



The Lighthouse

Touched By Suicide
Survivors Gather

Volume 8 Issue 4

Spring 2011

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Layout

The Suicide Support group gatherings are open to all individuals who have been touched by suicide. The group meets year round on the first Wednesday of the month 7:00 – 8:30 p.m. at Hospice of the Rock River Valley, between Dixon and Sterling at 264 Illinois Route 2, Dixon.

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Newsletter of Touched by Suicide, Survivors Gather

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From the Editor AS WE SEE IT: The Importance of Listening

One of the ways to help suicide survivors is by being a "good" listener. We listen throughout our life, listening casually to the sounds and words that surround us. We listen internally to our own thoughts and emotions, and to the daily dramas that bring meaning and insight into our lives.

Listening to the sounds of nature – to the rhythms of life (using all our senses) tells us that we are in the presence of beauty, awe and harmony. Wilderness enhances such a spiritual unfolding and heightens connectedness to others and to the world. Thus, we have a grounding, a base, from which we engage in listening to those impacted by suicide.

On one level, "therapeutic listening" is essential for those in helping professions; counselors, medical personnel, clergy, and social workers. Such professionals attend to suicide survivors and intervene with persons identified as suicidal. In addition, there are many lay persons who hear the sounds and voices of survivors. They include family members, friends and those who come together as a suicide support group. They have listened to expressions of grief, heartache, remorse, crying, moaning, and sometimes screaming and want to respond.

Listening helps us internalize and respond with empathy rather than trying "to fix the problem". Listening does not require us to always have a comment or response. When we concentrate on receiving, it sends a message to the survivor that what you say is important. "If I know you really listen to me, I will trust you."

Our support group has Ground Rules that spell out accepted principles for our monthly gatherings. Here are some of those rules that pertain to good listening:

- Listening is a priority. Everyone is to listen as one person speaks. There is to be no interrupting or cross talking.
- Members are not to give advice.
- Members will offer one another the gift of silence and attention during the expression of feelings.
- Members will not speak for another person.

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Choosing to Die

A few years ago Motti Gur gave up battling cancer. He chose to die by suicide because he did not want to be a burden on his family.

While Gur could not defeat cancer, he led soldiers into battle many times without fear.

He was the Israeli general who liberated Jerusalem in the Six-Day War in 1967.

Teenage Bullying

A sixteen year old boy in Virginia died by suicide weeks after he was taunted and bullied in his high school. Such incidents are being brought to light more frequently throughout the country. The media has coined the term "bullycide" to describe suicides that occur following bullying, although this alone may not be the cause. However, it does add to the stress adolescents experience during a time of physical, social and cognitive change.

The recent media attention on the consequences of bullying has helped redefine it from simply a "right of passage" to a problem with potentially devastating results. Although bullying may take different forms, it does occur among both teen boys and girls.

Based on: Karen Waters, "Teenage Bullies: Might Not Right," Phi Kappa Phi FORUM, Spring, 2011, pp. 7-9.

High School Student Kills Assistant Principal and Self

In January, a 17-year old boy gunned down the assistant principal at an Omaha, Nebraska high school. She had suspended the boy earlier in the day. He later took his own life with the same handgun.

Mountain Biker's Death in Spain

A 37-year old Spanish mountain biker died by suicide in January. He was among 14 people being detained in an investigation into doping in athletics. His body was discovered in his residence, but officials would neither confirm or deny that doping substances or equipment were found there.

The Lighthouse is published quarterly at no charge. We welcome submission of news items, poems, reviews, and personal stories. Comments and suggestions to the editor are appreciated.

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Responding to Suicide in Princeton

Though the overhead pictures, taken from a helicopter on June 5, 2010, are small, you can still make out a ribbon of neon orange wending its way through the streets of Princeton, Illinois. That ribbon represented nearly 500 people wearing orange T-shirts, who, in a town of 7,600, braved the drizzle to express their grief over losing several teens recently to suicide, and to commit to finding a way to prevent future tragedy. Not all the walkers were from the Princeton area, of course—some traveled from as far away as Arizona and Hawaii to share their grief with friends and family.

While the year from May, 2009, through May, 2010, had produced an unusually high number of youth suicides in Princeton—the highest in the nation, per capita, for that period—it was by no means the first time the tragedy had touched local residents. In 2006 Chris Compton had created a \$2,000 memorial fund at her church after losing her son to suicide. She had intended to one day use the money for a walk to raise awareness of the tragedy, and to prevent future suicides. In the summer of 2009, she joined forces with the 13th Judicial Circuit Family Violence Prevention Council, when, as Coordinator, I had convened several local talks about suicide prevention, and we began making plans for the walk.

Princeton High School had invited Cheryl Robinson, a LivingWorks instructor from Sterling, IL., to conduct a 'safeTALK' training, and she returned in October to do a 'suicideTALK' for the community, attended by 98 people. The town's first ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) was hosted by the Council in February, 2010, training 30 in all: Police officers, firefighters, educators, health care professionals, and concerned citizens. By then a group of dedicated citizens, many who were, like Chris, survivors of suicide, had been convening regularly to plan the walk scheduled for June 5, 2010.

The tragedies of suicide seemed to have touched about everyone in Princeton and beyond, leaving the town reeling. The walk seemed to come along at just the right time to be a catharsis—an action—something to do about the pain. Virtually every citizen, business and civil servant embraced it by asking, "What can I do?" and "To whom do I make out the check?"

Without being asked, volunteers lined up to do whatever was needed: Record registrants; hold registration events in the park and in front of the Chamber office; order banners for the walkers and signs for the water stations; coordinate with the city for the route, which stretched about a mile; arrange for parking and transportation back after the walk; arrange for bands who performed free. Indeed, everything that needed to be done seemed to have a volunteer step in to do it. We had covered all local media with releases, created fliers, registration forms, a web site to download them from, and a Facebook page.

We had estimated about 200 to 300 walkers, and ordered 500 orange shirts, thinking that any leftovers could be used the next year. By Tuesday before the walk, registrants rounded the 500 mark. By Thursday night we'd registered 650, by Friday, 750. On Saturday morning, in the hour before the walk, registration, when tallied afterward, had topped 877. Of course we had run out of shirts by Tuesday, too late to order more. And we had raised over \$22,000.

Since the walk, Living Works has sponsored a monthly Grief Support Group for suicide survivors that meets every third Thursday in Princeton. Our two-day ASIST training in February, 2011 was interned by Cathie Nelson, our first local trainer partially subsidized by Living Works. Terry Dumyahn will become our second local trainer after receiving her five-day ASIST training in March.

As we plan the Living Works Suicide Walk for June 4, 2011, we ask ourselves, "Will the enthusiasm be the same this year?" One never knows what has been prevented, but thankfully having no suicides since our 2010 walk has been a catalyst—members of our committee took part in interventions where people with thoughts of suicide had received the professional help they needed. And those are only the ones we know about. Does that mean every suicide has been

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My Son My Son

Ignition...on
and in perhaps an hour, it was over.
One slash of time made ridicule
of caution, for the silence that he knew
was not enough; he hated it,
chose death instead,
and that without regret.

I wonder just how long it was
the engine poured its fumes
into his ambience,
and he beyond a care...
how many passed just yards away,
how many chronicles raced with them,
past his waning consciousness
as they sped by.

It was a double silence that prevailed
upon the darkening day--
a double irony as that frail candle
smoldered when its destiny
was light.

(Twelve years ago my youngest son drove his van to a sheltered area off a lesser-traveled road, connected a hose to his exhaust, wrote a long and loving note, and died alone. Unknown to us, he couldn't take depression any more. This poem offers no self-consolation; I am better now, but it expresses the absolute grief I was unable to put into words at the time.)

Robert Ludden
Chatsworth, CA