



POSTvention is PREvention:

The uniqueness of facilitating a suicide survivor group

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Who Am I & What Do I Do



Who Am I & What Do I Do

“Companioning means to walk alongside the grieving person – bearing witness, listening, affirming, and learning from them instead of the other way around.”

Dr. Alan Wolfelt



Objectives

- ▶ Dispel misconceptions of suicide grief and mourning.
- ▶ Identify the uniqueness of suicide survivor grief.
- ▶ Summarize facilitator skills and suicide grief group dynamics.
- ▶ Demonstrate an ethical understanding of working with suicide grief clients.

Definitions

- ▶ **Grief:** deep and moving distress caused by loss
- ▶ **Mourn:** to feel or express sorrow or grief, to grieve or lament for the dead
- ▶ **Prolonged grief disorder (DSM-5 tr):** defined as intense yearning or longing for the deceased (often with intense sorrow and emotional pain), and preoccupation with thoughts or memories of the deceased (in children and adolescents, this preoccupation may focus on the circumstances of the death)

Definitions

- ▶ **Survivor of suicide loss:** Someone who lost a loved one to suicide
- ▶ **Stigmatized Loss:** losses typically not openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported
- ▶ **Traumatic loss:** the loss of loved ones in the context of potentially traumatizing circumstances. Ex: homicide, suicide, accidents, natural disasters, and losses resulting from war and terror
- ▶ **Misconception:** a view or opinion that is incorrect based on faulty thinking or understanding

The Six Needs of Mourning (updated 2021)

- ▶ 1. Acknowledge the reality of the death
- ▶ 2. Embrace the pain of the loss
- ▶ 3. Remember the Person who Died
- ▶ 4. Develop a New Self-Identity
- ▶ 5. Search for Meaning
- ▶ 6. Let Others Help You – Now and Always

Special Needs of Suicide Grief

- ▶ Suicide death is a type of traumatic death that has intense feelings of shock, fear, anxiety, and helplessness
- ▶ Can be seen as Taboo: something society decides is so terrible that no one is allowed to do it, talk about it, or learn about it
- ▶ Surrounded in Stigma: shame and ridicule placed on those who died and on their family. The stigma is the punishment for breaking the taboo

Special Needs of Suicide Grief

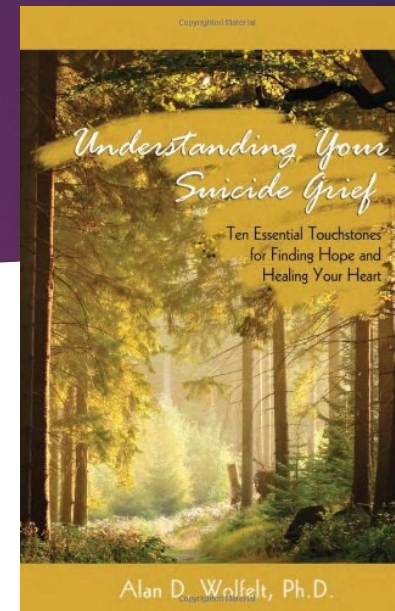
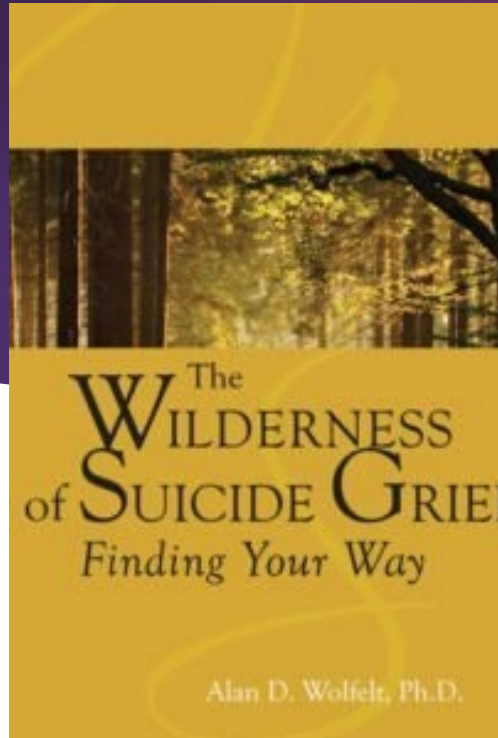
- ▶ The traumatic nature of the loss creates a unique, two-part experience: one focused on the event itself & one focused on the losses the event created
- ▶ If the person can function in their daily life and interact lovingly with others, they may not need professional help.
- ▶ Even if they may not need professional help, **traumatic loss often gives rise to a complicated grief response**, and people suffering from traumatic grief need special care and consideration

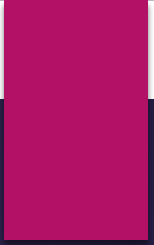
Responsible Rebel

“A responsible rebel is one who questions and challenges assumptive models... At the same time, Rebels respect the rights of others to use different models of understanding and provide leadership in ways that empower people rather than diminish them.”

-Dr. Alan Wolfelt

Understanding Your Suicide Grief: 10 Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart





Touchstone #2

Dispel the Misconceptions About Suicide & Grief & Mourning

“Misconceptions about grief are common in our society because we tend not to openly mourn or talk about suicide grief & mourning.”

Misconception: Grief and Mourning are the Same Thing

- ▶ Grief is what happens **To** us (internal),
- ▶ Mourning is what we **Do** with our grief (external)

Responsible Rebel Warning:

Grief is **Not** an Illness.

Grief does not need to be treated; Grief needs to be
Companioned

Misconception: Grief & Mourning Progress in Predictable and Orderly Stages

- ▶ Grief is Disorganized!
- ▶ Grief is Unique!
- ▶ Grief is Personal!



Responsible Rebel Warning:
Stages are for Actors Not Grievers

Misconception: Suicide is Inherited & Runs in the Family

- ▶ Untreated mental health disorders.
- ▶ Higher risk factor, it is not predetermined.



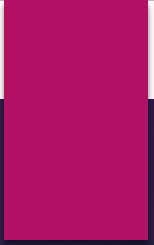
Misconception: Grief following a suicide death always results in “complicated” or “pathological” mourning

- ▶ Research shows that survivors of suicide integrate grief about the same as someone who experiences any kind of unanticipated death.
- ▶ Natural challenges of suicide grief:
 - ▶ Trauma of witnessing or discovering the person
 - ▶ The “Whys?”
 - ▶ Lack of support
 - ▶ Secondary victimization

Misconception: Nobody Can Help You With Your Grief

- ▶ Sharing pain with others will not make it disappear, but it will over time, make it more bearable.
- ▶ Support groups, well trained grief counseling, faith-based support, family, friends, pets

"There is no path so dark, nor road so steep, nor hill so slippery, that other people have not been there before me and survived. May my dark times teach me to help the people I love on similar journeys." Maggie Bedrosian



Touchstone #3

Explore the Uniqueness of Your Suicide Grief

“The traumatic nature of the death may leave you feeling turned inside out and upside down. Your wilderness may be rockier or more level than others. Your path may be revealed in straight line, or, more likely, it may be full of twists and turns. In the wilderness of your journey, you will experience the typography in your own unique way”

Unique Why's of Suicide Grief

- ▶ The Circumstances of the Suicide
- ▶ Relationship with the Person who Died
- ▶ The People in their Life
- ▶ Culture, Ethnic, Religious, Spiritual Background, Gender
- ▶ Experiences With Loss and Death in the Past

Suicide Support Group Guide

“...if you are to be one of the group’s co-leaders, you should be in a place in your own grief journey where you have emerged from the wilderness and have successfully integrated the death into your life. If you are too early in your own grief journey, you are probably not ready yet to be an effective group facilitator.”

Basic Support Group Guide

- ▶ Plan, Plan, and Plan again!
 - ▶ Research the need in your community (type of loss)
 - ▶ Find a **suitable** co-leader
 - ▶ Online or In-person (location)
- ▶ Closed-ended, with possibility of transitioning into open-ended
- ▶ 12 weeks/90 minutes/10 members
- ▶ Prescreen

Suicide Related Support Group: Lessons Learned

Find a suitable co-leader!

Facilitation Skill Training!

The Griever is the Expert!

Suicide Related Support Group: Lessons Learned

- ▶ Plan, but be Flexible!
 - ▶ Know your Body of Knowledge/Curriculum
 - ▶ In-person is best for suicide support
- ▶ Closed-ended with offer to repeat group a 2nd time
- ▶ 10 weeks; 90 minutes + 15min before & after; 8 members
- ▶ Prescreen, but once again be flexible

Suicide Related Support Group: Ethics

- ▶ Be aware of YOUR OWN misconceptions and biases of what suicide and suicide loss looks like
- ▶ Take Care of Yourself
 - ▶ Have your own Companions
 - ▶ Seek consultation
 - ▶ Take additional trainings

Words of Wisdom Dr. Maya Angelou



<https://youtu.be/0nYXFletWH4>



An Opportunity for Support and Growth

Counselor Peer Support group: The importance of self-work and gratitude in the counseling field.

6pm-7:30pm

September 10th – Nov. 12th



Let's Get Coffee!

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- ▶ Wolfelt, A. (2009). *Understanding your Suicide grief: Ten Essential touchstones for finding hope and Healing your heart*. Companion Press.
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- ▶ Dr. Maya Angelou <iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/0nYXFletWH4" title="YouTube video player" frameborder="0" allow="accelerometer; autoplay; clipboard-write; encrypted-media; gyroscope; picture-in-picture" allowfullscreen></iframe>