**How You Can Be Supportive After a Suicide**

In the aftermath of a death by suicide we often struggle on how to best support a family member or close associate who is grieving the loss. Suicide survivor is a name given to people who are deeply impacted by the suicide death of someone close to them. The hesitation and awkwardness present after many deaths is further heightened by a loss to suicide, a subject that is still taboo for many people. If you wish to support someone grieving this loss, here are some general suggestions that might help.

* **Acknowledge the loss:** Suicide survivors often feel that people avoid them; that there is an awkwardness that leads former friends and associates to not be as available as they were before. People fear that if they acknowledge the death they would upset the person and perhaps cause them to cry. If you have a relationship with the person, acknowledge the loss and express your support for them during their grief. If it is your habit to bring over a casserole or baked goods, this is a time for them.
* **Use the name of the deceased:** Survivors are in the process of letting go of a beloved person. Your use of the person’s name is often seen as you connecting with the loss and really acknowledging the person’s life, as well as their death, This is especially important if you knew the person who died.
* **Share your presence:** Grief after any type of loss is not something that anyone can fix. Grief is a process whereby we come to terms with our feelings and the reality that someone close to us is no longer part of our life. If the death was by suicide, the feelings are both powerfully strong and often conflicted. We grieve by telling our stories and by working through the complicated feelings. Sharing your presence is a powerful aid to someone grieving. It can be sharing a cup of coffee or a lunch; it can be a phone conversation where you listen as they talk.
* **Share a special memory/story and** **acknowledge the good things:** We are all so much more than the manner in which we will die. Sometimes that can get lost following a suicide where the manner of death is so powerful. Find a way to acknowledge the person through how they lived their life. Share memories and stories of the person’s life and how you knew them in happier times.
* **Stay in touch:** The grief after any death often lasts longer than most people acknowledge. After a natural death at the end of a long life, the period of grief generally lasts at least a year. The nature of a death by suicide makes the grief process more complicated and generally it takes much longer to come through the grief. Stay in touch with the person. This can be especially important at anniversary dates of birthdays, holidays and the date of their death. Be patient with their struggles and the inevitable moments of emotional overload. Allow them to grieve in their own way. For one person, the process of getting back to work is an important way to bring some sense of order to their life. Someone else may need time off before they can return to the normal schedule of their life. If in doubt, ask the person how you can support them during this difficult time.
* **Recommend Grief Support Center, grief support groups:**  Many suicide survivors have found that seeing a grief counselor or finding and attending a grief support group or a suicide survivor group can be an important step in healing after a loss. This is a difficult journey and is best done with supportive company. You can be part of that support.

