

Professional Workshop

BEREAVEMENT AFTER SUICIDE:

Walking the Journey with Survivors

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Description:

The suicide of a loved one can have a profound and sometimes devastating impact on those left behind, called suicide survivors. Bereavement after suicide may entail high levels of disorientation, guilt, regret, anger, and trauma. Survivors may also find their relationships with other people changed, as they struggle with the social stigma often placed on suicide, and the social ambiguity created in relationships with social networks after a suicide. Family relationships may also be significantly changed by the feelings of guilt, blame, and failure that suicide may engender. Survivors may also be at risk for elevated rates of complicated grief and future suicidality themselves. All of this makes surviving the suicide of a loved one a potentially life-transforming ordeal that requires a level of support that goes beyond traditional grief counseling.

This workshop will provide a focused overview of the impact of suicide on survivors, and the clinical and support responses that are needed after a suicide occurs. The workshop will include didactic presentation, group discussion, case examples from the presenter's practice, and video. The workshop will also draw from the instructor's recently released volume: *Grief After Suicide* (Routledge, 2011). Topics to be covered will include:

1. A brief review of the epidemiology and contributing factors involved in most suicides
2. The psychological impact of suicide on survivors
3. Common themes in the bereavement of survivors
4. Risk factors for complicated grief after suicide
5. The impact of suicide on family functioning
6. General principles of grief support after traumatic losses
7. What research with survivors tells us is needed
8. Principles of immediate postvention after a suicide
9. Principles of longer term clinical work with survivors
10. Examples of innovative support programs for survivors

Educational Goals:

At the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

1. Identify at least five common themes in bereavement after suicide.
2. Assess four risk factors for complicated grief responses in survivors.
3. Describe principles of immediate and longer term clinical work with suicide survivors.

Typical Schedule

8:30 –9:30 *What Should I Know About Suicide?*

- A. Suicide Epidemiology in the United States: Who Takes Their Life?
- B. General Risk Factors for Suicide
- C. Etiology – Why Do People Take Their Life?
- D. Summary: Suicide as the “Perfect Storm” of Contributing Factors

9:30 - 10:15 *Who Is a Survivor?*

- A. Exposure vs. Survivorhood
- B. Extent of Exposure to Suicide & Risks of Exposure
- C. How Many Survivors Are There?
- D. Summary

10:15 – 10:30 *Break*

10:30-12:00 *What is the Impact of Suicide on Survivors?*

- A. Prominent Issues in Bereavement After Suicide
- B. The Impact of Suicide on Family Systems
- C. Risk Factors for Complicated Grief
- D. Summary

12:00-1:00 *Lunch*

1:00-2:30 *What Do Survivors Need to Recover?*

- A. Research on Survivor Needs
- B. The Psychological Tasks for Survivors
- C. Implications for Survivor Programs
- D. Summary

2:30-2:45 *Break*

2:45-4:00 *What Can We Do To Help Survivors?*

- A. Postvention Options
- B. Guidelines for Clinical Work with Survivors
- C. Case examples
- D. Summary & Wrap-Up