



RESOURCE GUIDE

Suicide Loss Survivors

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Our mission is to prevent youth suicide through education, cyber safety, and kindness campaigns.

If you are reading this, you may have suffered a devastating loss. I am so sorry. You may feel numb by shock, disbelief, despair, profound anger, and a number of other intense emotions. These feelings are normal. No matter what you are experiencing, it is neither right nor wrong. While you may feel at times that you can't go on, I am here to tell you that you can live through this and even find peace.

In 2018, we lost our son Gabriel to suicide to when he was just twelve years old. To say we were shocked by his death is an understatement. Initially, we thought that it was an accident as he showed none of the "usual signs" of depression at home.

Weeks later, we received evidence from his search history on a school device that he had been searching suicide and bullying leading up to his death. We were never alerted. Additional evidence including a personal notebook, reports from his peers, and even a presentation given in class, showed that Gabe was being bullied and felt isolated and alone at school. He felt diminished, not good enough, and hopeless. He spoke of suicide to his classmates. Again, none of these signs were exhibited at home amongst our close family.

Our family was shattered by the loss. We are working to put our lives back together and choose to celebrate the way Gabriel lived, not focus on the way he died. In Gabriel's honor, and in honor of all those lost to suicide, we share our journey and work diligently through Gabriel's Light to prevent youth suicide through education, cyber safety, and kindness campaigns.

We have created this resource guide to offer support and advice to others who have lost a loved one to suicide. Please know that you are not alone. If you can find the courage to mourn and accept your grief, you will heal. Eventually, you can even love, laugh, and live.

With sympathy,



Carol Hufford Deely

President and Founder, Gabriel's Light

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We Understand

We understand that you may feel that you cannot survive this. You can.

We understand that you may be struggling with the question “Why?” Over time, you can find peace.

We understand that anger is a very normal emotion for you to be feeling at this time.



We understand that feelings of guilt or regret are normal and that you can find ways to let these feelings go and even find your way to peace and acceptance.

We understand that grief can be physical. You may be exhausted and have physical pain such as headaches.

We understand that it takes time to heal and find relief.

We understand that taking one day, or even one hour, at a time can be a helpful coping mechanism.

We understand that suicide is an effect of illness or pain and that people who die by suicide want their pain to end.

We understand that life will never be as it was before the loss but that you can find a new normal.

We understand that processing grief is not a straight line and you may experience setbacks along the way.

We understand that everyone grieves differently. There is no wrong or right way.

Suggestions for the Newly Bereaved

Accept Help: Designate a Point Person

You may be in shock, confused, and unable to make decisions immediately after losing a loved one. Finding someone reliable that you trust and want by your side at this time can make your immediate day-to-day existence more manageable. They can assist you in coordinating family and friends that want to help you. They will be someone to lean on and can handle daily details to allow you to grieve, process, and make funeral decisions. It might be one person or two or three. Let your point person help you.

Put Off Major Life Decisions. Give Yourself Time.

You may be in a state of shock or paralyzed by grief. It can be very hard to focus and make decisions in this state. Give yourself time and ask others to give you time when facing major life decisions. Your perspectives will shift as you progress through your mourning process.

Find Professional Support

There are many online resources to help you find a therapist that will guide you through your grief or a support group full of folks who are struggling with a similar situation. Although it may seem difficult to add this to your to-do list following a loss, it can often be an enormous help during your grief process and should not be overlooked. See pages 6-7 for a list of support groups and advice on finding a therapist.

Your Communications Plan

For obituaries and communications to friends, family, school, and possibly media, you will want to decide what information you share about the loss of your loved one to suicide. Historically, a death by suicide was not shared, due to stigma. Times have changed; mental health conversations have opened up significantly. It remains a difficult topic for many to share, especially when the death is so recent and raw. The majority of suicides are due to mental health illness that may be diagnosed or undiagnosed.

Below are some examples of language that could be used in an obituary or when talking about your loved one's cause of death with family, friends, and acquaintances:

- Lost his or her battle with depression / bipolar / mental health.
- Died by suicide (Committed suicide is not recommended. See more on How to Talk about Suicide on page 8)
- Died suddenly
- Died unexpectedly

Note: It is **NEVER** recommended to share the method of how the person died by suicide. Research studies worldwide have found that when details of the method of death are shared, suicide contagion or copy cat suicides follow. Vulnerable individuals, most likely already thinking about suicide, may impulsively copy what they have heard or read.

Support Groups

Loving Outreach for Survivors of Suicide (L.O.S.S. program)

Loving Outreach to Survivors of Suicide (LOSS) is a non-denominational program that supports individuals who are grieving the loss of a loved one by suicide. LOSS offers a safe, non-judgmental environment where survivors of suicide can openly talk about feelings and experiences. They help survivors to find community, direction and resources for healing.

<https://www.catholiccharities.net/GetHelp/OurServices/Counseling/Loss.aspx>

Alliance of Hope - Online Forums and Individual Online Support

The organization Alliance of Hope for Suicide Loss Survivors was created by survivors for survivors. They believe no suicide loss survivor should go without support. Since 2008, the Alliance of Hope has been working to decrease stigma, increase understanding of the suicide loss experience, and provide direct support to survivors. Their online forum operates like a 24/7 support group.

<https://allianceofhope.org/find-support/>

Willow House

Willow House is a non-profit, social service organization in Illinois whose sole mission is to support children, families, schools and communities who are coping with grief and the death of a loved one. The Bannockburn location offers suicide loss support groups.

<https://willowhouse.org>

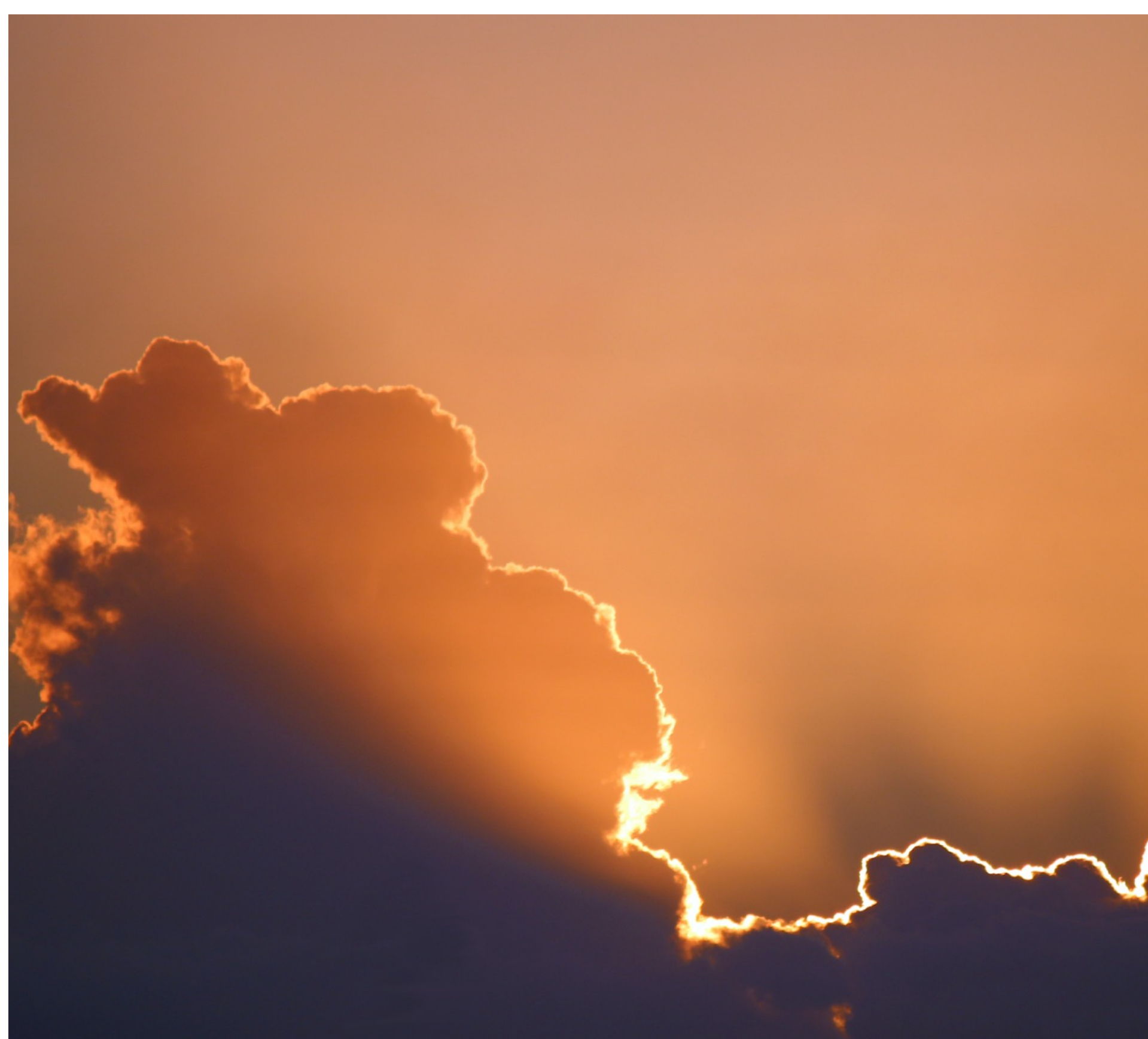
Find a Support Group Near You

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has a search tool to find a support group near you.

<https://afsp.org/find-a-support-group>

Facebook

There are many online private groups of parents, siblings, spouse/widow, etc. on Facebook. Most are moderated and can be helpful.



“After we lost our son to suicide, we immediately were referred to the L.O.S.S program and to a very experienced therapist who helped every member of our family find a therapist and who helped us navigate the early shock. We could not have received better advice and support. We highly recommend family and individual therapy for each member of the immediate family.”

Carol, Founder of Gabriel’s Light

Finding Therapy

Speaking to a professional can be very helpful as you grieve. Talking to someone can help your own mental health and offer you tools to cope with grief. If a recommended provider is not taking new patients, ask them for recommendations. If you don't connect with the therapist after a few visits, find another.

How to Find a Therapist

- Ask your primary doctor for recommendations
- If you are comfortable, ask friends or family for recommendations
- Ask school counselors, religious leaders
- Insurance companies often have a list of providers
- Use online resources to search for a therapist near you: [psychologytoday.com](https://www.psychologytoday.com)

Questions to Ask a Provider

- Does the therapist have experience with grief counseling and specifically suicide?
- Do they take your insurance or what are payment policies?
- Do they offer in-person or telehealth therapy?



How to Talk About Suicide

Though suicide is a topic that is more normalized than in the past, there is still a harmful stigma. This stigma is very real and detrimental as it is the #1 reason that people do not seek treatment for mental illness. We must learn how to talk about suicide, in the right way, to ensure that our communications are helpful and productive.

What we say, don't say, and how we say it make a difference. Decades of research show that our communication really matters to those struggling with thoughts of ending their own lives and to those grieving the loss of a suicide. Silence on the topic of suicide is equally as dangerous.

**Do not say
committed
suicide.**
Language matters.

Choice of Words

Words have power. It is important that we stop using the word “committed” when talking about suicide. Think about phrases like “commit murder” or “commit adultery.” The word commit harkens back to beliefs that suicide is a crime or sin. **Depression is a treatable illness, not a choice.** Experts recommend saying “died by/from suicide.” Additional language recommendations include:

Say This

Died by suicide _____
Suicide death _____
Suicide attempt _____
Person living with suicidal thoughts _____
(Describe behavior) _____
Working with _____

Instead of this

Committed suicide
Successful attempt
Unsuccessful attempt
Suicide ideator or attempter
Cry for help, manipulator
Dealing with suicidal crisis

Being Open and Honest can Help Stop The Stigma

Suicide is the second leading cause of death in the U.S. for youth ages 10-14. We need to speak openly about it. For years, cancer was referred to as the “C word” as people were afraid to discuss it. Now that people speak about cancer openly, there is funding, research, and support groups. By talking openly about the problem of suicide, we can forward solutions to addressing the public health crisis. In a world where suicide is no longer stigmatized, we can imagine funding and support available for everyone. Speaking about suicide will empower others to be open and will help break the stigma.

How to Talk About Suicide

Demonstrate Compassion

We understand that most people who are depressed or having suicidal thoughts do not want to die, they want their pain to end. Those who are struggling, those who have died by suicide, and the families and friends grieving a loss deserve great compassion. They must not be condemned. Part of doing this is using the right terminology about depression and suicide, and having the courage to speak openly and supportively about mental health.

Take the time to learn the right choice of words. Focus on compassion and hope. If we all do these things, we can help make change.

Talking to Children about Suicide

It is extremely difficult to guide children through any loss and suicide adds complexity. Find tips for talking to children about suicide here:

<https://iunderstandloveheals.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Talking-to-Children-After-Loss.pdf>

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/talking_to_your_child_about_a_suicide_death.pdf

Communications Tips for Supporting Suicide Survivors

You can be integral in helping a friend heal after a loss. Some tips for supporting someone through a suicide loss:

- Accept the intensity and complexity of the grief
- Do not minimize the grief or try to boost recovery with cliches (i.e. Time heals all wounds)
- Be a compassionate listener with an open heart
- Do not inquire about details of the death or the cause of death
- Respect the faith and spirituality of the bereaved
- Be aware of anniversaries and holidays when they may need extra support

Advice for Schools, Camps, or Youth Communities

Suicide within a school or youth community is very sad and can be overwhelming. It is also an opportunity for the community to help students understand mental health and learn how to heal. Schools need reliable tools and proven methods for helping students, teachers, and parents cope with a loss by suicide.

The resources below can help guide school communities with the following:

- Crisis Response
- Helping Students Cope
- Understanding the Facts
- Working with the Media
- Memorialization
- Suicide Contagion
- Bringing in Outside Help

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools

<https://afsp.org/after-a-suicide-a-toolkit-for-schools>

Elyssa's Mission Suicide Response Tool Kit for Schools

<https://elyssasmission.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/AfteraSuicideToolkitforSchools.pdf>

- SOS: Signs of Suicide Programs for School
- Hope Squads-peer to peer programs
- Grief Groups in schools after a suicide

Willow House

<https://willowhouse.org/school-programs/>

- 8 week In-School Grief Support Groups for Staff and/or Students
- Workshops
- Crisis and Consultation Support

After a Suicide: Answering Student Questions by Scott Poland

<https://www.uen.org/suicideprevention/downloads/strategies/Postvention/AfteraSuicide-StudentQuestions.pdf>

Additional Resources

Help Lines

These are confidential and free, for all emotional support not just suicide crisis.

Suicide Prevention Lifeline

- 988 has been designated as the new three-digit dialing code that will route callers to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Before July 16, 2022, 988 may not be available in all areas.
- Talk to someone now: 1-800-273-8255
- Nacional de Prevencion del Suicidio 1-888-628-9454
- Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255
- TTY Users: use your preferred relay service or dial 711 then 1-800-273-8255
- <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/>

Crisis Text Line

It doesn't have to be a crisis to use the Crisis Text Line. You can contact them any time with mental health questions or concerns.

Text "HOME" to 741741 in the United States or Canada.

International Directory of Helplines

findahelpline.com

Organizations

- Alliance of Hope: <https://allianceofhope.org>
- NAMI: <https://nami.org>
- The Jason Foundation: <https://Jasonfoundation.com>
- The Jordan Elizabeth Harris Foundation:
<https://Jordanharrisfoundation.org>
- AFSP-American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:
<https://www.afsp.org>
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center at <https://www.sprc.org>
- Association of Suicidology (AAS) at <https://www.suicidology.org>

988

New 3-digit code to reach the Suicide Prevention Lifeline immediately.

Currently available in Illinois. Available in all areas after July 16, 2022.

