

# Comforting Friends

Published by Friends for Survival, Inc.

A NATIONAL OUTREACH & SUPPORT ORGANIZATION  
FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY A SUICIDE DEATH

2021  
SEPTEMBER



## WHY

by Ginny LaRoe

As I sit here tonight,  
Watching the stars so bright,  
I ask myself "Why?"

Why is the sky so blue?  
The ocean so deep?  
Why day and night? Why must we sleep?

The sun shines so bright, the moon is aglow.  
Why must it rain? Why must it snow?

Why must there be pain,  
Why do some choose to take their own life  
Leaving behind troubled parents, children,  
husbands and wives.

Just a little clue to show.  
But I guess some things we are not meant to know.  
I'm sure someday in Heaven above,  
Joined together with those we love,  
Then and only then will we know.

**September:** My son Steven would have been 62 this year. As my family has grown older and larger, I cherish my time with his siblings (four girls and two boys), my 19 grandchildren and my 16 great grandchildren. Steven was only 18 when he died, 44 years ago, and I still sometimes wonder what "might have been." The gut-wrenching pain and heartache of losing my oldest son has lessened over the years, but there is still a piece of my heart missing, and there always be.

My message to you is that you will experience happiness again, eventually. You will laugh again, eventually. Your life trajectory has changed and you will feel stability again, eventually. You will feel at peace, eventually. Those of you who have several years into your grief journey may be experiencing some of these feelings now. If not, please know that you will...eventually.



Gratefully,

Marilyn Koenig  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## together we'll walk the stepping stones

by Barb Williams



### GROUP MEETINGS

Go to our website, click on **Upcoming > Meetings**. Find your virtual meeting date and time, click on **Register**." On this same page, you can also check for updates regarding in-person meetings.

### VIRTUAL MEETINGS:

#### Second Monday

September 13 @ 3pm PST / 6pm EST

#### Third Tuesday

September 21 @ 7pm PST / 10pm EST

#### Fourth Wednesday

September 22 @ 7pm PST / 10pm EST

#### Grieving Moms Groups (2)

#1 September 2 @ 6:30pm PST / 9:30pm EST

#2 September 23 @ 3pm PST / 6pm EST

#### Grieving Spouse & Partner

September 14 @ 6pm PST / 9pm EST

#### Legacy Survivors (Private Utah Chapter)

Wednesday, September 8 @ 6pm MST

### IN-PERSON MEETINGS:

#### Cameron Park

Tuesday, September 14 @ 6:30pm

Faith Episcopal Church

2200 Country Club Dr., Cameron Park, CA

#### Carmichael\* (call office to confirm)

Tuesday, September 21 @ 7pm

Carmichael Presbyterian Church

5645 Marconi Ave., Sacramento, CA

#### Grass Valley

Thursday, September 16 @ 5:30pm

Hospice of the Foothills

11270 Rough & Ready Hwy., Grass Valley, CA

#### Modesto

Monday, September 20 @ 7pm

The Bridge Covenant Church (Riverbank)

2201 Morrill Road, Riverbank CA 95367

**WEBINARS:** Available to watch anytime:  
FriendsForSurvival.org > Upcoming > Webinars

Come, take my hand, the road is long.  
We must travel by stepping stones.  
No, you're not alone, I'll go with you.  
I know the road well, I've been there.  
Don't fear the darkness, I'll be there with you.  
We must take one step at a time  
But remember, we may have to stop awhile.  
It is a long way to the other side  
And there may be obstacles.

We have many stones to cross, some are bigger than others,  
Shock, denial and anger to start.  
Then comes guilt, despair and loneliness.  
It's a hard road to travel, but it must be done.  
It's the only way to reach the other side.

Come, slip your hand in mine.  
What? Oh, yes, it's strong. I've held so many hands like yours.  
Yes, mine was one time small and weak like yours.  
Once you see, I had to take someone's hand in  
order to take the first step.  
Oops! You've stumbled; go ahead and cry.  
Don't be ashamed; I understand.  
Let's wait here awhile and get your breath.  
When you're stronger, we'll go on, one step at a time.  
There's no need to hurry.  
Say, it's nice to hear you laugh. Yes, I agree,  
The memories you shared are good.  
Look, we're halfway there now; I can see the other side.  
It looks so warm and sunny.  
Oh, have you noticed, we're nearing the last stone and you're  
standing alone? We've reached the other side.

But wait, look back, someone is standing there.  
They are alone and want to cross the stepping stones.  
I'd better go, they need my help. What? Are you sure?  
Why, yes, go ahead, I'll wait, you know the way, you've been there.  
Yes, I agree, it's your turn, my friend -  
To help someone else cross the stepping stones.

# september is suicide prevention month

*by Marilyn Koenig, Co-Founder & Executive Director*

Dear Reader:

You may see information regarding suicide on TV and print news during this month. You may have noticed that Friends for Survival doesn't talk about suicide prevention. Why?

Since forming Friends for Survival over 38 years ago, and having often advocated for suicide prevention, I have talked with and met many grieving individuals. But I discovered very early on that discussing suicide "prevention" can be a difficult issue for many of us.

Why is that? Because we tried... but couldn't prevent the suicide death of our loved one.

Many of us may have tried so many times to save our loved one. We cried, we pleaded, we prayed, and yet we lost the battle. Many of us were blind sided, and did not have the opportunity to try to save them. Some may have received treatment, medications and therapy, and yet they still died.

We didn't want this outcome. We loved them. Why wasn't that enough? What else should we have done? We are frustrated, devastated, and carry a tremendous burden of blame and guilt.

With all the worldwide attention to suicide prevention why didn't it work for my loved one?

During the month of September, we will hear that "Suicide is preventable." You may feel that, if this statement was true, then my loved one should still be alive. We are left with the reality of our own experience that prevention did not save our loved one. We failed. "Suicide is preventable" may feel like salt in our wounded heart.

That is why Friends for Survival is sensitive to the fact that many of us cannot accept that suicide is preventable when we are in such pain.

We are grateful that so many agencies and persons work so diligently to save persons at risk for suicide and advocate for suicide prevention. Many suicidal persons receive help and are able to continue their lives with purpose. Our communities need those services.

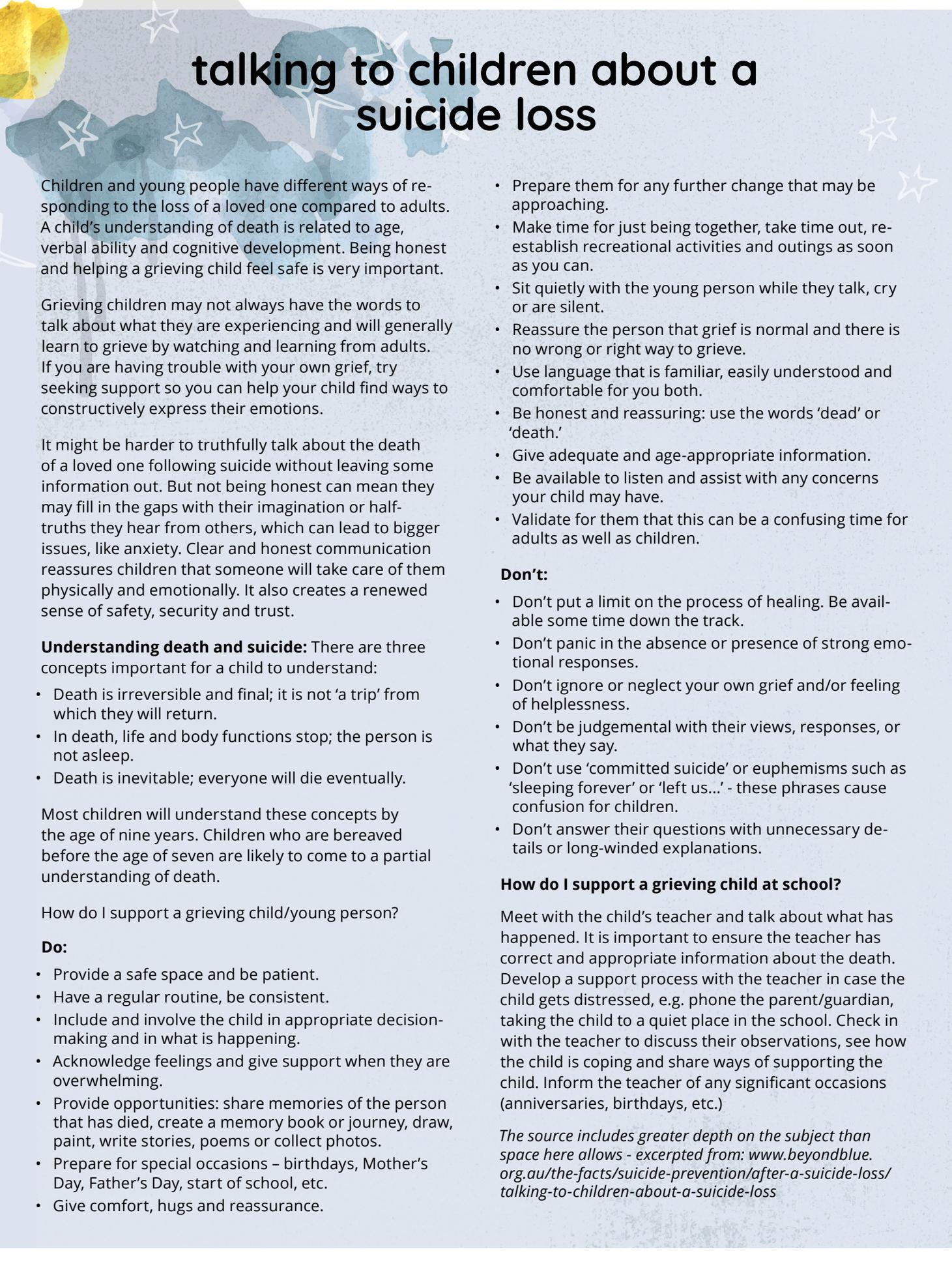
But that is not the mission of Friends for Survival. We are here to comfort and encourage our grieving families. Above all, we strive to be sensitive and respectful to every person and where they are in their grief journey.

Sincerely,

*Marilyn*



# talking to children about a suicide loss



Children and young people have different ways of responding to the loss of a loved one compared to adults. A child's understanding of death is related to age, verbal ability and cognitive development. Being honest and helping a grieving child feel safe is very important.

Grieving children may not always have the words to talk about what they are experiencing and will generally learn to grieve by watching and learning from adults. If you are having trouble with your own grief, try seeking support so you can help your child find ways to constructively express their emotions.

It might be harder to truthfully talk about the death of a loved one following suicide without leaving some information out. But not being honest can mean they may fill in the gaps with their imagination or half-truths they hear from others, which can lead to bigger issues, like anxiety. Clear and honest communication reassures children that someone will take care of them physically and emotionally. It also creates a renewed sense of safety, security and trust.

**Understanding death and suicide:** There are three concepts important for a child to understand:

- Death is irreversible and final; it is not 'a trip' from which they will return.
- In death, life and body functions stop; the person is not asleep.
- Death is inevitable; everyone will die eventually.

Most children will understand these concepts by the age of nine years. Children who are bereaved before the age of seven are likely to come to a partial understanding of death.

How do I support a grieving child/young person?

**Do:**

- Provide a safe space and be patient.
- Have a regular routine, be consistent.
- Include and involve the child in appropriate decision-making and in what is happening.
- Acknowledge feelings and give support when they are overwhelming.
- Provide opportunities: share memories of the person that has died, create a memory book or journey, draw, paint, write stories, poems or collect photos.
- Prepare for special occasions – birthdays, Mother's Day, Father's Day, start of school, etc.
- Give comfort, hugs and reassurance.

- Prepare them for any further change that may be approaching.
- Make time for just being together, take time out, re-establish recreational activities and outings as soon as you can.
- Sit quietly with the young person while they talk, cry or are silent.
- Reassure the person that grief is normal and there is no wrong or right way to grieve.
- Use language that is familiar, easily understood and comfortable for you both.
- Be honest and reassuring: use the words 'dead' or 'death.'
- Give adequate and age-appropriate information.
- Be available to listen and assist with any concerns your child may have.
- Validate for them that this can be a confusing time for adults as well as children.

**Don't:**

- Don't put a limit on the process of healing. Be available some time down the track.
- Don't panic in the absence or presence of strong emotional responses.
- Don't ignore or neglect your own grief and/or feeling of helplessness.
- Don't be judgemental with their views, responses, or what they say.
- Don't use 'committed suicide' or euphemisms such as 'sleeping forever' or 'left us...' - these phrases cause confusion for children.
- Don't answer their questions with unnecessary details or long-winded explanations.

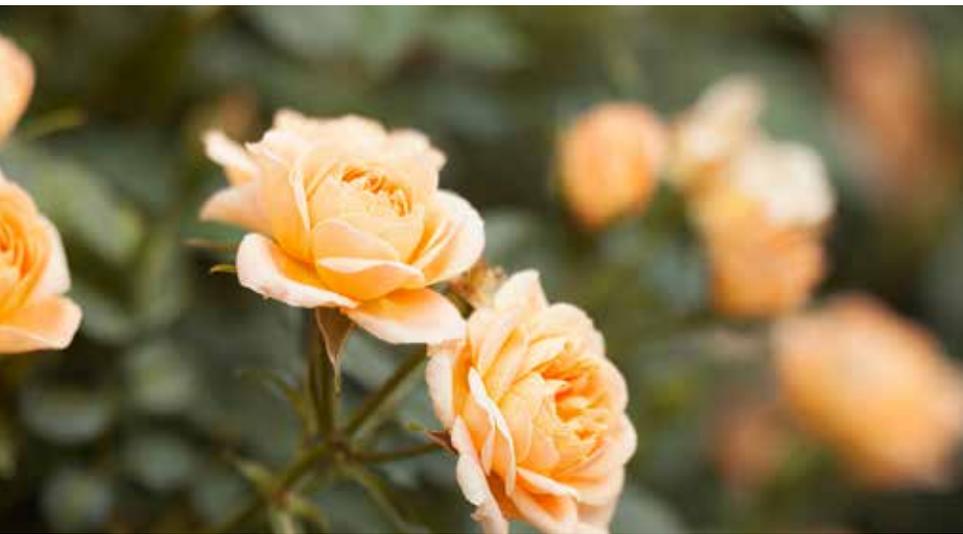
**How do I support a grieving child at school?**

Meet with the child's teacher and talk about what has happened. It is important to ensure the teacher has correct and appropriate information about the death. Develop a support process with the teacher in case the child gets distressed, e.g. phone the parent/guardian, taking the child to a quiet place in the school. Check in with the teacher to discuss their observations, see how the child is coping and share ways of supporting the child. Inform the teacher of any significant occasions (anniversaries, birthdays, etc.)

*The source includes greater depth on the subject than space here allows - excerpted from: [www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/suicide-prevention/after-a-suicide-loss/talking-to-children-about-a-suicide-loss](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/suicide-prevention/after-a-suicide-loss/talking-to-children-about-a-suicide-loss)*

# on a rosebush full of blooms

by Earnestine Clark



On a rosebush full of blooms, there is occasionally one rose more fragile than the rest. Nobody knows why. The rose receives the same amount of water and of food from the earth; of clipping and tending and gentle encouragement from the gardener. Its time on earth is neither more nor less significant than that of the other blooms alongside. Its stresses are neither greater nor fewer. Its promises of development are just as rich. In other words, it has all the necessary components to become what it is intended to be; a beautiful flower, fully open, spreading its fragrance and color for the whole world to see and enjoy.

But for some inexplicable reason, once in a while a single rose doesn't reach maturity. It's not the gardener's fault; It's not the fault of the earth, nor of the rain, nor the sun. But neither is it the fault of the rose. For some roses, even the touch of the gentle spring rains leaves bruises on the petals. The sun's rays-so soft and warm to some flowers-feel searing to others. Some roses thrive while the fragile ones feel buffeted by inner and outer ghost winds.

So it is that sometimes, despite the best growing conditions, and best efforts of the gardener, and the best possibilities and predictions for a glorious blooming season, a particularly fragile rose will share its glow for a while, then fade and die. And the gardener and the rosebush and the earth and all around will grieve.

We are never ready for a loss. Not for the loss of a promising rosebud, nor for the loss of a friend or relative whose life appears ready to unfold with brilliant color and fulfillment. In the midst of our grieving, we can be grateful we were in the garden during the same season. We can remember and celebrate the glimpses of color and fragrance and growth that were shared. We can love the fragile rose and the fragile soul for the valiant battles won, and blooming that was done. And as our own petals unfold, we can remember the softness and beauty of those who touched us along the way.

# Support

**Friends for Survival**  
[www.friendsforsurvival.org](http://www.friendsforsurvival.org)

Phone: (916) 392-0664

Toll Free: (800) 646-7322

If you are in crisis and need immediate help, call the 24 hour National Crisis Line:

**1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

**Alliance of Hope**

Survivor services including a 24/7 on-line community forum  
[www.allianceofhope.org](http://www.allianceofhope.org)

**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)**

Extensive lists of available meeting support [www.afsp.org/find-support](http://www.afsp.org/find-support)

**American Association of Suicidology (AAS)**

[www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)

**Suicide Awareness Voices of Education**

[www.save.org](http://www.save.org)

**Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)**

For service members, veterans, and their families: [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org)

**The Compassionate Friends**

For bereaved parents of a deceased child: [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

**The National Center for Grieving Children & Families**

The Dougy Center  
[www.dougy.org/grief-resources](http://www.dougy.org/grief-resources)

**SACRAMENTO COUNTY**

*This program is funded in part by the Division of Behavioral Health Services through the voter approved Proposition 63, Mental Health Services Act (MHSA).*



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*Comforting*  
Friends