

# SUICIDE SURVIVORS

## *DEFINING NEEDS AND INTERVENTIONS*

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# INTRODUCTION

- My Background
  - The Family Loss Project
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- Overview
  - Prominent themes for survivors
  - Risk factors for developing complicated grief
  - Elements of effective interventions

# Qualifiers

- Adult survivors
- Not applicable to all survivors, & not limited to just survivors
- Based on both empirical research and clinical observation

# PROMINANT THEMES FOR SURVIVORS

- WHY? - Making Sense
- RESPONSIBILITY - Guilt & Blame
- SHAME - Stigma
- ANGER - Rejection & Abandonment

# PROMINANT THEMES FOR SURVIVORS

- TRAUMA - Shock & Horror
- RELIEF - The End Of Suffering
- SUICIDALITY – Why Go On?
- SORROW – Grief & Yearning

# RISK FACTORS FOR COMPLICATED GRIEF

## *Before the Death*

- Pre-existing Psychiatric Disorder
- Quality Of The Relationship
  - Dependency
  - Conflictual

# RISK FACTORS FOR COMPLICATED GRIEF

## *At the Time of Death*

- Forewarning
- Method / Witnessing
  - Dissociation & flashback symptoms
- Encounters with Police/Rescue/ME
- Location
- Immediate Social Network Response

# RISK FACTORS FOR COMPLICATED GRIEF

## *After the Death*

- Longer Term Social Support
  - Blame from others
  - Self – stigmatization
  - Isolation
- Family Disruption
  - Blame
  - Secrecy
  - Communication shut-down



# RISK FACTORS FOR COMPLICATED GRIEF

## *After the Death*

- High Risk Grievers
  - High risk categories
    - Isolated elderly males
    - Mothers
    - Siblings, esp. sisters
  - High distress responses

# INTERVENTIONS

## *Postvention Is Prevention*

- Identify “At-risk” Survivors & Direct Into Services
- Reduce Risk Factors
- Reduce Isolation & Assist With Social Disruption
- Psychoeducation
- Provide A Safe Context For Doing “Griefwork”
- Family Guidance

# INTERVENTIONS

## *Options*

- Organizational Postvention
- Survivor To Survivor Outreach
  - On scene
    - Stabilization, risk assessment, facilitating later involvement (Frank's data)
    - Later follow-up
- Groups
  - Open, peer led
  - Structured, usually professionally led
  - Advantages/disadvantages

# INTERVENTIONS

## *Options*

- Individual Counseling
  - Better monitoring of response
  - Tailored to the particular needs of the survivor
  - In depth working though with neutral, safe person
- Family Counseling
  - Psychoeducation
  - Reduce blame, guilt
  - Improve communication

# INTERVENTIONS

## *Options*

- **Bibliotherapy & Internet**
  - Group therapy “lite”
  - Private and “dosed”
  - [.afsp.org](http://.afsp.org); [suicidology.org](http://suicidology.org); [griefnet.org](http://griefnet.org)
- **Survivor conferences**
  - Psychoeducation
  - Create community
- **Network interventions**
- **Activism**

# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- AFSP/NIMH Conference
- Areas for Future Research
  1. Defining and identifying survivors of suicide
  2. Individual vulnerability to distress after suicide
  3. Impact of suicide on family functioning and suicide risk

# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Areas for Future Research
  4. Interventions for survivors of suicide
  5. Special populations
  6. Research strategies

# WRAP-UP

- Questions?
- Comments?



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