



Responding to Suicide Survivors

Tell the survivor you are sorry for his or her loss.

A simple heartfelt, “I am sorry for your loss,” is an appropriate response. Do not make statements such as, “You’re young, you’ll marry again.” Or, “At least you have other children.” Or, “I know how you feel.” These are not comforting statements.

Understand that the survivor may be experiencing an overwhelming number of complicated emotions.

Shock, anger, bewilderment, disbelief, yearning, anxiety, depression, sorrow and stress are emotions expressed by some but not all suicide survivors.

Remember that grief is an intensely individualistic journey.

Although you may have experienced grief in your life, suicide related grief is complex. Suicide is a death like no other and survivors are left to struggle with a pain like no other. You do not know how the survivor is feeling.

Listen.

If the survivor wishes to talk, be available. Listening can be the most comforting thing you can do for a suicide survivor.

Be aware of the suicide survivor grief support groups in your community.

Many survivors have found it very helpful to attend a suicide survivor support group where they can exchange support, information and encouragement. They need to know they are not alone. These groups are specific to grief from suicide.

Suicide and the Stigma.

Survivors must wade thru both the emotional devastation and the stigma that accompanies a suicide death. Do not judge. Be compassionate and offer support just like with any death. Think of suicide as the tragic result of an illness; the most misunderstood of illnesses. You can help erase stigma by your reaction to this tragic death.