Creative Pathways to Resilience: Restorative Interventions for Children, Adults, and Families Coping with Suicide Bereavement

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“Postvention – Prevention for the next Generation”
E. Shneidman 1972


Shear (2010)

Each person’s grief follows a unique trajectory guided by:
Circumstances
Character
Context
Consequences
Calming/ Self-Regulation Practices

When the world becomes a tsunami, I ask how can I dive down to a quiet place where I can gather myself—from which I can surface, survive, and help others thrive. Where are your quiet depths and how do you get there?
~ Parker Palmer

INTENTION

Responding to Suicide Loss
Reactions: Trauma and Grief
Risks and Protective Factors
Reflections on Resilience
Restorative Interventions

Is Suicide Bereavement Different?

Responding to Grief, Trauma, and Distress after a Suicide:
U.S. National Guidelines
Survivors of Suicide Loss Task Force (April, 2015)
Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention

Guidelines for Postvention

http://actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/task-force/survivors-suicide-loss
Postvention responses aim to:

- reduce associated trauma after suicide loss
- provide bereavement support and advocacy for those affected by the suicide

*For every life lost to suicide, 6-12 people are affected* — Edwin Schneidman (1983) *Psychache*

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The Continuum Model: Effects of Suicide Exposure

The exposed would include absolutely anyone whose life or activities in any way intersect with a particular suicide fatality.


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Impact on Bereavement Care Providers

Vicarious Trauma

*state of tension and preoccupation of the stories trauma experiences described by clients.*

— American Counseling Association

persistent avoidance → persistent state of arousal
Postvention for Care-Givers

- Attention to self-care
- Support for their own grief
- Education and resources

**KEEPER OF THE LIGHT**
(music, Harvey Reid)

To keep a lamp burning we have to keep putting oil in it
~ Mother Teresa

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Postvention

Suicide Bereavement ("long-term")

★ Support
★ Safe Expression
★ Connection
★ Education and Resources

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Common to children are at least three concerns:
Did I cause it?
Will I die?
Who will take care of me?

~ Sandra Bertman, Ph.D, FT
Voices of Suicide Loss

Children write, draw, and talk about what it was like losing a parent to suicide

Red Chocolate Elephants is an invaluable resource. I would have treasured this as a source of comfort after my mother died by suicide.

— Dr. Nancy Rappaport, Assistant Professor, Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School. Director of School Based Programs in Child Psychiatry at the Cambridge Health Alliance

The Journey (International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day Film). www.afsp.org

Prominent Themes For Survivors

WHY? - Making Sense of the Death

RESPONSIBILITY - Guilt & Blame

TRAUMA & HELPLESSNESS - Shock & Horror

ANGER – Rejection and Abandonment

RELIEF – Freedom from suffering

Jordan & McIntosh (2011) Grief after Suicide

Interplay of Trauma and Grief

Traumatic grief involves a 'dual burden'
Fear/horror associated with manner of death
Trauma Reactions
(Interfere with normal grieving process)

- Intrusive thoughts about the death
- Avoidance and numbing
- Hyperarousal

National Child Traumatic Stress Network
www.nctsn.org

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Dual Process Model

Loss Oriented
Involves the emotional and reactive processing of the loss

Restoration Oriented
Dealing with the many life changes and new roles that are brought about by the loss

Oscillating between these stressors

(Reference: Stroebe and Schut, 1999)
Trauma and Grief
Reactions and Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trauma Distress</th>
<th>Separation Distress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reenactment</td>
<td>Reunion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Longing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>Searching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rynearson, 2001, Violent Death

Restorative Treatment Approach
Evidence-based Practices
Trauma-Informed Care

- Resilience
- Retelling
- Reengagement
The suffering from extreme grief takes a person away from humanity.

~ M. Katherine Shear, M.D.
Columbia University, School of Social Work
**Trauma Model**

- Establishment of Safety
- Remembrance and Mourning
- Reconnection with ordinary life, self, and others

**Restorative Retelling**

- Stress moderation/psychoeducation
- Reconstructive exposure
- Meaningful re-engagement

Herman (1997)  
Rynearson (2011)

**Post Traumatic Growth**

- Changed Outlook on Life
  - Purpose- sometimes a new purpose
  - Greater appreciation/gratitude
  - Deeper spirituality/faith
  - Hope
  - Growth

Jordan & McIntosh (2011)

**Principles of Restorative Treatment**

★ Treatment should begin with a thorough review of resilience and risks.

★ *Beware the clinician who rushes into your retelling without getting to know you as a person.* (Rynearson, 2001)

★ *To use a tool without craftsmanship will be less than artful, potentially harmful.*  
  R. Neimeyer (ADEC, 2012), Complicated Bereavement
Risk Factors

• Circumstances of the death
• Relationship to the deceased
• Previous traumas or deaths
• Prior physical, emotional, or learning problems
• Caregivers who have difficulty adjusting
• Limited or less support from friends, family or other adults
• Negative peer influences
• Additional stresses related to changes after loss and distressing reminders (secondary adversities)


Protective Factors

• Strong connections to family and community
• Social/peer support
• Sense of belonging, sense of identity and good self-esteem
• Having meaningful forms of expression
• Skills in problem solving, coping and self-regulation
• Constructive use of leisure time
• Positive outlook on life
• Identification of future goals
• Sense of control in their lives
• Easy access to support and professional help if needed.

(United States Public Health Service, 1999); www.nctsn.org (2012)

One of the key factors in resilience is the capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses (APA, 2011)

In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer...

...no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there’s something stronger – something better, pushing right back.

~Albert Camus
Resilience: The Magical Ingredient

Resilience is the magical ingredient that helps propel someone beyond adverse circumstances to not just surviving but thriving...
~ International Resilience Research Project (2013)

7 C’s
Competence
Confidence
Connection
Character
Contribution
Coping
Control

Ginsburg (2011)

Fostering Resilience:
5 Broad Principles

- Promote a sense of safety
- Promote calming, ability to self-regulate
- Promote a sense of self- and collective efficacy
- Promote connectedness
- Promote hope

Masten (2011)
Research consistently shows that self-regulation skill is necessary for reliable emotional well being.

Grief reactions ("griefbursts") can hit hard unexpectedly

STUG:
- Sudden
- Temporary
- Upsurge of Grief

STUG: Loss reminders
- Predict
- Prepare
- Permission
- Practice

~ adapted from Theresa Rando, Ph.D

P - Predict
P - Prepare
P - Permission
P - Practice
~ adapted from NCTSN.org

A strong emotion can be like a storm and when a storm is about to arrive, we should prepare so we can cope with it

(THE RESILIENCY PROJECT)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=118vK0aJH5Q

"Just Breathe", Julie Bayer & Josh Saltzman children talking about how their emotions affect the brain and ways to calm themselves

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbIP11FBRk

Daniel Siegel, MD re: explaining the "upstairs/downstairs" brain to children and how to avoid "flipping your lid"
Calming Ideas For All Ages

Breathing Techniques
Mindfulness
Guided Imagery
Soothing music
Creative
Movement/Yoga/Exercise
Reading...

http://mindfulmichigan.com/making-a-mind-jar-for-kids/

The Arts as Restorative Evidence-Informed Practice

- use of art modalities to promote stability, self-regulation, self-expression, resilience, meaning-making, and community
- music, dance/movement, art, poetry, drama, writing—powerful yet also soothing, calming, and beneficial to disquieted spirit of many traumatized clients
- use of art modalities for personal or professional self-care practice

It is music and dancing that make me at peace with the world and at peace with myself. – Nelson Mandela

I Never Saw Another Butterfly (Children Of Terezin)
The Lady in Number 6: Music Saved My Life
2013 Oscar Best Documentary Short
Healing Potential of the Arts
“aesthetic distance”

Throughout history the arts have embodied the value of controlled emotional expression. Art can fully evoke emotion while, at the same time, preventing emotion from raging free and wreaking havoc of which we know it to be capable.

~Joan Erikson, The Arts as Healing

ESSENCE

Emotional Sparks
Social Engagement
Novelty Creative Exploration

Thrive

Thriving despite context.
surpasses resilience
post traumatic growth
(Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995)

Siegel (2013)

Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT)

Befriending the Body
(mind/body wellness)

• Body as Resource
• Body as Instrument of Expression
• Body as Safe Place

I had forgotten that my body was also a sanctuary, a haven.

~ DMT participant
Psychodramatic Methods

Surplus reality, "realm of the imagination"
Social Atom
Creation of Safe Place, Pool of Resources
Imaginal Conversations:
  Dialogue with "empty chair"
  Dialogue with a quality, feeling, resource
Role play (dreams, wishes, memories)
Future Projection

Blatner, 1996 Acting In

Social Atom:
Assessment of Supports/Resources

- Who is in your inner circle?
- Who are your safe, support persons?
- What has helped you in the past when feeling sad, angry, lonely...etc?
- What do you need to help you through this?
- What would each of these supports say you needed now?
  (Effective as a role play/sculpture/drawing)
There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

~Maya Angelou

Images as Prompts
Lament, Kathe Kollwitz

Collateral Damage: Images of Those Left Behind by Suicide, will be a book of portraits, a website and gallery exhibition, telling the stories of people who have lost loved ones through suicide
~ Scott Chisholm

www.leftbehindbysuicide.org

Isle of Grief Map
To request a copy, contact:
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UK College of Nursing
E-Mail: "Grace, Anthony"
<tonymgrace@uky.edu>
Healing Power of Stories

All sorrows can be born if you tell a story about them
~ Isak Dinesen

“Books are many things: lullabies for the weary, ointment for the wounded, armour for the fearful and nests for those in need of a home.”
~ Glenda Millard

Our journeys are carved on paths unpaved;
When we stumble during our frailest moments,
may we never, never forget... to look up and notice:
Our path is tightly woven with several others by our side.
This may be the struggle, but with support
We, too, survive.
~ JCL
(teen poem after suicide loss of father)

THANK YOU!

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