

POSTVENTION AND GRIEF WORK:  
HELPING OURSELVES AND OUR  
COMMUNITIES HEAL

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# Overview of the Presentation

- Action Alliance Guidelines
- Suicide Bereavement
- Postvention

## Paraphrasing Shneidman:

- “Postvention is Prevention of Future Suicides”



# *Survivors of Suicide Loss Task Force*

<http://actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/>

# Background – *SOSL Task Force*

- NAASP – Public Private Partnership Created in 2010
  - Mission = Advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (NSSP)
  - NSSP – 2001, Updated 2012
  - Various Task Forces
- Survivors of Suicide Loss Task Force
  - Draft comprehensive guidelines for postvention in the U.S.
  - Expert review of the guidelines
  - Disseminate guidelines
  - Facilitate implementation of the guidelines

# Task Force

## Recommendations:

### *Organization of Guidelines*

- Organized Around the 4 Strategic Directions of the NSSP:
  - 1 - Healthy & Empowered Individuals, Families, Communities
  - 2 – Clinical & Community Preventative Services
  - 3 – Treatment and Support Services
  - 4 – Surveillance, Research, & Evaluation
- Total of 15 Goals & Numerous Objectives Under Each Goal

# SD 3 – Treatment & Support Services

- Goal 10: At the level of professional clinical services, provide an array of treatment, programs, and resources that help people affected by unremitting or complicated grief, PTSD, depression, suicidality, and other acute or potentially debilitating conditions.
  - Objective 10.1: Ensure that professional assessment and treatment for loss survivors are provided by a clinician with broad competencies in a relevant discipline and specialized knowledge of and experience with people exposed to suicide. p.34

# Why Help Survivors?

- Exposure = Elevated Risk of Suicidal Behavior & Completion Have Been Found in:
  - Bereaved Parents (esp. mothers)
  - Bereaved Spouses (esp. older males)
  - Bereaved Children (esp. when mother dies before child is 21)
  - Bereaved work colleagues
  - Peers (esp. in depressed adolescents and young adults)



# Why Help Survivors?

- Additional Complications – Survivors Have Elevated Rates of:
  - Mental health disorders (Mood, anxiety, & PTSD)
  - Substance abuse
  - Suicidal ideation
  - Isolation and stigmatization
  - Complicated (prolonged) grief
  - Physical/medical disorders
  - Service utilization (medical & psychiatric)
- Effects Have Been Demonstrated as Far Out as 10 Years After the Suicide
- Conclusion: *Suicide Leaves a Heavy Toll in its Wake*

# Conclusions

- Survivors of suicide loss are at elevated risk for suicide!
- Survivors of suicide loss at elevated risk for adverse health and mental health sequelae!
- *Postvention is Prevention!*

# Further Reading – Special Issue of *Death Studies*

- Jordan, J. R. (2017). Postvention is prevention—The case for suicide postvention. *Death Studies*, 41(10), 614-621.
- Jordan, J. R., & McGann, V. (2017). Clinical work with suicide loss survivors: Implications of the U.S. postvention guidelines. *Death Studies*, 41(10), 659-672.



# *Where Can I Get the Guidelines?*

*<http://actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/>*

# *Clinical Work With Loss Survivors: Needs, Challenges and Rewards*

“The deceased hang their psychological skeletons in the closet of the survivor.”

-paraphrased by Ed Shneidman

# *Clinical Aspects of Suicide Grief*

*Duration*

*Intensity*

*Suicidality*

*Common Themes*

# Clinical Goals with Suicide Grief Work

- Meaning Making
- Repair of the Relational Bond
- Adapting to Changes in Social Connections
- Reinvestment in Living

# Countertransference with Suicide Loss

- Need to fix/Feeling hopeless
- Need to blame
- Need to simplify/Need to complicate
- Need to minimize/panic
- Need to rush

Examples...



# Paraphrasing Shneidman:

- A benign society ought routinely provide postvention.

# Organizational Support After A Suicide

- Plan Ahead
- Communicate Effectively
- Aid Mourning Rituals, Account for Risk of Contagion
- Consider A Teachable Moment
- Proactively Help Those at High Risk
- Respond Over The Long Term

# Special Postvention Populations

- Schools
- Colleges
- Hospitals/Clinics
- Workplace
- Clinicians

# Resources

After a Suicide: A Toolkit For Schools

A Manager's Guide to Suicide Postvention in the Workplace

Postvention: A Guide for Response To Suicide on College Campuses

Riverside Trauma Center Postvention Guidelines

CONNECT Postvention Protocols and Trainings

Lifeline Online Postvention Manual

The Suicide Funeral (or Memorial Service): Honoring Their Memory, Comforting Their Survivors

AAS Clinician Survivor Task Force