

Support After Suicide Newsletter

Support After Suicide Program

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Monday & Tuesday

Counsellors at DOFM

Mon-Fri

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Sarah Martin

Welcome...



The abrupt ending of a life by suicide leaves unique emotional scars on those left behind. This newsletter aims to provide a link with others who have lost a relative, partner or close friend as a result of suicide.

Some of you may decide to attend group meetings where you will meet others who have suffered a similar loss. Some of you may never be able to do that, but have had some contact with one of the Forensic counsellors. Each persons' grief journey is unique.

This month we have written about our 'thoughts' and the impact they can have on our daily life. Whether it's interrupting our much needed sleep, distracting us from our work or caring for others or leading us into another grief surge. We have written about a technique that Dr Russ Harris uses in his Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) called diffusion. Another technique that we have found useful has been developed by Robert Neimeyer. It can help us make sense of our loss if we find that we are ruminating in our thoughts and are preoccupied with the event and it's impact on our life.

Support Group Meetings

are held on the

1st Tuesday of every month

Time: 7:15 pm

at

DOFM

50 Parramatta road

GLEBE

Next Meetings:

April 7

May 5

Please speak to Holly or one of the counsellors before attending for the first time.

New Resource for supporting children after a suicide

We have come across a new resource called: *Tell me what happened: talking with children and young people about suicide*. It's written by Support After Suicide a program by Jesuit Social Services. This book is a really useful resource for parents or family members who have concerns about supporting and talking to a child or young person after the death of a loved one to suicide. It highlights the importance of communicating with children in a way that is appropriate for their age and development and the possible implications if you decide not to tell the children. It includes what some common reactions may be in children and young people and how you can best support them while also taking care of yourself. In one chapter it outlines some steps you can take in actually telling your children and gives you some examples on what you could say. Also there are specific chapters on trauma, age specific reactions and why suicide grief is different. In the back of the book there are some really touching life stories written by young people and parents who reflect on their own experiences and I think these could be really helpful and reassuring for some families.

We will hold a couple of copies in our library but, you could also order a copy from: www.jss.org.au/policy-and-advocacy/publications-and-research

The book can also be read online at:
<http://tellingmewhathappened.rvrapid.com/>

SAS Newsletter by Email!

The SAS newsletter is available electronically, using PDF format & requiring Acrobat Reader. If you would like to receive the newsletter through this means instead of the regular mail, please let me know. Just send an email request with both your email details and postage details to:

holly.smith@sswahs.nsw.gov.au

Ever thought of Writing Your Story?...

After the death of a loved one it is very common to feel like our whole life is shattered. We can find ourselves ruminating about the event and the impact it has had on our life. Our plans and dreams for the future often included our loved one and it makes us question and reflect back on our life and ourselves as a way of making meaning of what actually happened and perhaps why. As Neimeyer (2014) writes it is often necessary to process *the event story of the death* and the *back story of the relationship* as a way of understanding the death and to make meaning of what happened. This can be an important part of the grief journey. **Writing** your life story can be a helpful way to process and understand your unique life in a way that is meaningful however it can seem overwhelming and be difficult to know where to start! In his book *Grief and the Expressive Arts*, Robert Neimeyer (2014) writes about a technique that he uses in groups and with individuals called **Chapters of our Lives**. Rather than writing a whole book he suggests you start by roughing out a *table of contents*. This would include headings of the different 'chapters' of your life so far. These chapter titles might reflect a particular phase of your life, significant events, a time, or mile stone. The chapter titles may also reflect your changing insights into your own family and world. What events, insights, or phases are significant and important to you as you reflect back? The death of a loved one can also make us question the directions of our future – for example, what possibilities may be ahead?

Neimeyer suggested that you write down the chapters on a sheet of paper with a title and a short description or summary or dot points of what this chapter would contain and then in conversation with a partner, close friend or counsellor he asks you to reflect and find meaning in what you have written. These are the discussion points he recommends: *Organisation* – how did you organize the flow of your story and how did you decide when one chapter ended and another began and what role did significant losses play? *Projection* – when did you begin your story was it with birth or an event in early childhood? *Evolution* – if you were to continue to change in the way you are how do you imagine it may be different in 5 or 10 years? *Authorship* – who is the primary author is it you or another family member? How would your self-narrative look if some else, for example your mother or partner had written it? *Audience* – who would most appreciate the way the narrative is written, is there any silent story that isn't present? *Perspective* – is there any main themes for your self-narrative? What literacy genre would your life story fall into? Is there a genre that you would like to expand for the future? What goals could you set for yourself that would help you get there?

This can be a challenging exercise and some may not feel ready to do it. For others it may be a way to help put your losses into a life context, to make sense of the past, acknowledge the present and make goals for the future.

Neimeyer, R (2014) Ch 19. Chapters of Our Lives in R.A Neimeyer (Ed), *Grief and the Expressive Arts*. Routledge, UK, pp. 80-84..

At some of the darkest moments in my life, some people I thought of as friends deserted me—some because they cared about me and it hurt them to see me in pain; others because I reminded them of their own vulnerability, and that was more than they could handle. But real friends overcame their discomfort and came to sit with me. If they had not words to make me feel better, they sat in silence (much better than saying, "You'll get over it" or "It's not so bad, others have it worse") and I loved them for it. - Harold Kushner, Living a Life that matters

For Ian

*You continue to live for me in the sky,
among
The eucalypt trees swaying above your
grave,
In the shimmering blue waters of the
ocean,
In the clouds of grey days, when I am with
your brother
And above all, in the faces of your children.*

Dasia

Grief surges and other distressing emotions

Many people bereaved by suicide report that they have sudden surges of grief...bouts of sadness, anger, irritation, distress, feeling overwhelmed ...often when least expected and at inconvenient times! Thoughts and emotions can take over briefly or sometimes stay around for longer. Sometimes these surges of emotion can trigger a cascade of thoughts about what happened and the 'why's and 'if only's'. At other times it can feel like thoughts are racing through your head all the time, impacting your sleep, your ability to work, your mood, how you feel and even your friendships and relationships. So what can you do when emotions and thoughts overwhelm you?

Russ Harris' (2011) book, *'The reality slap'* is based on Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT). It is written for people dealing with life altering crises and describes techniques that can help us manage our emotions and thoughts rather than them managing our lives. Harris suggests trying to push the emotions and thoughts away; to distract or drown them out can help sometimes, but often they can come back even worse or for longer. An alternative approach is **diffusing**, which help us to 'detach' or 'unhook' ourselves from these thoughts. Diffusion means mentally separating from our thoughts and emotions. This first means noticing that we are absorbed in our thoughts. When we follow 'noticing' with 'naming' we create a distance between us and our emotions and thoughts. We can then choose how to respond in the present moment. **Notice** your emotion...when you have suffered such a devastating loss it is common to be absorbed in our thoughts and before you know it you can be caught up in what happened and the cascade of thoughts and emotions that follows. Try to notice what mind is doing and how you are responding to it. Harris suggests that it is a bit like pausing a DVD player for a moment to interrupt the film. This allows you to reflect on what is happening at that moment and take stock. By 'pausing' the story we are no longer caught up in the story and this allows us to step back a bit. Then **Name** your emotion...as you notice what you are feeling, name it, silently say to yourself 'Here is fear'; here's guilt; 'here's anger; here is 'worry'; 'I notice I am feeling anxious'; here is 'blame' ... if it's a mix of thoughts about what happened name the story...'I notice I am thinking about what happened again' or 'here's the blame story'. This helps create a bit of space between you and your thoughts and feelings. **Breathe into** your emotion...Breathe slowly.... Imagine your breath breathing into and around the emotion, around the thoughts. **Allow** your emotion and thoughts to be there...make space for it. It may not be comfortable but it is OK...it is OK to feel what you feel. Noticing, naming and allowing our thoughts and emotions help us to 'un hook' ourselves from unhelpful thoughts. It doesn't push them down or challenge them, rather it encourages us to notice them flow by 'like leaves on a stream or clouds in the sky' without letting them consume us. The aim is not to get rid of the feelings and thoughts of grief, but rather make room for them, and allow them to be here, allow them to come and go, and expand our capacity to cope. We can then be in a position to think more clearly and make choices about what we do.

If you are interested in these techniques you will find Russ Harris book *The Reality Slap* helpful. You may also find you have a greater understanding of this process with the assistance of a counsellor who is trained in Mindfulness and / or Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT). Check out <http://www.actmindfully.com.au/directory.asp> and **Harris, R (2011) *The Reality Slap*. Exisle: Australia.**

Notice...Farewell from counsellor Jane Mowll.. after 15 years with the Support after Suicide Program and the Department of Forensic Medicine I am taking leave. I will be doing some research with the University of Notre Dame, Australia looking at how people cope with bereavement after suicide and other sudden death as well as after palliative care loss. I am hoping to contribute valuable information about the needs and experiences of bereaved people to help inform and provide better services. It has been such a privilege to be involved in the program and get to know some of you, and connect with you all though writing and editing this newsletter with Holly! I hope to still be involved in the future, in the meantime Holly Smith and Colleen Fitzpatrick from the counselling team will be looking after the program. Warm regards **Jane Mowll** jane.mowll@nd.edu.au

Some other Support Groups

Northern Beaches

1st Tuesday of the month at Lifeline Balgowlah 7 pm.
2nd Tuesday of the month at the Tramshed Narrabeen 7 pm.
Ph: Kathi (02) 9949 5522 during office hours.

Gordon

2nd Thursday of every month at 7pm
Contact Ceiny Maybury for information. Ph: (02) 9498 8805

Port Macquarie

4th Wednesday of every month at 6pm.
Contact Lee-Ann Foord for further information. Ph: (02) 6581 2800

Macarthur

Monthly evening group
Contact Jackie Moore: Ph: (02) 4645 7208 or 0413286496

Central Coast

An 8 week structured closed group, running 4 times a year in the evenings.
Contact Lifeline during office hours. Ph: (02) 4323 6105

Newcastle

1st Wednesday of the month at 7pm
Ph: (02) 4940 2005 or 0419 993 195

Restoring the Heartbeat of Hope

Closed group program and counselling in the Lower North Shore.
Wings of Hope Association Project. Contact Dr Diana Sands,
Ph: 0414 721 653
e-mail: dianasands@bereavedbysuicide.com.au
Website: www.bereavedbysuicide.com.au

Penrith & Richmond Suicide Bereavement Support Groups

The Western Sydney Suicide Prevention and Support Network operates two evening support groups. For information phone 0402 627 696
A Penrith group meets on the 2nd Wednesday of the month and a Richmond group meets on the last Wednesday of the month.

Wollongong Salvation Army Support Group "ETC"

First Floor Program support group "etc .." 1st Tuesday each month, 6-8pm
Contact: Marilyn Dunn 4229 1079 (business hours) or 0411 143 586

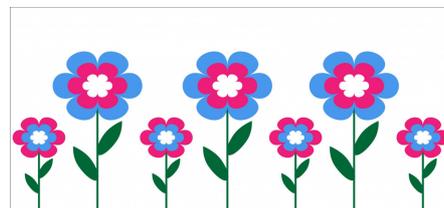
Please note: The support groups advertised in the newsletter are not connected with the DOFM and their advertisement in the newsletter is in no way an endorsement of the services.

The SASP has gratefully received a donation in loving memory of a beloved son Ian Black who died 8/1/05 aged 43.

Reminder

Our group is now running at the Department of Forensic Medicine—50 Parramatta road, Glebe from 7:15pm. There is free parking out the front from 7pm.

Please call Holly or Colleen before attending for the first time on (02)8584 7800



Anything that is human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone.

Fred Rogers

If you do not wish to continue receiving this newsletter, please let us know. You may send us a letter or write to:
holly.smith@sswahs.nsw.gov.au

Disclaimer

The information in this newsletter can only assist you in the most general way. If you need specific advice, please seek an appropriate professional who is knowledgeable in this area. Your local GP is often a good place to start. The contents of this newsletter should not be reproduced without permission.