**Group Facilitator Training Manual**

**Suicide Bereavement Support, Inc.**

November, 2016

Portions of the information are excerpts from the Facilitating Suicide Bereavement Support Group Manual, a collaboration of The Dougy Center and AFSP 2011

and Facilitating Volunteers, The Dougy Center 2016.

**Introduction:**

Welcome to the Suicide Bereavement Support training. We appreciate your giving of your time to help others who are suffering after a suicide death of someone they loved. This training will give you the information to facilitate a support group. Our organization is all volunteer run. We have a dedicated group of volunteers, some facilitators, others board of directors who keep the organization operating. Because we have many groups throughout the area, we want the groups to have consistency and our brand, so when someone walks into any group they know what to expect. This training will provide you with that structure. We look forward to having your involvement in our groups. Thank you for your time.

**Mission Statement:**

Suicide Bereavement Support, Inc. is a self-help organization served by trained volunteers offering understanding, support, friendship and education to those bereaved and impacted by the suicide death of a child, spouse, partner, sibling, family member, friend, client or

co-worker.

**Learning Objectives of this Manual:**

* Understand the uniqueness and similarities of suicide to other tragic deaths
* Define types of groups to meet your service area needs
* Organize the space and setting for person’s in deep grief
* Set group boundaries and confidentiality
* Deal with difficult group participants
* Learn group closure and invitation to return
* Offer internet meeting reminders if desired
* How to care for self, to debrief, and when to ask for help

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**Understanding Suicide Bereavement**

A suicide death is complicated and often has stigma and shame associated with it.

When someone dies of suicide they leave behind grieving family and friends who are trying to make sense of the death and find ways to cope in their forever changed world.

People struggle with the “why” question which has no satisfying answer for them. Although the issues of suicide are different from other types of death, the grief can be very similar to the grief of other types of deaths.

Bereaved people may experience a variety of feelings and emotions including: shock, guilt, sadness, abandonment, shame and stigma, anger, fear, disbelief to name a few. Everyone grieves differently so they may have some, all or none of those feelings. One thing many bereaved people have in common is that they want to be understood and heard, to know that they are not alone or the only ones who have experienced a suicide death.

Things that the bereaved person may find helpful are:

* acknowledgement of the loss by others
* information about suicide - resources can be found at afsp.org
* know they are not the only ones who have experience such a loss
* support groups where they can share freely and safely their feelings
* sharing memories and challenges of the person who died
* ways of coping and healing
* a listening and supportive person
* time to grieve and time to take a break from grief
* extra support during difficult times such as holidays, birthdays, anniversaries
* the ability to grieve in the way that is most helpful for them
* not to be judged or shamed because of the death

It has been reported the 90% of those who died of suicide have a diagnosable mental health challenge. The brain, which is an organ in the body just like the heart or liver is not working correctly. The areas of problem solving and impulse control are impacted. Looking at, and talking about a suicide death as you would a cancer death will help to take some of the stigma away. Words matter greatly when talking about suicide. We do not say a person “committed” suicide but rather “died of suicide” The word committed brings up feelings of bad or negative events such as “committed a murder”. We choose to refer to the participant attending our groups a bereaved by suicide rather than a survivor of suicide. A survivor of suicide is someone who survived a suicide attempt. AFSP and other organizations refer the the bereaved person as a Suicide Loss Survivors.

**Group Facilitation Skills**

***The Role of a Facilitator (To “facilitate” means “to make easy”)***

* To provide a safe place for individuals to talk about their grief
* Simply be present with individuals; don’t try to fix them or change them
* Listen without judgment or advice
* Allow participants to share their story as often and in as much detail as they choose
* Facilitate discussion with group members, so all have the opportunity to participate
* Ensure confidentiality by reminding participants that you will not share their stories outside of the room and that they are expected to do the same.
* Tell participants ahead of time that if they talk about hurting themselves or others, you will share that information with an SBS board member
* Start and end the group on time
* Be prepared for the group with all necessary materials
* Welcome new participants to group
* If you do come in contact with them in the community, remember confidentiality and do not bring up things that have happened in the group

***Qualities of an Effective Group Facilitator***

* Have had sufficient time since your own loss and done what you needed to do to cope with your grief so that you can be a good group facilitator
* Are aware of your personal losses (deaths, divorces, abandonment, etc.) and how they influence how you respond to others – *loss & grief assessment sheet in appendix*
* Are aware of conflict and “hot spots” in your grieving - things that others say and do that evoke your grief process or defenses
* Are aware of your beliefs, prejudices, biases, spiritual/religious issues related to death, grief and rituals
* Are able to co-facilitate with another person
* Can explain safety guidelines for the group and follow through with them
* Listens and provides support without judgment
* Allows the participant to choose how they grieve without trying to “fix it”
* Can keep information shared in the group confidential, unless participant is talking about  hurting themselves or others or there is another type of conflict that needs to be addressed with a SBS board member
* Shares your own feelings, thoughts, or experiences **concisely**, primarily for the purpose of letting the participant know that they are not alone, that others have had a similar experience. When you share who died in your life and what it has been like for you, you model for them how to talk about their experience. **Remember** however, that the group is for the participants to share their stories, not for you to gain support

***Creating a Safe Environment***

* Provide group safety rules, see safety guidelines:
* Remember confidentiality, (what is shared in group is private and not shared outside group)
  + There will be times of silence, and laughter, allow for them
  + Make sure everyone has the opportunity to share, listening is often a valuable as talking
  + Respect the feelings of others; be considerate and don’t use hurtful talk
* Listen, support and be present to participants
  + Don’t give advice unless asked for, Share from your own experience,
  + Don’t try to fix the problem
  + Allow them to share what and how much they are able,  The participant is not required to share or talk and may “pass”
  + Don’t ask intrusive questions
  + Encourage peers to support each other
  + Allow for talking about things that have nothing to do with grief
* Respect differences in grieving styles
  + Some people are talkers, some are criers, some are angry, some are quiet
  + Some individual’s grief experience is mostly internal
  + Some express their grief through other modes of expression
* Physical Contact
  + Allow the participant to initiate all contact --  a hug, holding a hand, back rub

***Group Facilitation Skills***

* **Making Connections**

Acknowledge similarities and common experiences by making a statement like, “Many of you here today have had a child die by suicide.”

* **Noticing Differences**

Acknowledge that differences are okay by asking questions or making statements like, "How is it different to have a partner die compared to having a sibling die by suicide?" or “You say you have cried a lot since your mom’s death and he says he hasn’t cried at all.”

* **Identifying Common Themes**

Listen for the common themes you have heard in the group or your experience as a facilitator. Example: “Many of you talk about how hard it is to tell others about the suicide death.”  Or summarize the group sharing by stating: “We discussed problems with family, work, and friends tonight, plus how to remember a person after they die.”

* **Establishing Consistency and Predictability**

Consistency and predictability help to establish a safe group and reduce the natural anxiety an individual may feel in anticipation of the unknown. They have experienced numerous changes in their lives following the suicide death of a family member, and need to re-establish the sense of safety and predictability that is challenged after events they could not control.

Therefore, establishing consistency in the way the group is run (Opening Welcome, Introductions and check-ins, group discussion and Group Closing) is important. Seeing the same facilitators each time helps them to build trust and reduce anxiety. Beginning and ending the group on time is also important.

* **Developing Group Cohesion**

Start groups with consistent routines and safe topics. Begin groups with new participants by stating guidelines for group safety. Recognize that when a new member joins the group or someone leaves, it changes the group dynamic and new relationships will take time to develop.

* **Establishing Rituals**

It is helpful to develop group rituals or routines to welcome new members, and for beginning and ending a group. The Opening Welcome and Group Closing rituals have already been discussed. Here are some suggestions for welcoming new members, and for other special occasions like anniversaries, holidays or birthdays:

**When a new member joins the group:**

This is a good time to ask each person in the group to share who died in their family, how long ago and maybe how long they have attended the group. It sets an example for new members to see that these are topics that can be talked about in the group, and that they’re not alone.

Other rituals for anniversaries or special occasions like Mother’s Day/Father’s Day, Thanksgiving, etc. can include a statement or reading/poem to the group, candle lighting (battery operated), and sharing memories of previous special occasions

***Communication Skills***

Effective communication is one of the keys to good group facilitation because it lets the children and teens know that you care and are listening. The following are facilitation skills that will help you in your interactions with participants. There is additional information on the Language in Grief Communication in the appendix followed by an exercise.

* **Reflection**

Reflection is a technique in which you act as a “mirror”, repeating (“reflecting back”) what someone else is saying. It can be a powerful tool. When a person hears their own words being said by another, it opens the conversation and encourages more discussion.

* **Awareness**

It is important for the facilitator to be aware of how they are being impacted by what they hear. By increasing your awareness of yourself, others, the environment and the elements of grief after a suicide death, you will be better able to facilitate groups. Be aware of yourself, your reactions, moods, judgements, and your own grief. Be aware of other people, their facial and body expressions, their voice tone and energy level, and how they are reacting or responding to others stories. Be aware of the environment, does the room feel comfortable and friendly - temperature, sounds, smells, etc. Is it a place of safety?

* **Effective Listening**

Show interest in the speaker by leaning forward, giving eye contact and nodding your head, showing that you are interested and listening to them. You want to convey acceptance through your tone and words, as well as by allowing for silence.

* **Silence**

Silence allows time to contemplate what has previously been discussed or put thoughts together before sharing. Most facilitators tend to be uncomfortable and will jump in to break the silence; resist the temptation to do that too soon. It takes away an opportunity for the participants to collect their thoughts before they continue talking.

* **Clarifying**

Check out your understanding by saying “Do you mean\_\_\_\_ ?” or “Let me see if I understand.” You can also re-state your understanding of what the person said and then ask: “Is this what you are saying?”

* **Summarizing**

Summarize the important points of the overall communication of one person, a small group, or even the whole group. Example: “You moved away then your dad died and you feel guilt about leaving your mom” or, “Most of the group said today that they had a really hard time going through belongings but a couple of you shared that it was a healing experience.”

* **Questions**

Questions should be used sparingly. Often the question is asked because the facilitator is curious. What is more helpful is to ask a question that will help the participant share more of their story, possibly getting some insight into their situation. You might restate the individual’s question. Example: participant asks, "What do you think happens when a person dies?" You reflect, "You are wondering about what happens when a person dies. What do you think happens?" Sometimes individuals ask questions wanting to talk about something but don’t know how to bring it up. You could respond to the question with an answer like, "There are lots of different answers to your question…tell me what you think.” You can then follow with, “What do others in the group think happens?”

Instead of asking questions that can simply be answered “yes” or “no,” start questions with “what” or “how.” Questions that demand a response, particularly "yes" or "no," are closed-ended, and usually cut off communication (i.e. "Did you feel mad?"  "Yes.").

* **Helpful Expressions**

Some expressions encourage a person to continue sharing. Here are some phrases that may be useful:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| “What I hear you saying…” | “Tell me more about…” |
| “I see…” | “As you see it…” |
| “You think…” | “You believe…” |
| “From your point of view…” | “Uh, huh…” |
| “I really hear you saying that…” | “Where you’re coming from…” |
| “You mean…” | “I’m listening, tell me more…” |

These are also phrases that can be useful when you have difficulty understanding what another person is saying, or if it seems that they need more encouragement to continue sharing:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| “Could it be that…” | “I wonder if it seems to you…” |
| “This is what I think I hear you saying…” | “I’m not sure I got it, can you repeat the part about…” |
| “Please tell me more about…” | “Let me see if I understand, you…” |
| “Explain that again for me…” | “I wonder how that is for you?” |

* **Expanding the Conversation**

When an individual shares a feeling or a thought that is particularly sensitive or significant, facilitators have numerous ways in which they can expand the conversation.  Communication in this form is based on mutual respect. Through your use of reflective listening and facilitating skills, group members can clarify their thoughts and feelings and discover their own solutions.

Silence or a simple sound (“uh-huh”) or head nod of understanding lets them know you are listening.

Restate feelings and thoughts expressed using the participant’s own words. "You felt really mad and disappointed when your husband didn’t leave a note."  "It sounds like you felt it was your fault that your daughter killed herself.”

Frame your questions in such a way as to invite the sharing of more information. "What other feelings did you experience after your brother died?" Maintain silence, create a space for a person to feel and respond if he or she chooses, or say, "I would like to hear more."

Put the question out to the larger group.  "I would be interested in knowing if others of you in the group have had a similar experience.  How did you handle that situation?”

Sharing your own experiences about similar situations in your life (in a limited, appropriate way) can open the door for other participants to share.

* **Roadblocks to Communication**

There are many subtle and not so subtle ways that listeners can hinder someone’s sharing. The Essential Skills of Awareness, Reflection, and Communication, provide you with alternatives to these roadblocks. By avoiding the common responses listed below, you do a lot to communicate that the person is being heard and that you are interested in deepening the conversation.

* **Advise**: (being a know it all) *“Have you thought about…” “Why don’t you…” “If I were you”*
* **Analyze/Interpret**: (know what the problem is, how it should be handled) *“It sounds like your mom has a problem with anger” “Your son probably feels like that because of what happened when he was little”*
* **Evaluate/Judge**: (making a judgement on something a person says or does) *“You’re being too sensitive, I’m sure he didn’t mean it like that” “You need to calm down, that’s his problem, not yours”*
* **Educate**: (being an expert who knows what’s best) *“I think that the best thing in these kinds of situations is to…” “Kids today need more discipline, there’s this great book you should read…”*
* **Investigate/Interrogate**:(asking intrusive or too many questions) *“Why did you say that?” “What were you thinking?”* [Note: these types of questions can be helpful, depending on the context/tone/timing]
* **Sympathize/Console**:(trying to fix another person’s problems)  *“Oh you poor thing, that’s terrible!” “I feel so bad for you…”*
* **Collude**: (siding with rather than just listening) *“That doctor sounds like he’s totally incompetent, no wonder you’re so mad.”*
* **Minimize**: (making the participant feel less than) *“Don’t worry I’m sure the test won’t be that hard and you’re such a smart kid” “Just wait, when you’re older, you’ll really know what it’s like to be stressed out”*
* **Warning**: (predicting dire consequences) *“If you don’t take that class now, you’ll regret later” “Not go to the funeral? You’ll always kick yourself for not saying goodbye”*
* **One Upping**: (competing with others) *“Let me tell you what happened to me…” “You should hear what our experience was like...”*
* **Monopolizing: (**taking up large amount of group time)
* **Disrupting:** (coming late, side conversations, off topic remarks)
* **Proselytizing**: (seeking to convert others to a particular way of grieving or coping) *“you really need to go through the anger stage before you will get better”*
* **Challenging:** (challenging others beliefs or opinions especially in an angry manner)

If the facilitator assesses that the problematic behavior is disruptive to the group, facilitating skills need to be employed. One can remind participants of the safety ground rules and redirect the conversation. Examples:

* “*it sounds like this has been hard for you, I would like to stop you for a moment to see if*

*others have felt the same way and how they have dealt with it”*

* *“I am not sure that he was wanting advice, lets ask him”*
* *“Rather than giving advice and telling her what she should do could you share your own*

*experience of how you handled that”*

* *“Sometimes we just need and want to be heard,  let’s let him finish his story without*

*interrupting”*

**Dealing with a member in crisis or who may be suicidal**

Rarely a participant my come to group feeling suicidal or talking about suicide behavior. If it does occur, have one of the facilitators take the person aside for a private conversation while the other facilitator continues the group.

The facilitator should acknowledge the suicidal thoughts or feelings, ”*it sounds like you are really struggling with living or dying right now”* Use their words if you can.

Express concern for the member’s well-being “*it is important that we keep you safe”*

Encourage the person to contact a family member or friend- stay with the person until their support person arrives. If you feel uncomfortable handling the situation, have the person call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-800-273-TALK (8255). They are trained to handle such situations.

If the person is at risk and none of the above seem to be working, call 911.

***Group Structure***

All Suicide Bereavement Support groups are open ended, without a starting and ending date. People are free to join at any time and come whenever they choose.  Everyone is welcome in our groups, we do not discriminate.

Each group should have the same format for each group and at every site. This will provide safety and comfort for the participants and they will know what to expect when they attend a group. The group itself consists of an opening, go-round, discussion and closing. Below are samples of opening and closing statements to be used in your group.

The typical group would follow the schedule:

**Welcoming** and visiting before group begins - Facilitator should have the room set up in a circle format if at all possible. As each person arrives the facilitator should welcome them and introduce them to other participants. It is often scary for folks to come to an new group where they do not know anyone and the topic is suicide death so whatever you can do to help them feel welcomed and at home is important.

**Opening -** The opening statement formally begins the group, sets the tone for the meeting, sharing what the group will be like, and discuss ground rules. Starting on time is an important part of this structure. The opening serves several purposes:

1. gets the folks attention and marks that the meeting is starting: See opening statements below for ways to begin your group. You may want to begin each group with a ritual, a reading, lighting a candle, listening to a healing song etc.
2. acknowledges and welcomes new members: example: *we would like to welcome those of you who are attending for the first time. We want you to know that you are among people who have also experienced a suicide death. This is a support group where we all work to help each other, and we hope you will find this group helpful for you as you cope with your grief.*  *If  it appears less helpful than you had hoped, please try a couple of more meetings before you decide it is not for you.*
3. allows for any business items to be addressed, any announcements, scheduled groups, and up-coming events,
4. share and discuss the **Meeting Safety Rules** which will provide the structure that allows for group safety. See Meeting Safety rules below.

**Go- Round-** This is the time for each person to introduce themselves sharing their

name, who died, when, and any other introductory information they would want to share. Limit the initial go round to 1-2 minutes for each person. Of course a person may pass if they do not want to share. The facilitator can start by modeling: *My name is Tom, my wife died of suicide 3 years ago in April.*  This first sharing can be intense for some who may have never spoken in public about the death. It allows each member to have an equal voice in the group and creates a sense of connection. The facilitator also establishes their role in the group of providing structure and safety.

**Discussion -** The discussion phase is the part of the group where participants can share their thoughts, feelings, experiences and concerns about their grief journey. This is the place where the connections and support is felt the most deeply. The facilitator can begin this section in a variety of ways:

1. Ask an open ended question  - *Would anyone like to begin? or Is there a topic anyone would like to discuss tonight?* Be sure to allow for some silence, don’t just in quickly if no one speaks up right away.
2. do a less formal go round allowing each person to speak on a specific topic *What has been the most difficult thing for you since the death?*
3. once the discussion is underway remember to use your facilitation skills

of reflecting, connecting, summarizing, expanding conversation etc. Remember it is their group, encourage them to connect with each other.

**Formal Closing** - It is important to close the group on time, there is the tendency to continue a conversation. By following the guidelines set regarding time limits the facilitator again provides the safety and security necessary for a successful group. In order for participants to stop their conversations, Facilitators should let them know that it is time to wrap up conversations about 10 minutes before the end of group. Then for the closing ritual have everyone stand up, which changes the energy and signals that group is over. See below for Closing ritual suggestions.

**Informal Conversation-**Once the group has formally ended, the participants will often stay for another few minutes to talk with one another. This is good for them to connect in a less formal way. Be clear about when the need to leave the meeting.

**Pre and Post meeting -** Before and after each group the co facilitators should spend some time together before talking about the upcoming group and after how they were impacted by the group. If the facilitator is having a hard time letting go of a conversation or participant they are welcome to call the SBS phone line and talk with someone directly about their concerns.

**SAMPLE OPENING #1:**

Each of us comes to this group with a common sorrow: we have a loved one who died by suicide.  The emotional pain can be quite intense at times, and even more so when it seems that there is no one to help us carry it.  Perhaps others whom we love are carrying their own burdens and cannot always be available to help.  Or perhaps we feel that we must be strong in order to help someone else carry on.  Today, however, let us use our time together as an opportunity to share our own concerns, feelings, and experiences.  We come to this group to look to one another for support.

At different times, each of us will need something from the group, and each of us will have something to give.  One member may need a safe place to open up, perhaps even to cry.  Someone else may want silence to formulate thoughts or to make sense of their feelings.  Still another may need encouragement to tell his or her own story.  We can help one another by listening without judging, by asking questions without advising, and by sharing our own experiences.  Each of us has a different way of handling our grief, and our goal today is to give and receive support for our unique journey as a survivor of suicide.  Therefore, in all of our discussions together, let us make an effort to discern what kind of support another member may need, and then to offer it.  Also, we agree to hold in confidence the many things that are shared.  With this support, we believe that we can pick up the pieces ourselves and even live more richly because of the gift of compassionate hearts.

**SAMPLE OPENING #2:**

We are so sorry that you need to be here.  Our hope is that we can provide this safe place for you - to talk, to cry, to remember, to question and to share with all of us.  Each of us came here after someone we dearly loved died by suicide.  We came from different backgrounds, different belief systems, for the purpose of being understood, and hopefully to receive some comfort.  Everyone will have an opportunity to speak, if they wish.  If you choose to pass, we’ll return to you towards the end of the meeting.  Some nights, if fewer people are here, you may be able to talk for a longer time.  When we have a larger group your time may be more limited.  The Facilitator may have to interrupt only to give others a fair opportunity.  Please do not feel slighted if this happens.

We like the group to be interactive.  If you would like to address who is speaking or to make a suggestion about something you feel may be helpful, we ask that you always be respectful and never argumentative.  We do not give advice.  All that each of us brings is his or her own experience with this tragedy.  There is no right or wrong way to grieve.  We each have our own way.  We are not mental health professionals.  We are survivors like each of you.  We will share what we have learned that helped us.  It may or may not help you today but may help somewhere down the road.

Restrooms are\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. [If, provided] you may help yourself to refreshments quietly during the meeting. Feel free to take a break or to go home early if needed to take care of yourself.  Do let your Facilitator know.  A support group is similar to a family unit at its best, interactive, listening, kind and loving.  We do not judge here.  We want you to be safe and understood.  We ask you to be on time.  If you cannot, just sign in and quietly take a place in the circle.

***Meeting Safety Rules:***

1.   The meeting will begin and end at the scheduled time. .Please do your best to come on time. If you are late, just sign in and quietly take a place in the circle.

2.   Your safety is important and we ask each of you to keep things shared in the group confidential.  “What is said here stays here.”

3.   This is a shared support group.  No one is required to speak. Everyone will have the opportunity to share if they wish.

4.   We both listen to and share with one another, our experiences allow us to continue to heal individually and collectively.

5.   We avoid giving advice or expecting others to give us advice or to solve our problems. We may share our own experience but don’t tell others what they should do.

6.   It is important to be respectful of one another’s grief and avoid interrupting their story.

7. Please turn off phones & ipods before group starts. Inform the group ahead of time if

      you’re expecting a call and need to have it on

***Sample Group Closing***

It is important to get people who have shared strong emotional feelings during group to get out of that “heart space” and into a thinking “head space” so they can get themselves safely home. It is your job as a group facilitator to make time at the end of each group to do that. It is a critical part of the group! You will be tempted to keep going because folks tend to wait until near the end to share intense or emotional stories. It is a true disservice to the group members not to provide a transition for them before they leave.

The process for ending groups:

* Start the process about 10 minutes before the end of the group.
* Announce that we need to wind up the conversation and prepare to leave.
* Have the members stand up. This shifts the energy and is a good way to stop the conversation, it also signals the group that it is time to leave for the evening.

**You want to end the group with a thinking task and also to have them take away some hope**.

For example, ask them to share something:

* “What are you looking forward to in the next month?”
* “What is one thing you will be taking with you from the group today and what will you

leave here?”

* “Share a kindness someone did for you?”
* “What is one thing you are grateful for?”

You can do a hand squeeze or light a candle and share a memory, develop a ritual that you will do each time so the folks know and can count on the consistency.

After the formal closing of the group, members can stay and talk informally, maybe have a snack or coffee if that is available. Set a time for them to leave the building. They can continue their conversation outside or choose a local coffee shop.

**Self-Care**

Self-care is one of those terms that can mean many different things, depending on who you are and how you normally respond to intense or stressful situations. You may already have habits or rituals that you rely on. It is important not to internalize the stories you hear during group. Taking good care of yourself will allow you to facilitate groups for a long time.  Eat well, hydrate, sleep, play, move and connect with others.

Make a self care plan that has activities in each of the 4 categories:

Mind- thinking, Spirit - being, Heart - feeling, and Body - doing.

Mind - reading, learning a new skill, video games, logic games

Spirit - spiritual practice, meditation, yoga, nature encounters, play with pets

Heart- writing, laughing, music, friends, journaling, art

Body - walking, gardening, sports, exercise

After each group have a plan to let go of the stories you heard.

* Do something, anything physical after group – take a walk, shoot a few hoops, go up and down the stairs a few times, shake out your body, ...etc
* Spend a few moments focusing on your breath. Studies repeatedly show that intentional deep breathing helps calm your body's fight/flight/freeze response. You can do this throughout group, at the beginning of post-meeting, just before you head home, or anytime that works for you.
* Take a moment to tune into the emotions and thoughts you experience while listening to the stories in group. We can be so quick to push our feelings aside in the name of "being present for others," but acknowledging these responses helps you stay connected to your own experience. It also enables you to make more informed choices about what you need, rather than doing so in a daze or numbing out. Pre and post-meetings are great times to talk about not only the feelings and thoughts you have during group, but also what you notice about how you respond to those.
* Create a gratitude practice. I know, this might seem trite given how shot-through popular culture is with catchy phrases of thanks, but research again supports that conscious gratitude really does shift our thinking and also our neurobiology. Sometimes we have to dig deep to find anything we're grateful for, but it can be worth coming up with two or three things once a day. Perhaps this is something you do privately, keeping a journal or thinking of them on your way to/from group, or maybe it's something you share with the other volunteers in pre and post-meeting.

Survivor-Facilitators may be at risk for burn-out or compassion fatigue because of their own experiences with a suicide death. Signs of burn-out may include:

* exhaustion
* emotional rescuing
* difficulty setting limits
* over identifying with participants stories
* resentment or anger
* quick to emotions, crying more easily

It is best to avoid this situation, by practicing the self-care plan you have in place. If you find that you are suffering from any of the above reactions, you may want to take a break from facilitating and take care of yourself.

Thank you for becoming a facilitator. As a result of your courage and giving of your time for this important work survivors of suicide death will have a safe place to heal and restore hope in their lives.

Appendix 1: A Grief Helper

WANTED: A Grief Helper

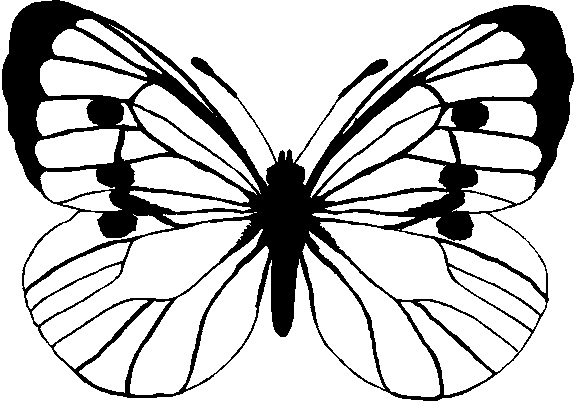
NEEDED: A strong, deep person, wise enough to allow me to grieve in the depth of who I am, and strong enough to hear my pain without turning away.

* Not too close, because then you couldn’t help me to see…
* Not too objective, because then you might not care…
* Not too aloof, because then you couldn’t hug me…
* Not too caring, because I’d be tempted to let you live my life for me.

I need someone who believes that the sun will rise again, but who does not fear my darkness, or walk through the night.

Someone who can point out the rocks in my way without making me a child by carrying me.

Someone who can stand in thunder and watch the lightening, and believe in the rainbow.

 -Father Joe Mahoney

Appendix 2: Loss and Grief Assessment Sheet ©1995 Marilyn c. Grover

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Loss & Grief Assessment Sheet for Adults** | What will I do now |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| What feels unfinished |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| What might have helped |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| How I coped |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Feelings at Loss |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Losses |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Age at Loss | 0 – 12 Years | 13 – 24  Years | 25 – 34 Years | 35 – 44 Years | 45 – 55 Years | Over 55 Years |

Appendix 3: Styles of Grief

Styles of Grief

**What do we mean when we talk about a person’s style of grieving?**

Each person will grieve in a unique way. There are many factors that will affect why and how a particular loss affects one person differently from another. One of these factors is the person’s *grief style*. The style refers to three different parts of the grief experience.

* + 1. The grief style affects how the person experiences the grief inside of them self.
    2. The grief style affects how the person will tend to express their grief.
    3. The grief style affects how an individual will tend to cope with grief and what the person might do to help them self feel better or heal.

**Is one style of grief better or more “healthy” than another style of grief?**

People often have expectations about what grief is supposed to look like. In a given family or community, one style of grief may be undervalued, misunderstood, or dismissed as “not really grieving” or” grieving too much.” A person may even judge them self if their style of grief does not match their own expectations. What we found is that one style of grief is not better than another style of grief. Each style has its own strengths and its own challenges, and each style of grief can ultimately lead people toward healing.

**What do the different styles of grief look like?**

An individual’s style of grief can be more *intuitive*, more *instrumental*, or an equal blend of *intuitive and instrumental*. For example, each of the following people, Bill, Jane and Sue have different styles that tend to be more intuitive, tend to be more instrumental, or tend to be a balance of the two.

Instrumental

Intuitive

Instrumental

Intuitive

Intuitive Instrumental

Sue has a more instrumental style

Jane has a balance of both styles

Bill has a more intuitive style

**Intuitive Style**

**What Happens Inside**

A person whose grief style is more intuitive will probably say that they experience their grief as a variety of very strong feelings or emotions. While the intuitive person will also have thoughts about the grief, most of their focus will be on these intense feelings. They may find that they cannot ignore the feelings and that they have difficulty concentrating or thinking clearly. They may feel that all of their physical and emotional energy is tied up in their grief, leaving little to spare for the demands of daily life.

**How Grief is Expressed**

Many people who are intuitive in their grief style feel that it is helpful to give expression to these feelings by talking about them or sharing them with others. They might do this by crying or telling the story of the death. Other people will often perceive the intuitive griever as someone who is “really grieving”, because they may appear sad, depressed, confused, anxious, unable to concentrate, angry, etc. Other people may tell the intuitive griever to “hurry up and pull yourself together”, because their intense feelings do not resolve “quickly”.

**What Seems to Help**

Many intuitive grievers find that they feel better by paying attention to their feelings, giving them expression, and seeking out opportunities to share with other people. A person whose style is more intuitive will often say that it felt good to “have a good cry” or to write out their feelings in a journal. They may find it difficult to concentrate and attend to normal activities, such as work or home life, so they may need to rely on other people for support with these things. Generally, it is not helpful for them to try to ignore their feelings or to be stoic and strong for the benefit of others.

**Instrumental Style**

**What Happens Inside**

A person whose grief style is more instrumental will describe their experience of grief as primarily occupying their thoughts. Instrumental grievers also have feelings, but they may experience them as less intense or overwhelming than the intuitive grievers. The instrumental person may wrestle most with trying to understand the loss and its meaning. Inside they may feel more anxious or restless.

**How Grief is Expressed**

The instrumental person may feel a greater than usual need to withdraw or to find quiet, where they can contemplate this significant loss and be alone with their feelings. While they may share their thoughts and feelings with another person, they are not likely to “have that good cry”. Instead of experiencing a sense of relief or release, having an intense cry may cause the instrumental person to feel more anxious, tense, or “out of control”. They may channel their feelings of restlessness or anxiety into increased activity. For example, they may focus on solving problems related to the loss, such as settling the estate. Sadly, instrumental grievers are often misunderstood, and others may accuse them of “not really grieving”. Other people may be unaware of the instrumental grievers internal experience and may misunderstand a grief process that looks so different on the outside.

**What Seems to Help**

Rather than simply talking about their thoughts of feelings, instrumental grievers often feel better when they channel those thoughts and feelings into purposeful activity. They may create something to memorialize the one who died, like planting a memory garden or creating a scrapbook. Engaging in physical exercise or work may help the instrumental griever to decrease their anxiety or restlessness.

Information adapted from Doka, Kenneth J & Martin, Terry L (2000) Men Don’t Cry, Women Do. Philadelphia, Pa: Brunner/Mazel

Appendix 4: Language in Grief Communication

* 1. **Communications:**

1. Suggest to the gathered group we communicate with Our Heads and Our Hearts. Suggest we often think in black and white terms as we try to regain control of our loss and grief. Suggest difficulties in families, friends, workmates, and other settings are often based on misunderstandings in communication, and may result in years of unnecessary hurt and conflict. Especially around grief, we respond intensely in two ways---by our thinking and by our feelings.

a) We respond by thinking with our heads---we think about the

circumstances and wonder what more might happen, we project the future, we think what can be done for safety, we try to make sense of what we see and hear, we wonder how we can get back into control in an uncontrollable situation.

b) We respond by feelings with our hearts---we feel many emotions---anger, sadness, shock, unsafe, disbelief, fear, panic, disconnected, out of control, irritable, sorrow, despair, depression, worry, and more.

2. We can improve communications w/in Families, at our workplace, w/friends, in our churches and social gatherings by simple clarifications.

It is helpful to encourage groups of grievers and their helpers by identifying their mutual understanding of the terms associated with grief. Clarification will positively change the response of the listener in most cases.

* 1. **Definition Exercise:**
     1. Instruct the audience/family: “Please give your personal definition of terms by completing these sentences (Remind: “This is not a test. There are no wrong answers. Give your first thoughts.”):

*Loss is ; Death is ;*

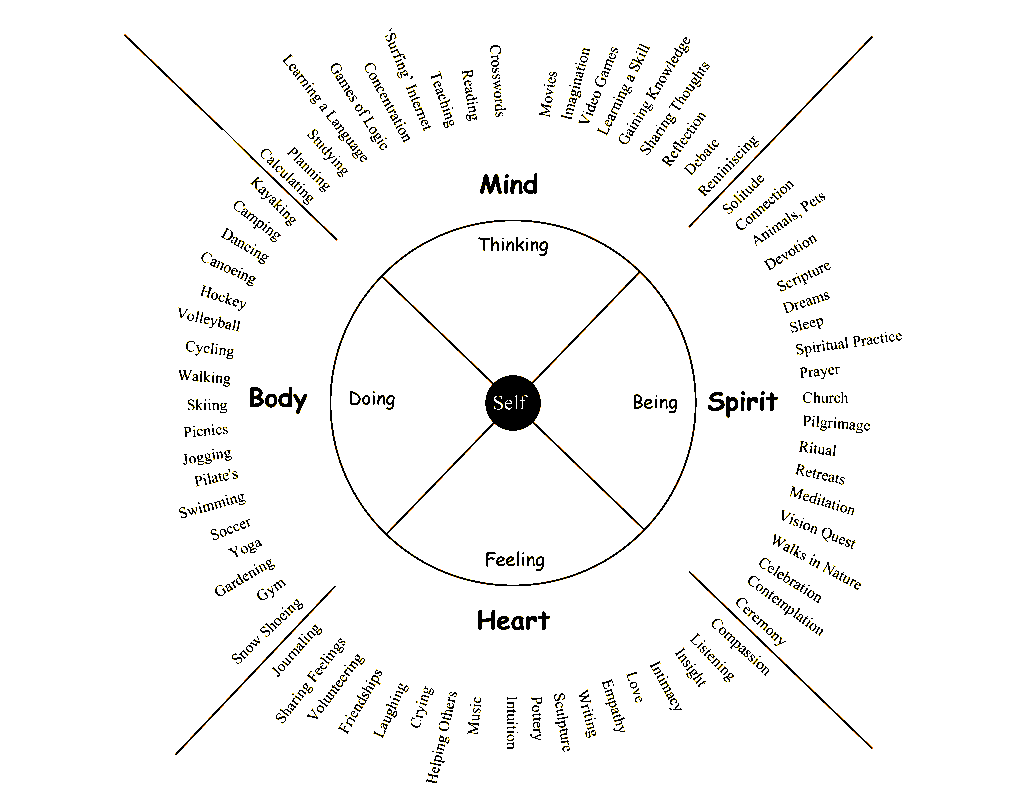
*Grief is ; Soul is .*

2. Write the responses on a large visible chalkboard/paper for larger groups.

3. Invite the audience to state if the various answers come from thinking (the head) or from feeling (the heart). Some will be both and they will figure that out. Remind them to remember this exercise when talking or listening to other grievers.

1. Remind: Generally, feelings just want to be listened to and validated. Thinking may need fixing, be informational, or be a step in processing. Ask the audience to remember this exercise the next time they are listening to a griever and not to assume a word has the same meaning for both. Ask them to check if the speaker is talking about thoughts or about feelings---as this distinction may expect two entirely different responses on your part.

Appendix 8: Self-care Wheel



**S**uicide

**B**ereavement

**S**upport, Inc.

Group Location: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Facilitator(s): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Suicide Bereavement Support, Inc. PO Box 2525, Portland, OR 97208

503.200.0382 sbsnw.org Facebook: sbsnw sbsnw@gmail.com

**Suicide Bereavement Support, Inc. (SBS)**

SAMPLE OPENINGS

SAMPLE OPENING #1:

Each of us comes to this group with a common sorrow: we have a loved one who died by suicide. The emotional pain can be quite intense at times, and even more so when it seems that there is no one to help us carry it. Perhaps others whom we love are carrying their own burdens and cannot always be available to help. Or perhaps we feel that we must be strong in order to help someone else carry on. Today, however, let us use our time together as an opportunity to share our own concerns, feelings, and experiences. We come to this group to look to one another for support.

At different times, each of us will need something from the group, and each of us will have something to give. One member may need a safe place to open up, perhaps even to cry. Someone else may want silence to formulate thoughts or to make sense of their feelings. Still another may need encouragement to tell his or her own story. We can help one another by listening without judging, by asking questions without advising, and by sharing our own experiences. Each of us has a different way of handling our grief, and our goal today is to give and receive support for our unique journey as a survivor of suicide. Therefore, in all of our discussions together, let us make an effort to discern what kind of support another member may need, and then to offer it. Also, we agree to hold in confidence the many things that are shared. With this support, we believe that we can pick up the pieces ourselves and even live more richly because of the gift of compassionate hearts.

SAMPLE #2:

We are so sorry that you need to be here. Our hope is that we can provide this safe place for you - to talk, to cry, to remember, to question and to share with all of us. Each of us came here after someone we dearly loved died by suicide. We came from different backgrounds, different belief systems, for the purpose of being understood, and hopefully to receive some comfort. Everyone will have an opportunity to speak, if they wish. If you choose to pass, we’ll return to you towards the end of the meeting. Some nights, if fewer people are here, you may be able to talk for a longer time. When we have a larger group your time may be more limited. The Facilitator may have to interrupt only to give others a fair opportunity. Please do not feel slighted if this happens.

We like the group to be interactive. If you would like to address who is speaking or to make a suggestion about something you feel may be helpful, we ask that you always be respectful and never argumentative. We do not give advice. All that each of us brings is his or her own experience with this tragedy. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. We each have our own way. We are not mental heath professionals. We are survivors like each of you. We will share what we have learned that helped us. It may or may not help you today but may help somewhere down the road.

Restrooms are\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. [If, provided] you may help yourself to refreshments quietly during the meeting. Feel free to take a break or to go home early if needed to take care of yourself. Do let your Facilitator know. A support group is similar to a family unit at its best, interactive, listening, kind and loving. We do not judge here. We want you to be safe and understood. We ask you to be on time. If you cannot, just sign in and quietly take a place in the circle.

**Suicide Bereavement Support, Inc. (SBS)**

**Group Closing**

It is important to get people who have shared strong emotional feelings during group to get out of that “heart space” and into a thinking “head space” so they can get themselves safely home. It is your job as a group facilitator to make time at the end of each group to do that. It is a critical part of the group!  
You will be tempted to keep going because folks tend to wait until near the end to share intense or emotional stories. It is a true disservice to the group members not to provide a transition for them before they leave.

The process for ending groups:

Start the process about 10 minutes before the end of the group.

Announce to the group that we need to wind up the conversation and prepare to leave.

Have the members stand up. This shifts the energy and is a good way to stop the

conversation, it also signals the group that it is time to leave for the evening.

**You want to end the group with a thinking task and also to have them take away some hope**. For example, ask them to share something: 1) “What are you looking forward to in the next month?” 2) “What is one thing you will be taking with you from the group today and what will you leave

here?”

3) “Share a kindness someone did for you?”

4) “What is one thing you are grateful for?”

You can do a hand squeeze or light a candle and share a memory, develop a ritual that you will do each time so the folks know and can count on the consistency.

After the formal closing of the group, members can stay and talk informally, maybe have a snack or coffee if that is available. Set a time for them to leave the building. They can continue their conversation outside or choose a local coffee shop.

**Suicide Bereavement Support, Inc. (SBS)**

**Meeting Safety Rules:**

1. Please come on time.  If late, just sign in and quietly take a place in the

circle.  The meeting will begin and end at the scheduled time.

2.   Your safety is important and we ask each of you to keep confidentiality.  “What is said here stays here.”

3.   This is a shared group.  No one is required to speak. Everyone will have the opportunity to share if they wish.

4.   We listen to one another’s experiences in order to continue to heal individually and collectively.  If your story is long, you may be asked by the facilitator to pause to allow others to share and come back to finish your story later.

5.   As we share our stories, we help others in the group as well as ourselves.

6.   We avoid giving advice or expecting others to give us advice or to solve our problems.

7.   It is important to be respectful of one another’s grief and avoid interrupting their story.

8.   If this is your first meeting and it appears less helpful than you had hoped, please try a couple of more meetings before you decide it is not for you.

9.  Please turn off phones & ipods before group starts. Inform the group ahead of time if you’re expecting a call and need to have it on.

Facilitator Log in on SBS Website

1. Go to sbsnw.org on your computer or mobile devise
2. Hover over the header “About us”
3. In the drop down menu, click on “Facilitators”
4. Enter the password: suicide
5. Click on the “enter password & click here” blue link
6. Click on the “Facilitators’ Counter” blue link

You have made it to the counter! There are no individual names for facilitators, just group names.

1. click on your group.
2. Select communication type (your group name will come up again from the drop down menu)
3. Enter the number of members who attended group (NOT OPTIONAL) (you do not need to enter yourself into the counter)
4. Members who have not previously entered their email address, can also select people to enter their email address. (This is optional)

You may print extra documents and forms such as sign in sheets, email reminders, group information half-sheets, etc by following steps 1-5. Extra documents will be available under the Counter, under the dark gray header “Documents”.

**Example REMINDER E-MAILS for Group Meetings**

**From Debbie Sack, SBS Facilitator Coordinator**

*I would like to share with all of you amazing volunteer facilitators this tool I have been using for my grief group. For our group, the reminder e-mail has proven to be helpful and well-liked by our group.*

*The short note not only reminds the often forgetful grievers of suicide, but it also allows members an opportunity to respond. I have often been informed when someone will not be able to make the meeting, and sometimes asked to update the group on their behalf.*

*My routine has been to send the reminder about* ***4-7 days*** *before the night of the meeting.*

*I have often included a grief related quote in the body of the e-mail that I have found on Facebook or other grief web-sites.*

*I encourage you as a facilitator to mark your calendars and give this a try!*

*It is an easy opportunity to reach out with a positive connection and it allows a few days for members to anticipate the upcoming meeting. Remember the days when you were so thankful and counting the days to that next meeting?*

Here are a few examples:

**#1.** Hello to all my amazing grief friends -

This Wednesday is our monthly meeting and I hope you can come and give a bit of time

to yourself in memory of your loved one who has died by suicide.

I am feeling thankful this morning for the fresh start of each day, and in particular, the

fresh start of the "day after Mother’s Day [or other holiday or special occasion] and having it behind me!

What survivors we all are!

Sending strength and support, Debbie

**#2**. Hello to all my SBS Friends -

I want to remind you that our Wed meeting is this week and encourage you to come if you can. Taking some time to take care of ourselves and our grief is an important part of our new year.

Losing a loved one to suicide is such a long and tiring road, filled with so many ups and downs. It is my hope that getting together will in some way, large or small, lighten your load for a time.

In friendship, Debbie Sack

PS: I read a wonderful little quote last week that I wanted to share-

“May I hold my grief lightly in my hand so that it can lift away from me. My connection to the one I have lost is inviolate; it cannot be broken".

**#3**. A (particularly) warm hello to all of you!

Paul and I are feeling that bit of release and relief that comes after having just hurdled on over to the other side of Josh's angelversary day. It seems like each year has been such a unique experience but always there is that lift to have it behind us.

How are you doing?

We look forward to seeing you at our monthly meeting on Wednesday. We hope you can make it.

In friendship, Debbie Sack

**#4**. Hello Group –

How's everyone doing out there?

I know it's just a circle of us folks for an hour and a half, but I truly believe in it's power and healing.

Please join us this month, as we share our experience, strength, and hope.

I hope these warm days have given you some moments of joy and dear memories of your loved one.

See you Wednesday! Debbie

**#5** Hello to all -

I would like to remind you to come join our meeting on Wed at 7:00.

These short, rainy, and grey days can really add to our waves of grief, as you all know.

I hope you are remembering to be aware of the importance of self-care and finding joy and blessings when you can.

For me, there is always a certain comfort and healing when I come together with others who have shared this devastating life experience.

I am attaching the poem that Margie (Andrew's mom) shared with the group at our last meeting, as she was honoring his birthday month and sharing about him.

It was so generous and open spirited of her to offer it to us and I am honored to pass it along.

I hope to see you next week.

Sending support and a warm hug, Debbie

**#6.** Hello to all my SBS Friends -

I want to remind you that our Wed meeting is this week and encourage you to come if you can.

Taking some time to take care of ourselves and our grief is an important part of our new year.

Grieving the death of our loved one by suicide is such a long  and tiring road, filled with so many ups and downs.

It is my hope that getting together will in some way, large or small, lighten your load for a time.

I read a wonderful little quote last week that I wanted to share; "May I hold my grief lightly in my hand so that it can lift away from me. My connection to the one I have lost is inviolate; it cannot be broken".

In friendship, Debbie

**#7** Hello to my "Support People!",

Are you finding this cooler weather a welcome event, or maybe feeling a wave coming on from memories of the fall?

I find it so interesting how, for me, the idea of "bittersweet" means so much more now. My happy is often more joyful and my sad more deeply painful than before I lost my Josh.

I'm looking forward to our support meeting on Wednesday and I hope to see you and hear how things are going for everyone.

I hope you have some joy today and are remembering to practice a bit of self-care when you can.

Your Friend, Debbi