

Suicide Survivors: The Ties That Bind Us



Suicide survivors belong to an exclusive club with a costly membership fee. As the lyrics from the Eagles song *Hotel California* say; "you can check out any time you like, but you can never leave." The same can be said about the house of grief where suicide survivors live.

Since my soulmate of 33 years, Steve, took his own life in March, 2015, I have observed that there are some common ties that bind suicide survivors. Yes, some of these ties are shared by anyone who grieves the loss of a loved one and I am by no means trivializing their pain. We all grieve differently and in different ways for different relationships. However, in the case of suicide survivors, I believe our grief is intensified due to the stigmas associated with suicide and society's inability to comprehend how someone can take their own life.

In connecting with other suicide survivors, these are the common themes I have seen that many of us share:

- We have so many unanswered questions.

Why did he (she) give up hope? What could I have done differently to prevent this tragedy? Why didn't I see the signs? How could he (she) do this if he (she) loved me? These questions will never have answers and they will always haunt us.

- We want our loved one to be remembered as the good person they were, not as someone who completed suicide.

In the case of suicide, more often than not, the loved one's cause of death is how they are remembered. In the case of death by other circumstances, people are likely to be remembered for their accomplishments and/or who they were as a person.

- We will always remember the sadness in our loved one's eyes, the fear on their face and our feelings of helplessness leading up to the suicide.

Yes, we knew something was not right, but we never in a million years would have thought our loved one would die by their own hand.

- The cause of death of our loved one is something many—including family and friends— do not want to talk about.

When there is disagreement within the family as to whether or not to be public with the cause of death, the family can be torn apart. This is so sad since we need each other now more than ever to join hands and console each other on our journey of grief. When fellow suicide survivors turn against us, it further adds to everyone's pain. This is so ironic because we all loved the one lost to suicide just as they loved all of us.

- Someone must take the blame for the death of our loved one.

It is human nature, when trying to make sense of a tragedy, to place blame on someone or something. More often than not, it is unfairly placed on someone who was closest to the lost loved one. As people take "sides" family and friends are torn apart, further compounding the grief and pitting suicide survivor against suicide survivor.

- We have a tendency to isolate ourselves.

This is mainly self-imposed, however, many longtime friends and acquaintances seem to avoid us. No one knows what to say. We are so weary of heartless comments like: "suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem." We are so worn out by grief, we are too weary and drained to educate, especially since most people are not open to being educated about suicide and are steadfast in their opinions.

- At some point prior to their death, our loved one articulated we would be better off without them.

This is so sad as it is the farthest thing from the truth. He (she) had no idea how those left behind would suffer after they were gone.

- The intensity of the pain of loss will always be with us.

Whether it is ten weeks, ten months or ten years since our loved one's suicide, the passage of time does not lessen the pain we feel. The waves of grief will still come, sometimes like ripples on the ocean or they could be like crushing tsunamis. I believe time will only lessen the frequency and duration of these waves, not reduce the depth of the pain.

- We feel guilty for being angry at our loved one lost to suicide.

Our tears of sadness sometimes turn to tears of rage because our loved one "gave up" and chose suicide, leaving us to pick up the shattered pieces of their lives. Yet, upon further reflection, we know in our hearts they were suffering intense mental anguish. Then, our tears of anger transform back into tears of sadness.

- We take comfort in knowing we are not alone in our feelings.

This, in my mind, stands out as the most prevalent feeling shared by others like myself. We are already grieving a tragic loss and compounding that grief are some or all of the other experiences I have notated above.

I am thankful for all the suicide survivors who have reached out to me and made me feel that I am not alone. They have all inspired me to continue writing about suicide awareness and the collateral damage that results from it.



[Share your story](#), message, poem, quote, photo or video of hope, struggle

or recovery. By sharing your experience, you can let others know that they are not alone.