Practical Guides for Coping with a Suicide Loss


This excellent handbook is organized chronologically to follow the days, weeks, and months after a suicide loss. It includes straightforward information about psychiatric disorders, when to seek professional help, and practical strategies for coping and healing.


A brief exploration of suicide in the African-American community, including a chapter dedicated to first-person accounts of black survivors of suicide loss.


Co-authored by the cousin of Kurt Cobain and a crisis intervention specialist, this book combines personal accounts from survivors with practical guidance for coping with suicide losses. The lead singer of the band Nirvana, Cobain took his life in 1994.


Many survivors struggle with the questions, “why?” and “what if?”. This book shares case studies and offers advice to help survivors begin to heal.


One of only a few books addressing suicide and mental health problems within the African-American community.


A clinical hospice social worker and survivor of her daughter’s suicide, Kilburn offers practical advice for well-meaning friends and family who want to reach out and be supportive after a suicide, but aren’t sure what to do or say.


Written by a survivor who lost a sibling, this guide explores the effects of suicide and grief on family relationships. Linn-Gust addresses the reasons some families work through their suicide loss and become stronger than before, while others struggle with coming back together as a family unit.


Co-authored by a psychologist and a survivor of multiple suicide losses, this book is written with sensitivity and understanding. The authors offer simple, constructive suggestions for healing, along with straightforward information and a message of hope.
Why Suicide? Questions and Answers about Suicide, Suicide Prevention, and Coping with the Suicide of Someone You Know (2nd ed.). Eric Marcus, HarperOne (a division of HarperCollins), 2010.

Eric Marcus was 12 years old in 1970, when he lost his father to suicide. More recently, his sister-in-law also took her life, prompting him to reconsider his own experience and revise his original and well-received, Why Suicide? Marcus integrates his personal experience and journalistic skills in this comprehensive yet accessible primer on all aspects of suicide, its prevention, and aftermath. For more information visit www.whysuicidebook.com.


A basic guide for early bereavement after your child's suicide, sharing comfortable, compassionate, easy-to-read observations and personal messages.


Providing specific suggestions and practical advice from other survivors, the author addresses the questions: Why? What about shame and guilt? How long does the pain last? What helps? How do you deal with others?


A compilation of advice and survivor stories.


Using the metaphor of grief as a wilderness, this guidebook, written by a grief counselor, offers 10 wisdom teachings, including: open to the presence of loss, misconceptions about suicide and grief, and reaching out for help. The author also offers an expanded version titled, Understanding Your Grief: Ten Touchstones of Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart, and the companion workbook, The Understanding Your Suicide Grief Journal.


Co-authored by a psychiatrist and a survivor, this book offers detailed steps, practical suggestions, and compassionate advice on coping with all aspects of suicide.


A journal kept as the author works to transform his grief following the loss of his best friend. The story is combined with tools and techniques which offer survivors effective new means to face their own experience. After each brief chapter of the author's story revealing a particular stage or action in the aftermath of suicide, the survivor is invited through a series of related questions, to reflect on their own experiences and memories in order to facilitate a transformative healing process.

Survivor Stories


A mother's personal account of her son's depression and suicide. Explores some of the familiar challenges survivor families face, such as how to handle the holidays, and the struggles of grief between the parents of a child who dies by suicide.


Interviews with more than 30 sibling survivors all over the U.S., as well as the author's own account of losing a sister to suicide.


The author, who lost her sister to suicide, presents interviews with 50 survivors covering a wide range of issues, including the press, stigma, guilt, anger, and rejection.

Adult child survivor accounts of their loss, grief, and resolution following a parent’s suicide. Separate sections offer perspectives on the deaths of mothers and fathers. Includes the reflections of four siblings on the shared loss of their mother.


As a young boy, Christopher (Kit) Lukas, co-author of Silent Grief: Living in the Wake of Suicide, survived the suicide of his mother. Neither he nor his brother were told how she died, and both went on to confront their own struggles with depression, a disease that ran in their family. In 1997, Kit’s brother Tony, a Pulitzer-prize winning author, took his own life. Blue Genes is Kit’s exploration of his family history, his personal journey, and his determination to find strength and hope.


Writer Jill Bialosky was pregnant with her first child in 1990 when her 21-year-old half-sister, Kim, took her life. Jill’s grief was compounded by the loss of her baby within just a few months. This memoir, written nearly 20 years later, shares a detailed personal investigation of her family’s complicated history, and of Kim’s struggle with depression and addiction. (This book is recommended for survivors who are further along in their grief. Newly-bereaved survivors may find it overwhelming.)


Now a child psychiatrist, at the age of four Dr. Nancy Rappaport lost her mother to suicide. Encouraged by her own children’s curiosity about their grandmother, and fortified by her professional training in psychiatry, she began to look into her mother’s life and death. Drawing on court papers, newspaper clippings, her mother’s unpublished novel, and interviews with family and friends, Rappaport explores the impact of her mother’s suicide from the perspective of a daughter, psychiatrist, wife, and mother herself, in this deeply personal memoir.


A mother’s account of her progression through the grief process after the suicide of her 20-year-old son.


In this memoir, a mother of three provides an intimate glimpse into her family’s struggle to understand, cope with, and grieve the bipolar disorder and ultimate suicide of her husband, a well-respected judge.


Following the suicide of her husband, the author interviewed over 100 suicide survivors. In this book, she weaves their experiences into a story of loss, grief, and survival.


A personal account by the U.S. Senator from Oregon, whose 21-year-old son took his own life, and whose speech on the Senate floor led to overwhelming bipartisan support for the passage of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act, which increased federal funding to prevent youth suicide.


A celebrity and grieving mother shares her story about the loss of her son to suicide, and her own struggle with mental illness.

The grief process, as experienced by people dealing with varying emotions following the suicide of a family member.


Wickersham creates an index to try to make sense of her father’s suicide, assembling family history, business failures, and encounters with friends and doctors into a philosophical, deeply personal, and beautifully written exploration of the mystery of her father’s life and death.


A memoir. The story of actor and playwright, Josh Rivedal as he copes with his father’s and grandfather’s suicides, his own clinical depression and suicidal thoughts, and his recovery. The Gospel According to Josh is based in part on his acclaimed one-man show.

Helping Children


Written by a bereavement counselor who lost her mother to suicide before she was four years old, this book offers constructive, compassionate, and clear suggestions for helping children.

After a Suicide: A Workbook for Grieving Kids. Available through The Dougy Center

This workbook for children includes explanations of mental illness and suicide, creative exercises, practical advice, and quotations from child survivors.


Narrated by a child, this book is intended for adults to read and then share with children.


Available through AFSP. This practical guide offers guidance for family members, educators, and others seeking to help young survivors.


Written in clear, simple language easily understood by children, this book offers hope and practical methods to explain suicide to children. It explains the difference between sadness and depression, and describes how chemical imbalances in the brain cause illnesses that can result in suicide.


For Adolescents and Teenagers


Nominated for the Canadian Governor General’s Literary Awards in 2005, this autobiographical novel tells the story of 15-year-old Francis, whose father took his own life. It explores Francis’s struggles with guilt, anger, and profound sadness, and his search for hope, during the first year after his father’s suicide.

Nine personal accounts of survivors, many of whom are teens. Each account focuses on a specific topic, such as losing a parent, losing a sibling, seeking therapy, or using support groups.

For Men


Separate chapters address bereavement experienced during boyhood, adolescence, and adulthood, as well as a chapter on the effect of alcohol abuse on grief. While the book does include some discussion of bereavement after suicide, the focus is on the male experience of bereavement more generally.


Part of Robert Neimeyer’s Death, Dying, and Bereavement Series, this book is best suited for mental health professionals and others interested in exploring the theoretical and clinical aspects of gender-typical grief. While not specific to suicide loss, the book addresses the impact of socialization and culture on how individuals experience loss.


A former NFL quarterback for the Detroit Lions, Hipple candidly shares his experience surviving his 15-year-old son’s suicide, including his own lifelong struggle with depression, bankruptcy, imprisonment for drunk driving, and ultimate decision to seek treatment. A practical guide for men and the women who care about them.


Written by a licensed clinical social worker, this book explores the stereotypically masculine experience of grief. In the author’s words, “[A] man reading these pages will find a book that honors the uniqueness of a man’s path toward healing. A woman reading this book will benefit not only from gaining a deeper understanding of the men in her life, she will [also] find herself in these pages.”


This book focuses on grief in general rather than specifically following suicide. The authors share their view of the "masculine side" of healing. The book’s format is unique: the first half provides guidance to the grieving man himself; turned upside down, the second side advises his family and friends on how best to help him. The twelve suggestions in each half of the book are practical and straightforward.


A father’s perspective on the first year following his son’s suicide, this book is written in a simple, straightforward style, making it easy reading for early grief. Though written from a father’s perspective, female readers (especially spouses) have said that the book helped them to better understand the male experience of grief.

For Clinicians


Now a successful family therapist, the author was just 20 when his mother, a longtime alcoholic, took her own life. Even as he counsels his clients on how to deal with death, loss, and grief, he finds himself increasingly unable to manage his own. Turning to his own therapist for help, Treadway brings the reader along on his journey of healing as he finally comes to terms with his mother’s death.
Grief After Suicide: Understanding the Consequences and Caring for the Survivors. John R. Jordan, Ph.D. and John McIntosh, Ph.D., editors, Routledge, 2011.

Combining research literature, clinical theory, and extensive practical experience working with survivors of suicide loss, two of the field’s leading experts offer a comprehensive, professionally-oriented exploration of bereavement after suicide. Topics include interventions to provide bereavement care for survivors and the development of research, clinical, and programmatic agendas for future efforts.


This compilation of articles and essays captures many aspects of the experience of surviving a suicide loss. Although written by and for professional counselors, its readable style makes the book appropriate for the general public, as well.


This unique volume explores the firsthand experiences of “clinician-survivors”—mental health professionals who have lost clients and patients to suicide.

Poetry and Inspiration


Written from a Christian perspective, this book by a former funeral director who survived his cousin’s suicide explores the aftermath of suicide through the lenses of spirituality and theology.


Co-authored by a survivor and a minister, this book looks at the experience of suicide bereavement from a Christian perspective.

From the Ashes Flies the Phoenix: Creating a Powerful Life After a Suicide. Gretta Krane, Inspiring Enterprises, 2006.

The survivor of her husband’s suicide, Krane shares her journey with the hope that it will inspire others to find self-discovery, growth, and hope in the aftermath of suicide loss.


Written by a longtime survivor of multiple suicide losses, this non-denominational book encourages survivors to explore their grief through a series of simple readings and daily affirmations.


In the second half of this book of poetry, the author writes eloquently about the loss of his brother to suicide, delving into isolated moments in the immediate aftermath and the extended process of grief. A particularly moving sequence is titled, “The Undertaking.”


This two-volume set of poetry reflects on the two years immediately following the suicide of the author’s eldest son. Organized by date, the poems record, in vivid language and imagery, Spexarth’s intense grief, and her eventual journey towards healing and reconnection.

Reverend Ritter shares a moving collection of his sermons and notes following his son's death by suicide. Throughout this God-centered journey, Ritter's poignant words explore how spiritual healing is possible after the loss of a loved one to suicide.

Understanding Suicide and Mental Illness


In this memoir, an international authority on bipolar disorder describes her own struggle since adolescence with the disorder, and how it has shaped her life.


A powerful and moving first-hand account of what depression feels like to the sufferer.


Two psychiatrists explain modern day psychiatry, including the mental illnesses most closely associated with suicide risk, in this straightforward primer intended for a lay audience.


Weaving together an in-depth psychological and scientific exploration of the subject, this book traces the network of reasons underlying suicide, including the factors that interact to cause suicide, and the evolving treatments available through modern medicine. Includes a particular focus on suicide by adolescents and young adults.


This book looks at many examples of adolescent suicide and explores the complex factors that may contribute to it.


Winner of the National Book award, this book shares the author's story of chronic depression, and places depression in a broader social context.


From National Book Award Finalist George Howe Colt comes this comprehensive, 500+ page scholarly exploration of suicide. Based on in-depth reporting and case studies, and extensively footnoted, the book considers suicide from cultural, historical, biological, and psychological perspectives. (This book is recommended for survivors who are further along in their grief. Newly-bereaved survivors may find it overwhelming.)


The Psychiatrist-in-Chief of John Hopkins Hospital presents a comprehensive, user-friendly guide to depression, including the latest research in brain chemistry, psychology, and pharmacology.