more distant relatives. Intimate friends in smaller rings, less intimate friends in larger ones. . . . When you are done, you have a Kvetching* Order.”



Here are the rules:

The person in the center ring can say anything she wants to anyone, anywhere. She can kvetch and complain and whine and moan and curse the heavens and say, "Life is unfair," and, "Why me?" That's the one payoff for being in the center ring. Everyone else can say those things too, but only to people in larger rings. When you are talking to a person in a ring smaller than yours, someone closer to the center of the crisis, the goal is to *help*.

Listening is often more helpful than talking. But if you're going to open your mouth, first ask yourself if what you are about to say is likely to provide comfort and support. If it isn't, don't say it. Don't, for example, give advice. People who are suffering from trauma don't need advice. They need comfort and support. So say, "I'm sorry," or, "This must really be hard for you," or, "Can I bring you a pot roast?" Don't say, "You should hear what happened to me," or, "Here's what I would do if I were you." And don't say, "This is really bringing me down." If you want to scream or cry or complain, if you want to tell someone how shocked you are or how icky you feel, or whine about how it reminds you of all the terrible things that have happened to you lately, that's fine. It's a perfectly normal response. Just do it to someone in a bigger ring.

In the time since I originally read their piece, I have thought of this theory many, many times. Where I am in the circle? Given that position, what should I say, or what can I hope would be said to me? Who are people in the circle I could comfort? Who can I “dump” to?



*Kvetching (complaining) is an important tool for managing stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as for strengthening bonds between people and increasing empathy. It's also delicate instrument that needs careful handling. The definition of kvetch, from the Yiddish *kvetshn*, means to squeeze, pinch or press. In modern, American terms, think of it as the everyday complaining over issues both large and small that we all engage in almost unconsciously. It's about whatever it is that we have to get off our chest.



And I've wanted to come up with a list of practical things that can be done for someone in crisis. Here's a start:

1. Bring a meal.
2. Bring a cup of coffee, tea, or a chocolate bar.
3. Offer to go for a walk.
4. Offer to watch/spend time with kids, older parents, or pets.
5. Come over just to wash dishes or do a load of laundry.
6. Bring by a favorite CD or movie.
7. If going in person seems like too much, send a note by mail.

What do you have to add to that list?
What's been helpful for you or a loved one?
Where are you in the circle now?



Elana Premack Sandler, L.C.S.W., M.P.H., approaches health issues from a social perspective, viewing elements of the social environment as crucial factors in promoting individual health and well-being. Elana worked with the national Suicide Prevention Resource Center, providing consultation to organizations on using evidence-based interventions and best practices for developing suicide prevention programs. Elana earned a Master of Social Work and a Master of Public Health at Boston University and is faculty with Simmons School of Social Work.

She is author of the blog, [Promoting Hope, Preventing Suicide](#). It is written from both personal and professional perspectives. Promoting Hope, Preventing Suicide explores suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. This blog is a forum for new looks at old ideas and encourages challenging dogma. Elana is a survivor, having lost her father to suicide 32 years ago when she was a child. Many of her blog posts touch on her own personal experiences as her grief has evolved over the years.



Surviving After Suicide Support Group

7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

1st Thursday of Each Month – Next meeting is December 3rd, 2020

The Surviving After Suicide Support Group is open to anyone over 18 who has lost a family member or friend to suicide. 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 space 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 a good fit for you.

Due to the increase in positive COVID cases in the area, we will be offering monthly support group online only for the foreseeable future. We will resume in-person support groups when it is deemed safe for everyone's health to gather once again.



If you have questions regarding Support Group, Support Class, or any other of our survivor services, please do not hesitate to call Jennie Marks, Grief Support Coordinator at (605) 274-1416 or email griefsupport@helplinecenter.org

Register Now for January, 2021 Suicide Grief Support Class



The next Surviving After Suicide support class will begin on **Tuesday, January 5, 2021** from 7:00-8:30 p.m. The class will be held on **10 consecutive Tuesdays**, ending on March 9, 2021. At this time, it is anticipated that the class will be held virtually, on Zoom. If you are not within driving distance of the Helpline Center in Sioux Falls, this may be an important opportunity to benefit from the online class! Although the class and all materials are free of charge, **registration is required**. To participate, we highly recommend a firm commitment to attend the first 2 meetings and the strong intention to attend all 10 meetings.

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.

