



# Suicide Grief: Dispelling Misconceptions to Reduce Suicide Death Stigma

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FREE 2 GRIEVE

# Content Warning

This training may be uncomfortable due to the subject matter.

This training may be especially uncomfortable if you have lost someone to suicide, have attempted suicide, or are currently considering suicide. We are here to help.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-8255 and is available 24/7 press 1 for Veterans



# Objectives

- ▶ Objective 1: Identify the uniqueness of suicide grief.
- ▶ Objective 2: Dispel the misconceptions about suicide, grief, and mourning.
- ▶ Objective 3: Demonstrate an ethical understanding of working with suicide grief clients.

# Who Am I & What Do I Do



# My Inspirations

- ▶ Dr. Alan Wolfelt
- ▶ Founder and Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition
- ▶ Best known for his model of “companionship” Dr. Wolfelt is committed to helping people mourn well so they can live well and love well.
- ▶ Dr. Doris Vaughns
- ▶ Steve Sweatt, LPC/LMFT
- ▶ My Clients!





# Definitions

- **Grief:** deep and moving distress caused by loss
- **Mourning:** the act of sorrowing; outward expression of grief
- **Bereaved:** suffering the death of a loved one
- **Complicated Grief:** grief that has somehow been pulled off the path and needs to find its way back

# Definitions

- **Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder:** intense grief that continues to prevent a person from functioning a year or more after a death. (DSM-5)
- **Stigmatized Loss:** losses typically not openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported
- **Traumatic grief:** an abrupt, unexpected loss
- **Misconception:** a mistaken notion you might have about something

# *Special Needs of Suicide Grief*

- Suicide death is a type of traumatic death that has intense feelings of shock, fear, anxiety, and helplessness
- Can be seen as Taboo: something society decides is so terrible that no one is allowed to do it, talk about it, or learn about it
- Surrounded in Stigma: shame and ridicule placed on those who died and on their family. The stigma is the punishment for breaking the taboo



# *Special Needs of Suicide Grief*

- The traumatic nature of the loss creates a unique, two-part experience: one focused on the event itself & one focused on the losses the event created
- If the person is able to function in their daily life and interact lovingly with others, they may not need professional help.
- Even if they may not need professional help, **traumatic loss often gives rise to a complicated grief response**, and people suffering from traumatic grief need special care and consideration



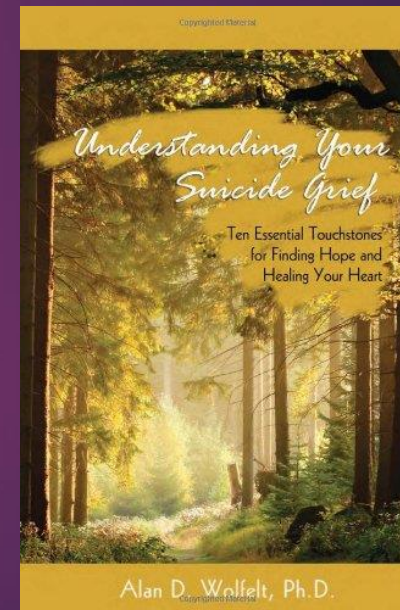
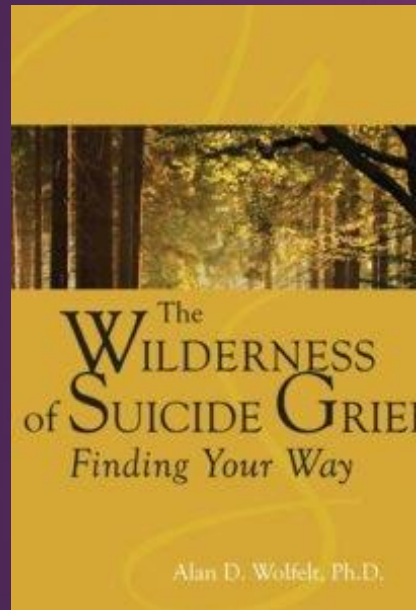
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“Do the  
best you  
can until  
you know  
better.  
Then when  
you know  
better, do  
better.”

- *Maya Angelou*

Have grace  
with yourself!

## Touchstone #2

“Misconceptions about grief are common in our society because we tend not to openly mourn or talk about suicide grief & mourning.”



# Grief and Mourning are the Same Thing

- Grief is What happens to Us.
  - internal
- Mourning is What we do with our grief
  - “grief gone public”

# Grief following a suicide death always results in “complicated” or “pathological” mourning

- ▶ Research shows that survivors of suicide integrate grief about the same as someone who experiences any kind of unanticipated death.
- ▶ Natural challenges of suicide grief:
  - ▶ Trauma of witnessing or discovering the person
  - ▶ The “Whys?”
  - ▶ Lack of support
  - ▶ Secondary victimization

# Grief & Mourning progress in predictable and orderly stages

- ▶ Grief is disorganized!
- ▶ Grief is Unique!
- ▶ Grief is Personal!



# Only Crazy or Certain Kinds of People Die by Suicide

- Approximately 2/3's of people who die by suicide have undiagnosed or untreated depression
- Suicide does not see race, religion, age, income, or socioeconomics



# Suicide is Inherited & Runs in the Family



Untreated mental health disorders.

Although there is a higher risk factor, it is not predetermined.

# When Someone You Love Dies by Suicide, You Only Grieve & Mourn the Physical Loss

## ➤ Loss of Self

- Self confidence
- Health
- Personality
- Self identity

## ➤ Loss of Security

- Emotional security
- Physical security
- Fiscal security
- Lifestyle

## ➤ Loss of Meaning

- Goals & Dreams
- Faith
- Will/Desire to live
- Joy

# Nobody Can Help You With Your Grief

- Sharing pain with others will not make it disappear, but it will over time, make it more bearable.
- Support groups, well trained grief counseling, faith-based support, family, friends, pets

*“There is no path so dark, nor road so steep, nor hill so slippery, that other people have not been there before me and survived. May my dark times teach me to help the people I love on similar journeys.”*      Maggie Bedrosian

# Are You Called to do This Work?

“You see, love and grief are two sides of the same precious coin.  
One does not- and cannot- exist without the other.”

*Dr. Alan Wolfelt (Loving from the outside in, Mourning from the inside out)*

# What is Companionship?

- Companionship the bereaved is not about assessing, analyzing, fixing, or resolving another's grief. It is about being totally present to the mourner.
- Understanding that Grief is not an illness to be treated, but an opportunity to say, "teach me" and "walk with me"?
- Must have a compassionate, open heart to create a safe non-judgmental space for the griever.

# How do we start this thing call “Companioning”?

- ▶ We must give up our Ego!
- ▶ Do our own Pain work. This creates a “safe place” for the griever.
- ▶ Honoring their stories require us to slow down, turn inward, & listen.
- ▶ Hospitality! Let's get coffee.

# Self-Care / Self-Companioning

- Essential to give yourself the same focused, compassionate, you-centric companionship that you give your clients
- 3 Major Reasons
  - We owe it to ourselves and families to lead joyful, whole lives.
  - Our work is draining- physically, emotionally, and spiritually
  - We owe it to our clients



# Suicide Grief Resources

- ▶ <https://www.asparc.org/resources/for-survivors-of-suicide-loss>
- ▶ <https://afsp.org/community-programs>
- ▶ <https://afsp.org/find-a-support-group>
- ▶ <https://www.centerforloss.com/2016/12/exploring-uniqueness-suicide-grief/>

# References

- ▶ <https://www.merriam-webster.com>
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- ▶ Wolfelt, A. (2009). *Understanding your Suicide grief: Ten Essential touchstones for finding hope and Healing your heart*. Companion Press.
- ▶ Wolfelt, A. (2012). *Companioning you!: A soulful guide to caring for yourself while you care for the dying and the bereaved*. Companion Press.
- ▶ Wolfelt, A. D. (2012). "Loving from the outside In, Mourning from the inside out".
- ▶ [www.asprc.org](http://www.asprc.org)



Let's Get Coffee!

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