

The Telegraph

NASHUA & REGION

news@nashuatelegraph.com | City Editor: Casey Jenkins | 594-1254

THURSDAY, MAY 24, 2018 | PAGE A-3

Understanding loss due to suicide can be difficult

By **SUSAN MEAD**
and **JESSIC CAPUANO**

For The Telegraph

Losing a loved one to suicide is one of life's most painful experiences. The feelings of loss, sadness, and loneliness experienced after the death of a loved one are often magnified in suicide survivors. Suicide will trigger a wide variety of emotions, including feelings of guilt, confusion, rejection, shame, anger, and the effects of stigma and trauma. These are normal emotions to experience during an abnormal situation.

Grief is the reaction that allows us to adapt to the loss of a loved one. While there are many stages of

grief, a survivor's experience of prolonged and unresolved grief is more prevalent in survivors of suicide. Common symptoms include: The need to understand. Many suicide survivors are tormented with the need to make sense of this death. There are often many unanswered questions, especially if there was not a message left behind from their loved one.

Survivors often feel that there is a series of events to untangle, including their own role in the whole sequence. Yet, many questions will remain unanswered. Personal Responsibility. A common reaction of the surviving loved one is an exaggerated sense of somehow being responsible and then feeling guilty for not being able to prevent this death. This reaction is even more magnified when a parent loses a child to sui-

cide. However, the majority of people who do commit suicide were suffering with a mental illness or substance misuse disorder when they died. This is important to realize because it can help some survivors make sense of the death and to let go of self-blame. Abandonment/Anger. Many suicide survivors feel abandoned by their deceased loved one. This can include feelings of anger for being left behind to deal with the stress of life without this person. Anger can be directed towards the person who died, mental health providers, God, or family/people close to the person. Recognizing anger is normal and

finding safe places to talk about it can help. Stigma. Despite efforts to end the stigma of mental illness, suicide is still highly stigmatized. Suicide can be difficult to discuss. Survivors often feel the need to conceal the cause of death. Some religions impose shameful restrictions on the grief process for suicide survivors. Life insurance companies have clauses with built in stigma. Openly talking about their loved one and circumstances of death is vital for recovery, and these effects of stigma can pose harmful barriers to the healing process.

LOSS | PAGE A-5



Loss

CONTINUED FROM | PAGE A-3

Trauma. Suicide survivors are at higher risk for developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Some suicide survivors develop this type of anxiety disorder that can become chronic if not treated. In PTSD, the trauma of the loss is re-lived over and over and sometimes with images that can create great anxiety and eventually have an impact on functioning. There may be re-occurring thoughts of the death and the circumstances surrounding the death. Death by suicide can sometimes be violent, sudden and unexpected. There may be shock associated with finding their loved one deceased, identifying their loved one, or being at the death scene in general.

What can you do to help? Be a friend. A helpful comment might be, "I can't imagine what you are going through". A not so helpful comment would be: "I know what you're going through." It is best to ask survivors how you can support them through this process, as not everyone will want your company, advice or food. Let them know that you care and are thinking of them.

Time. Try to keep in mind that time does indeed help.

Rituals/Celebrations. Suggesting a special time to celebrate the memory and life of the person will be comforting for some.

Do not judge. Judging survivors on how they are dealing with this situation is not helpful. We are all human and will grow and learn from the path we take. Letting go of the "what ifs," the "should haves," and the "shouldn't

haves" might be easier said than done initially.

Professional guidance. Attending a grief/suicide survivor group or supportive therapy allows for privacy and the space to vent in a safe setting. Numerous triggers and feelings of varying intensities may arise. There will be triggers for some, perhaps a song, a scent, a place, a saying, that may trigger one's emotions. Sometimes it is best to say, "Have you thought of seeing a professional to help you through this?" Recognize your limitation as a friend, but offer a hand to get them to see a clinician.

We offer a wide array of behavioral health programs, including treatment for substance use disorders, and for individuals challenged with both mental health and substance

misuse simultaneously. Our services are available for all ages from children to older adults, and no one is ever turned away due to the inability to pay. In addition, we are the statewide providers of behavioral health services for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Don't go it alone. We're here to help. Contact Greater Nashua Mental Health Center today. For an appointment call our intake line at 603-402-1574. For general information call our main number at 603-889-6147. Our videophone number is 603-821-0073. To speak to someone 24 hours a day, seven days a week if you are in crisis, call 800-762-8191.

Susan Mead, MA, is the community education and outreach director at the Greater Nashua Mental Health Center. Jessica Capuano, MA, LCMHC, is the acute care services program manager at the Greater Nashua Mental Health Center.



Greater Nashua Mental Health Center

at Community Council

Strengthening Our Community Since 1920!

**Do you need support with
life's challenges?**

You're not alone. We are here to help.

Our agency believes in empowering people to lead full and satisfying lives through effective treatment and support.

No one is ever turned away due to an inability to pay.

603.402.1574

or visit www.gnmhc.org for details.