

Surviving After Suicide



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

May, 2021



This copy of the newsletter has been edited to delete stories about events that have already occurred.



All Different and Yet Alike

10 Common Psychological Attributes of Suicide

Most survivors know that suicide loss is different from other types of loss. The uniqueness of losing a loved one to their own hand is devastating and also includes aspects that cause a survivor of suicide loss to feel “set apart” and isolated from other people who may be mourning a loved one by any other cause. It *is* a different kind of grief.

No two survivors of suicide loss are exactly the same, either. Two mothers may both lose sons and yet a multitude of attributes such as their personalities, relationships, social and support networks, environments, etc., can never be exactly the same. *Survivors are like snowflakes.* They have so many characteristics which make them one-of-a-kind, and yet they have certain traits that are theirs alone.

The “unique-yet-same” condition may also exist for those that have passed due to suicide. Just like survivors, they are each individual and irreplaceable and no two will ever be exactly alike. And yet, they do have similarities that are common to most or all of those that complete suicide.



Edwin Shneidman is a noted suicidologist and co-founder of the American Association of Suicidology, (www.suicidology.org.) In his book *The Suicidal Mind*, (Oxford University Press; Revised ed. Edition, April 23, 1998), he outlines what he calls "the 10 psychological commonalities of suicide":

- 1. The common purpose of suicide is to seek a solution:** A suicidal person is seeking a solution to a problem that is "generating intense suffering" within him or her.
- 2. The common goal of suicide is cessation of consciousness:** The anguished mind of a suicidal person interprets the end of consciousness as the only way to end the suffering.
- 3. The common stimulus of suicide is psychological pain:** Shneidman calls it "psychache," by which he means "intolerable emotion, unbearable pain, unacceptable anguish."
- 4. The common stressor in suicide is frustrated psychological needs:** A suicidal person feels pushed toward self-destruction by psychological needs that are not being met (for example, the need for achievement, for nurturance or for understanding.)
- 5. The common emotion in suicide is hopelessness-helplessness:** A suicidal person feels despondent, utterly unsalvageable.
- 6. The common cognitive state of suicide is ambivalence:** Suicidal people, Shneidman says, "wish to die and they simultaneously wish to be rescued."
- 7. The common perceptual state in suicide is constriction:** The mind of a suicidal person is constricted in its ability to perceive options, and, in fact, mistakenly sees only two choices—either continue suffering or die.
- 8. The common action in suicide is escape:** Shneidman calls it "the ultimate escape besides which running away from home, quitting a job, deserting an army, or leaving a spouse ... pale in comparison."
- 9. The common interpersonal act in suicide is communication of intention:** "Many individuals intent on completing suicide ... emit clues of intention, signals of distress, whimpers of helplessness, or pleas for intervention." No matter how subtle and scattered among a multitude of different people they may be, they exist *even though sometimes it is only possible to identify them in hindsight*.
- 10. The common pattern in suicide is consistent with life-long styles of coping:** A person's past tendency for black-and-white thinking, escapism, control, capitulation and the like could serve as a clue to how he or she might deal with a present crisis. Do any of these states or ways of thinking relate to your loved one? Do you feel that one or more of these does not apply?

A good place for that discussion is in a support group that is exclusively for survivors of suicide loss. These groups can be a valuable and healing experience in that they allow supportive space in which survivors can share both the commonalities and the uniqueness of their personal situation. With our groups and classes at The Helpline Center, we try to honor and celebrate the memorable qualities of those we've lost. At the same time, we come together in solidarity as a community that shares the pain of that loss.





EVELYN

Directed by Orlando von Einsiedel

Released September, 2019

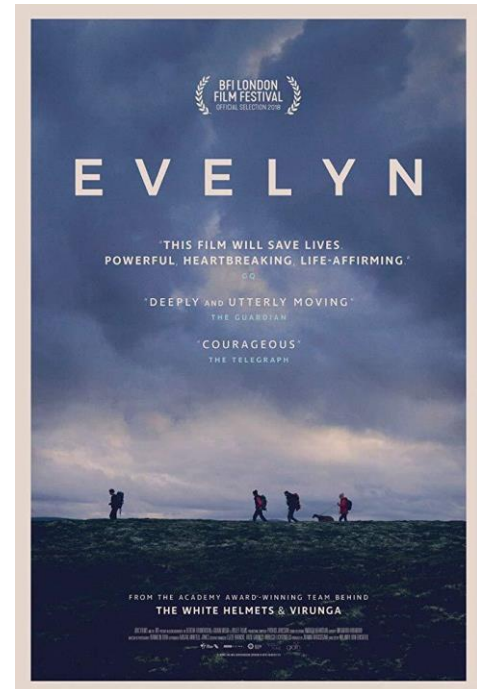
Available on Netflix

Evelyn – pronounced EVE-lyn – is a powerful film capturing many raw and highly emotional moments of both pain and catharsis. Orlando von Eisensiedel, director of Oscar-nominated *Virunga* from the frontlines of Congo’s bloody poaching crisis and the Oscar-winning short film *The White Helmets* from the Syrian civil war, has apparently been better able to deal with war, conflict, and violence on a global scale than his own family’s grief and anguish. This film, nominated for the BIFA Best Documentary award, is the story of his own family following the suicide of his brother over a decade previous.

Setting out into the Scottish Highlands and English countryside, they are accompanied along the way by various family members and childhood friends who share fond memories and new perspectives of the life and last days of their lost brother. They complete a series of hikes tracing Evelyn’s favorite journeys, often recreating poses and being photographed in the exact spots in which Evelyn himself had posed and was photographed.

This is a family steeped in repression and avoidance, who have grieved and have yet to mourn. They hope that the walks will allow them a chance to talk and confront their pain head-on as they have yet to do. His sister, Gwendolyn, admits early on that she has not spoken Evelyn’s name aloud since his death. Later in the film, she remarks that she hoped that the walks would heal her and she feels that the pain has only gotten worse. She hasn’t realized at that point that the overwhelming act of letting herself be washed in pain is a first step toward healing. In simple terms, “You have to feel it to heal it.”

Since the subject matter of this film is certainly very intense, survivors are advised to take protective measures if they decide that it’s something they are interested in watching. It’s important to have a good self-care plan in place and plans to “decompress” following the film. Also essential is having support available and not to isolate following an intense experience such as this. The Helpline Center is available 24/7 for listening and support by calling 2-1-1. If you’d like to watch a preview in order to decide if this is a good film for you to experience, go to <https://vimeo.com/294125978> to access a trailer for this film.



A Litany of Remembrance
By Rabbi Sylvia Kamens & Rabbi Jack Riemer

*At the rising of the sun and its going down,
We remember them;*

*At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter,
We remember them;*

*At the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring,
We remember them;*

*At the rustling of leaves and the beauty of autumn,
We remember them;*

*As long as we live, they too will live;
for they are now a part of us, as we remember them.*

*When we are weary and in need of strength,
We remember them;*

*When we are lost and sick at heart,
We remember them;*

*When we have joys we yearn to share,
We remember them;*

*When we have decisions that are difficult to make,
We remember them.*

*When we have achievements that are based on theirs,
We remember them.*

*As long as we live, they too shall live;
For they are now a part of us as we remember them.*

