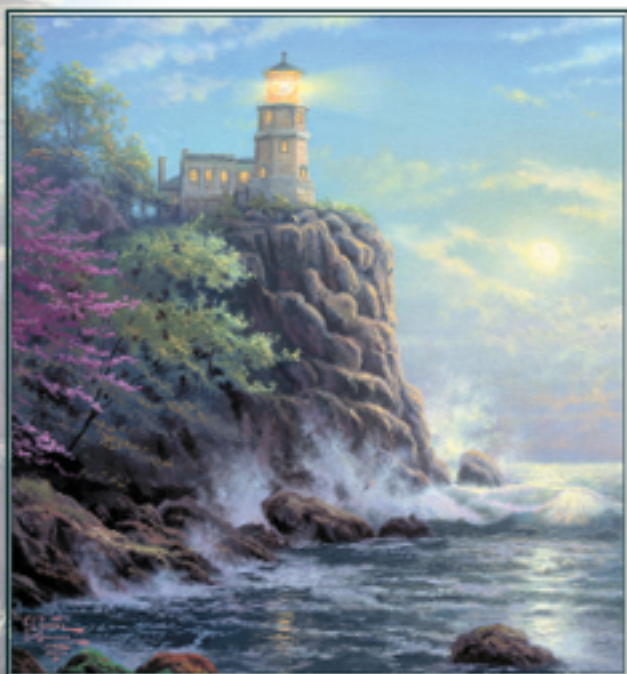


# GRIEF & SUICIDE LOSS SURVIVOR

by Kelly Baltzell M.A. &  
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*Being a survivor after someone close to you has committed suicide can pose many challenges. Although not much research has been done on the differences between grieving over a loss due to suicide versus other kinds of losses, some things have become clear. Those that lose a loved one because of suicide do experience grief differently and have higher risk factors than survivors of loss from other types of deaths. Here are some important things to know.*



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1. **Struggling With Meaning:** Survivors have a harder time finding meaning in the loss they have just suffered. They try to grasp the reason why someone committed suicide and the frame of mind of the person who has died. There is generally the internal question: Could something have been done to prevent it?
2. **Having More Guilt:** Higher levels of guilt, blame and taking on the responsibility of the loss are part of being survivors of suicide loss. Sometimes there is the worry that they had some part in pushing the person to commit suicide.
3. **Feelings Are Intense:** Survivors tend to have a greater feeling of rejection, abandonment and anger. There can be many unsolved questions that may never have resolution. Often there is intense resentment over the manner of death.
4. **Declining Health:** People who have lost a loved one to suicide tend to be depressed longer, have a greater risk of developing anxiety disorders, and are more likely to commit suicide themselves.
5. **Feelings of Isolation:** A vicious circle can appear with survivors of suicide. Since the issue is filled with unexpressed emotion, people might not know how to provide support. Survivors may see lack of support as rejection. Feelings of isolation and being shunned often contribute to the cycle beginning again.
6. **Lacking Self-Esteem:** Beware that survivors of suicide might feel more ashamed, feel less liked by friends and family, and might tend to lie about the cause of death to others.
7. **Experiencing Relief:** It may come as a shock but it is not uncommon to have some feelings of relief mixed in with grief. Although the suicide victim is gone there can be a sense of release because now turmoil that might have existed around that person is removed.
8. **Recovering Faster:** You may think society is pressuring you to heal faster from your loss because it was by suicide than another cause of death. It is unknown if this is a perception created by survivors or if indeed others are creating the sense of hurry.
9. **Changing Family Patterns:** Be on the alert that communication patterns will change with those left behind. Family secrets may even emerge around the loss that can reach across generations.

Although there needs to be more research on what is an effective method for treating survivors of suicide loss, a few things have been identified to help survivors heal from their loss. Some suggestions are:

- (a.) talk to other survivors of suicide loss,
- (b.) read up on suicide and suicide bereavement,
- (c.) try to make sense of the loss,
- (d.) try to be open with your friends and family on how you are feeling,
- (e.) encourage anyone with unresolved feelings to see a therapist, and finally,
- (f.) maintain good health.