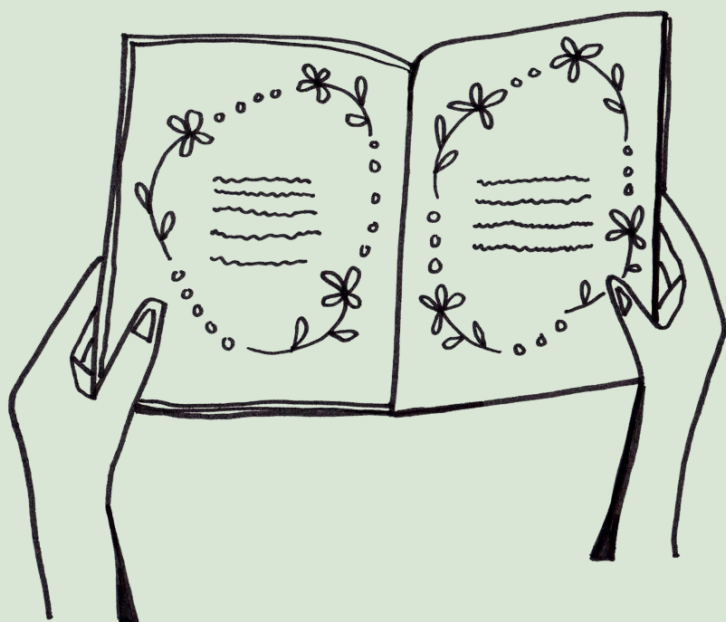


SURVIVAL GUIDE

for the first 30 days after a
suicide loss



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If you or someone you know are experiencing thoughts of suicide, I urge you to call the Suicide & Crisis hotline by dialing 988. Help and hope is available to you.

This guide is not intended to replace professional and medical resources that are available to those coping with the grief of suicide loss. It is intended to serve as an extended hand of help, from one human being to another; a companion as you walk one step at a time.

If you are reading these words and have just lost a loved one to suicide, I want to tell you three things. The first is that you are not alone in your pain. The second is that there is hope for your broken heart. And the third is that, with help, you can and must survive.

I am certain of these three things only because I have experienced them myself and I continue to live them every single day. I know that you are not alone because I exist, too. I know there is hope for your broken heart because I have felt hope in my own broken heart. And I know that you must survive and march on because, just like me, it is still your turn here on this earth.

This guide is unapologetically written through the lens of my personal experience. I can't make it anything other than my own advice because I can only be sure of what has worked for me. Many of the methods in this guide are practiced and recommended by a mix of medical professionals, grief counselors, fellow suicide loss survivors, and friends – but I have written this entirely from my personal perspective. It is subjective, and it's all I know to be true.

Luckily for both of us, there is a wealth of resources on coping with grief, and specifically with grief in the aftermath of a suicide, and I pray and trust that these flow to you in the coming weeks and months. Many such resources found me, for which I'm very grateful.

In my experience, the early days after a suicide death are about surviving each day; and it can be overwhelming to consider healing, rebuilding, and finding meaning in the grief while you're trying to survive such devastating heartbreak. I'm calling this booklet the Survival Guide for the First 30 Days After a Suicide Loss. It is meant to share the basic, replicable steps that carried me through the first 30 days of deep grief.

This is the guide that I needed when I first received the news that my beloved mother had taken her life. It is all infused with my most genuine hope that it might help you. Take from it anything that brings you relief, and leave all that doesn't.

The first 30 days after a suicide loss may be the most challenging of your life, but I believe that you can do it. I was quite sure I couldn't, but I did. I am with you.

Yours in solidarity – through the darkness and back towards the light,

Lillian Bicchieri

Daughter of Joan Frain Bicchieri (June 17, 1958 - December 17, 2021)

DAILY NON-NEGOTIABLES

Encountering a grief as crushing as a suicide loss puts an extremely heavy burden on your heart and on your body. In the early days after such a loss, return to the most basic physical needs of the body: food, water, and rest.

Writing out and completing a list of Daily Non-Negotiables that are rooted in physical bodily requirements will provide a semblance of steadiness and will ensure that your body has the essentials to survive such a loss.

The next few pages will outline a few things that I suggest you adopt as Daily Non-Negotiables over the next 30 days.

Eating
Hydrating
Sleeping
Staying Clean
Movement
Routine

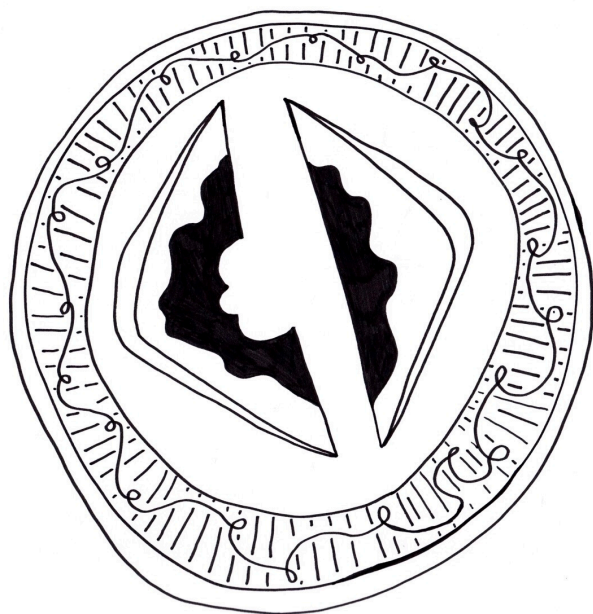
EATING

Eat something each day. It is normal for your appetite to subside or disappear altogether after such a traumatic loss, but it is important to take in calories to fuel your body for the tasks of the day ahead.

My suggestion is to eat whatever you find appetizing. Sweet foods generally go down easy. In the early days after I lost my mom, my diet consisted mostly of cookies and toast with jelly.

Of course, if you have the appetite to consume a healthy and balanced meal, good food can help to lift the spirits and boost your energy levels.

EATING



The most important thing is to eat what you can; at least a little bit every day.

HYDRATING

Anytime you think of it, drink a big glass of water. Being in deep pain is a lot of work. Your body is working every moment to heal, without you knowing it, and even when you're sleeping. Your body needs extra reserves of hydration to keep your systems moving.

I found that carrying a large water bottle with me throughout the day helped as a reminder to stay hydrated.

I also drank a lot of tea, especially chamomile tea, which has a calming effect on the body.

HYDRATING

The act of making a cup of tea (boiling water, choosing a tea bag, steeping the tea, sipping slowly) can be a good way to break up a bout of grief.



SLEEPING

Set aside at least 6 hours for sleep each day, even if it comes in small, separated chunks. If your nighttime sleep is disrupted, napping throughout the day is a good way to ensure you are getting some rest. Adjust your days around your sleep so that you can recharge your brain and body.



SLEEPING

I found it comforting to sleep when others in my house were awake and milling around within earshot, so I took frequent naps on my couch amidst company. I also found that it was easiest for me to sleep just before dawn, so I shifted my days to start a bit later to allow for sleep during the morning hours.

I struggled through the nighttime hours, I played the audio of comforting YouTube videos or podcasts from my phone to help distract my mind. There are a number of audio recommendations in the Resources section of this guide.

STAYING CLEAN

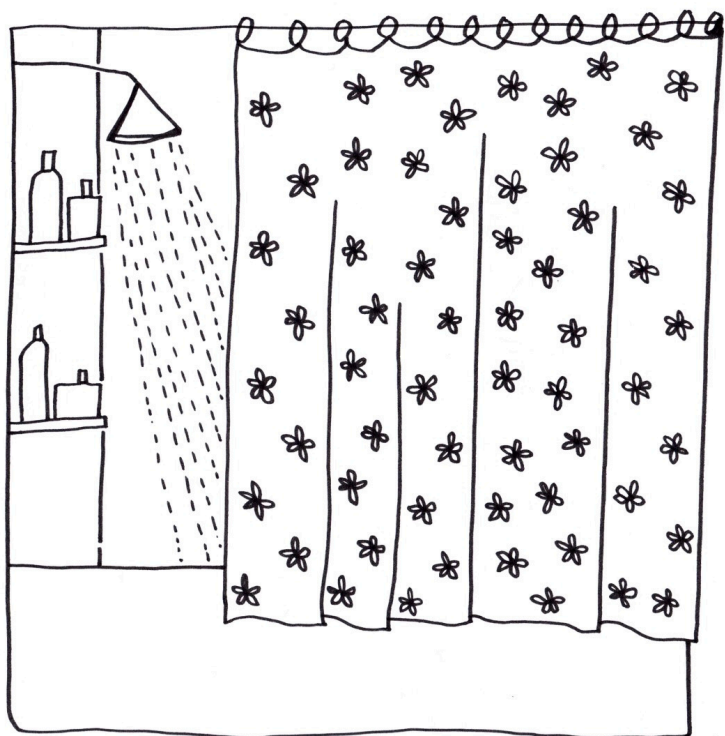
Shower and brush your teeth at least once every day.

The basic processes of personal hygiene provide the much-needed familiarity of routine tasks, and they also help to clear away the daily residue of deep grief.

Though I found it difficult to motivate myself to bathe, I always felt better after getting clean.

STAYING CLEAN

I stocked my shower with nice-smelling shampoos and focused on the scents of the soaps and the comforting warmth of the water on my body while I showered.



MOVEMENT

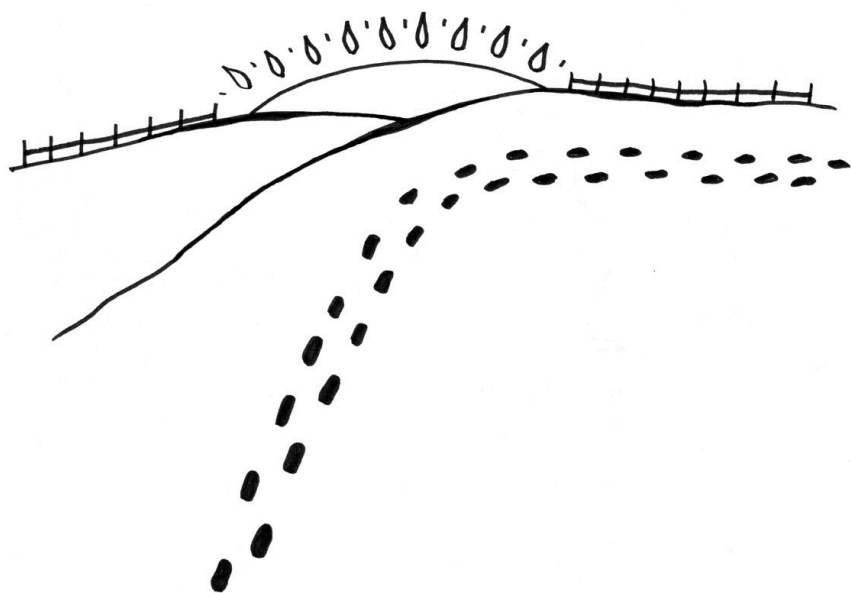
Move every day, even if it's just a little bit of gentle exercise. Exercise boosts serotonin levels and helps to break up your day and shift energy.

Try to seek movement that involves leaving your house and seeing other people – so, a walk around your neighborhood or local park is a good option.

I committed to taking a walk at least once daily – and I did not allow myself to miss a single day. I tried to walk short distances multiple times each day, usually along a familiar path on a sidewalk where I could see other people.

MOVEMENT

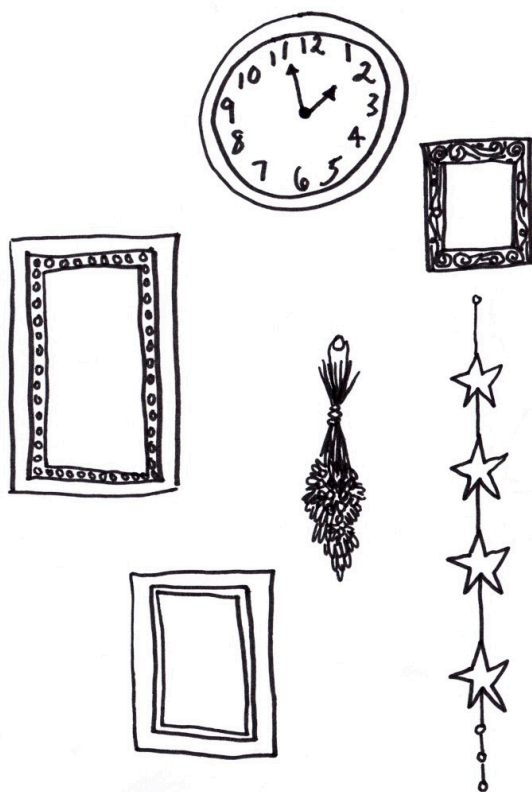
I focused on watching my feet move, one in front of the other, as a physical reminder of the passing of time and the forward movement of my life during this time of deep grief.



When family or friends visited me, I often asked them to take walks with me as a way to process grief outside of my home.

ROUTINE

Build yourself a simple routine around the Daily Non-Negotiables, and stick with it. Traumatic loss is highly disorienting, and brief, familiar daily activities can be like stepping stones through the heartbreak.



ROUTINE

My daily routine looked something like this:

Wake up at 9AM. Make and drink a cup of coffee. Take a shower and brush my teeth. Get dressed. Eat a piece of toast and drink a glass of water. Do something that needs to be done. Go for a walk. Take a nap. Clean the kitchen or bedroom. Eat a snack and drink a glass of water. Wash my face and brush my teeth. Put on pajamas. Go to bed.

This daily schedule helped to carry me through the first 30 days after losing my mother to suicide.

THE RELIEF LIST

As you go through the first 30 days after losing a loved one to suicide, take physical note of the things that bring you any bit of comfort. I suggest you write them down as a list and hang it in a visible place, like on your refrigerator.

In moments of great distress, choose an item from your Relief List to help break up the grief.

The next few pages will cover some channels of relief that I think would help most people in the wake of a suicide loss.

Company

Nature

Crying

Animals

Art

Movies and television

Helping someone else

COMPANY

Try to spend time in the company of others at least once each day. It can be very difficult to discern what you need from others during this time of deep grief, but try to be direct and ask for what would bring you immediate comfort. You might ask a friend or family member to come over and do the dishes while you take a nap. You might invite someone to go for a walk in silence with you. You might simply say, “I need company, can you come spend some time with me?”

If you do not have access to a close friend or family member, spend time somewhere familiar like the grocery store or post office. Your local library is also a safe place to go and sit or walk slowly among the aisles of books.

COMPANY



After losing my mom, my desire to be alone was very powerful and I often declined friends' offers to visit and spend time. But in my experience, I always felt better after visiting with a friend or leaving the house to go to a public space.

I recommend you do this at least once each day, if you can.

NATURE

Spending time in nature is very healing. Stand under a tree and look up at its leaves. Walk near water – the ocean, a lake, a pond, or a stream – and watch it ripple in the wind.

Listen to birds chirping. Breathe fresh air deep into your lungs. Study a flower very closely.



NATURE

There are endless examples of suffering, death, healing, birth, and renewal in nature.

Try to let the big, old, and mysterious world of nature capture your thoughts for a while.

I found it comforting to focus on the outlines and shapes of clouds as they passed in the sky – a reminder that the world is much bigger than me or this loss.

CRYING

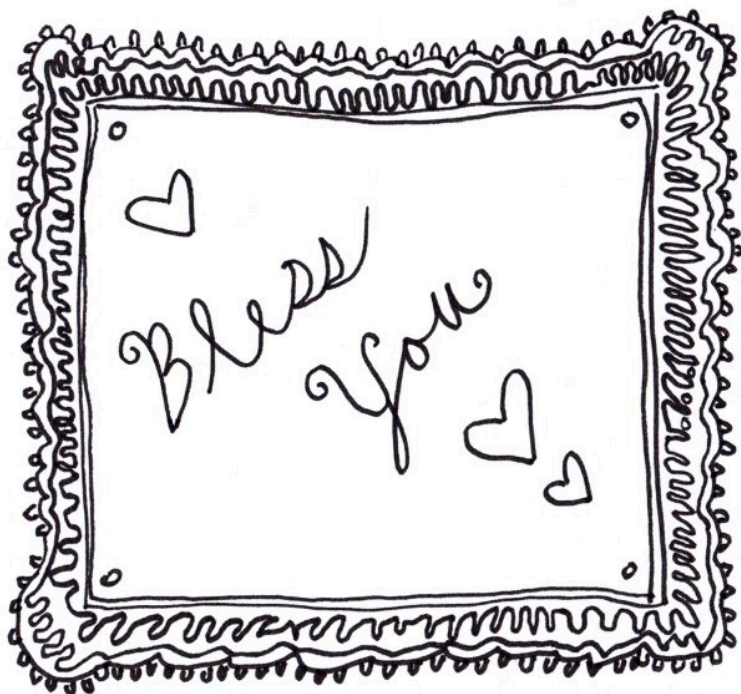
Crying is your body's way of relieving some of the pressure of deep grief. Tears tire you out so that you can rest. Often, much-needed sleep can come right after a period of crying.

I found that it was helpful to shed tears when they arose, but it was also important to book-end a period of crying. During intense episodes of tears in my family, we would remind each other to “not turn the corner.” That was our code phrase for stopping ourselves before we became hysterical.

You will learn where “the corner” of your crying is – and I recommend that you don't turn it. You are hurt enough; you are exhausted enough.

CRYING

I also eventually learned that it was not helpful for me to cry for more than an hour. After an hour, I learned to choose another item from my Relief List like taking a nap, making a cup of tea, going for a walk, or visiting with a friend to book-end the crying.



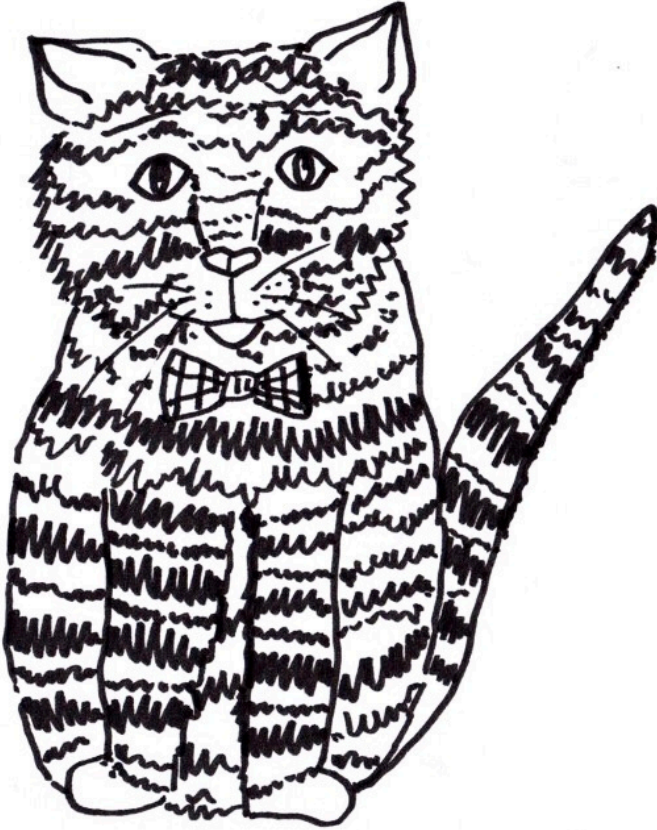
ANIMALS

Being near or touching animals can be like a calming balm to the nervous system. If you have access to an animal like a cat, dog, or horse, spend time with it. Focus on the soft feeling of its fur on your fingertips, the rise and fall of its lungs as it breathes, or how much it enjoys eating food.

Animals are a helpful reminder of the peace available in the present moment.

After we lost our mom, my sister and I spent many hours staring at our cat, Pierre. We watched him while he was sleeping, while he played with his catnip toys, and while he ate. It was a relief to witness him live his simple little cat life. When he curled up purring next to us, it soothed our hearts.

ANIMALS



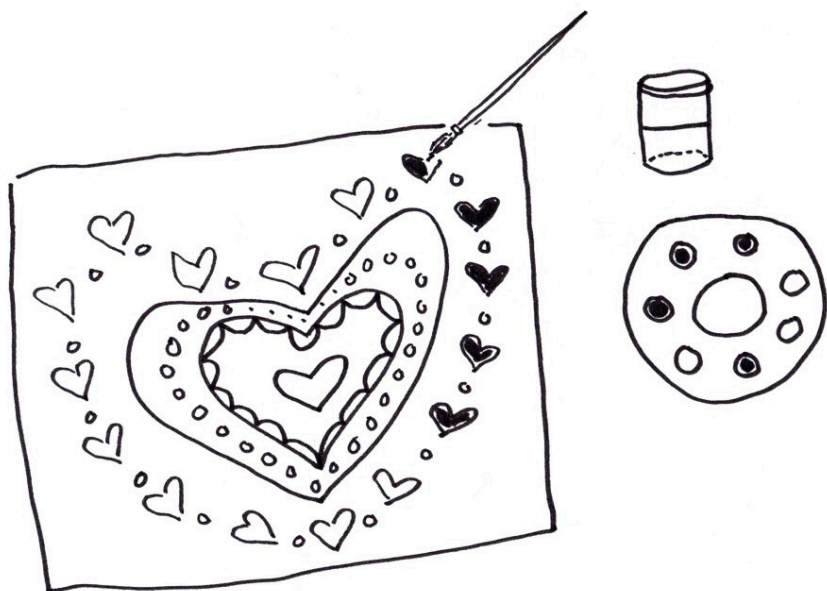
Our cat Pierre was the first thing that made us laugh again!

ART

Doodling, drawing, or painting can be a soothing outlet and healthy distraction for your brain and body. All you need is a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Try to imagine your grief flowing out of your heart, into the pencil, and onto the paper.

I found that I enjoyed the sensation of spreading paint on a canvas in abstract lines and color splotches, allowing myself to focus on colors and textures rather than creating something recognizable.

ART

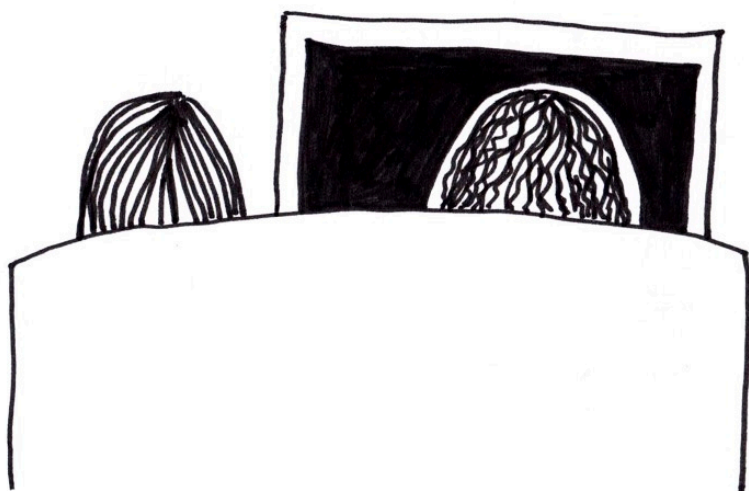


I also got comfort from drawing and painting hearts or tracing them in the sand or in the snow. My mom did this when she was alive, and she told me that they could be viewed from Heaven.

MOVIES, TELEVISION, AND PODCASTS

There are many options for free, uplifting, and light movies, television shows, and podcasts that can help you turn off your brain.

These can also provide comforting background noise while you rest, shower, or clean.



MOVIES, TELEVISION, AND PODCASTS

I found it most helpful to engage with shows or movies that I had seen before, to minimize the chance of surprises or triggering images or content. “The Office” was my go-to TV show.

I learned that I generally felt heavier and sadder if I watched television for more than 2 hours without moving on to another item from my Relief List. TV can provide a welcome distraction from grieving, but I found that it wasn’t helpful to linger too long in that distracted state.

HELPING SOMEONE ELSE

Being of service to others can be very healing to our hearts – a reminder of our interconnectedness and proof that we can still be helpful, despite our broken state.

Drop off a loaf of bread to a friend. Write someone a card. Text someone that you love them. Give a present to a child. Walk someone's dog. Pick up litter on the street.

HELPING SOMEONE ELSE

Even in my darkest times when I felt exhausted and depleted, there was a magic dose of energy that came to me when I did a small act of service for someone else.

Those bits of energy would brighten my spirit and carry me for a little while.



RESOURCES

Along with completing the Daily Non-Negotiables and choosing items from your Relief List, I hope these Resources will help you survive the early days after a suicide loss.

The next few pages include tangible and anecdotal resources that I used daily after losing my mother to suicide.

Accepting help

Professional counseling

Places of worship and prayer

Survivor groups and connections

An exit plan

A calendar

Books, shows, and clips

ACCEPTING HELP

In your grief, you might find that you have the tendency or desire to be alone. But the truth is that you need the help of your community during this time. Grief like this is not meant to (or able to) be weathered alone. When your friends, family, or even strangers offer their support, try to allow them to be like a buoy to you.

It might be helpful to direct your friends and family on how they can be of help to you during this time. Maybe they could bring you a shareable food dish that you could offer to other visitors. Maybe they could clean your kitchen while you rest. Maybe they could accompany you on an errand, sit next to you during difficult phone calls, or go for a walk with you.

ACCEPTING HELP

A suicide loss affects countless people, directly and indirectly, so it is likely that your friends and family are grieving, too. Try to let your community join you and help to carry you during this period of deep grief.



PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING

The help of professional therapist or counselor can make a huge difference in navigating the loss of a loved one to suicide. Most professional counselors are trained in processing trauma and grief, and some are specifically trained in navigating suicide loss.

Very soon after losing my mom, a family member connected me with a grief counselor who had experience working with survivors of suicide loss. It was so helpful to have her wise guidance and advice as I navigated the loss of my mom. I also worked closely with a spiritual counselor who helped me to turn to my Higher Power for help with my deep grief.

PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING



I often felt that the details of my mother's traumatic passing were too heavy to discuss with friends and family members. It was an immense relief to know that I could share them with a paid, trained professional who could help me process the darkest elements of my mom's passing.

PLACES OF WORSHIP, PRAYER, AND MEDITATION

Most places of worship, prayer, and meditation offer grief support groups and faith-based healing services. Learning to pray for help from a Higher Power can be a life-saving practice during deep grief.

(You can try reading my 12 Step Guide to Surviving Great Loss, if it speaks to you.)



PLACES OF WORSHIP, PRAYER, AND MEDITATION

We held my mother's funeral service at a beautiful Catholic cathedral, which I had never attended or visited prior to her death. I returned to that same church the week after her services, and the one after that, and the one after. It was one (and for a long time, the only) place where I felt some peace in my heart.

I never stopped going back to that church and remain a very grateful member.

SURVIVOR GROUPS & CONNECTIONS

Losing a loved one to suicide makes you a member of a group that no one wants to be a part of. But, it can be very comforting to speak with someone who has experienced a similar loss. Fellow suicide survivors “get it” in a way that most others cannot.

Within the first few days after losing my mother, I was put in touch with a woman whose husband took his life many years ago. Just sharing my pain with someone who had experienced something similar, and hearing the story of how she survived, was a huge source of comfort to me.

SURVIVOR GROUPS & CONNECTIONS

Talking to someone who had also experienced a suicide loss gave me hope that I could somehow survive the grief and learn to live again.



AN EXIT PLAN

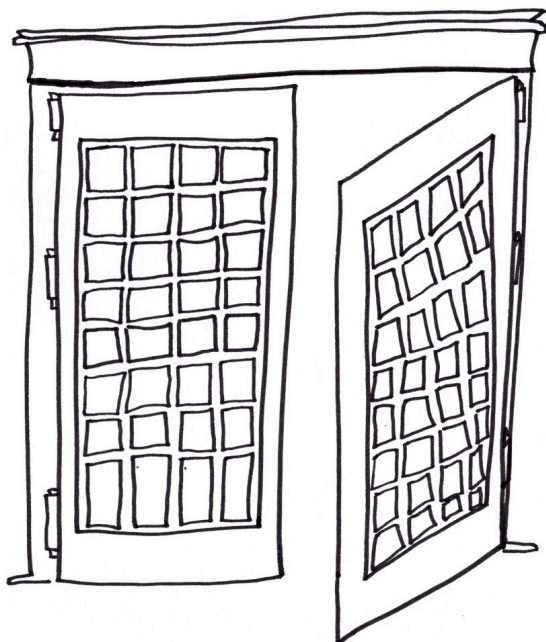
After losing a loved one to suicide, you may find it difficult to participate in many commonplace tasks or social situations. It can be helpful to have a pre-meditated exit plan for leaving a situation that you find painful, uncomfortable, or triggering.

A simple option for an exit plan is to say “I need to step outside for a bit,” and then remove yourself from the situation. You don’t have to explain your limits, triggers, or pain to anyone – you just have to take care of yourself.

AN EXIT PLAN

In my experience, there were many unexpected triggers in daily life after losing my mom.

Having a one-line exit plan allowed for me to take an undramatic break away from situations that upset me, without having to explain myself.



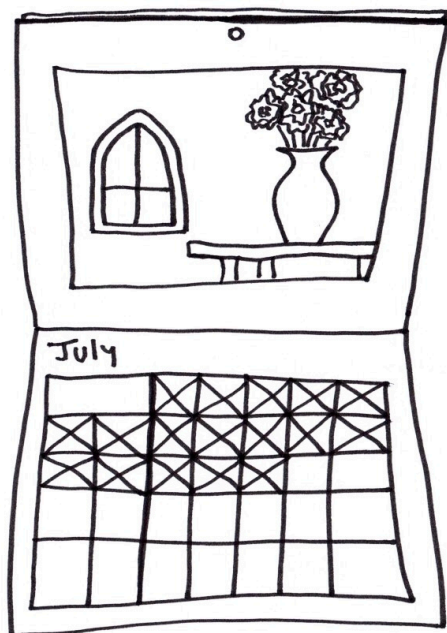
A CALENDAR

I can confirm that the passing of time does make the reality of a suicide loss more bearable. In time, you will learn how to live with this grief. You will begin to heal, to rebuild, and even to feel hope.

For now, you must focus on surviving and passing these early days with as much grace and courage as you can.

Crossing off each completed day on a calendar can be a helpful visual reminder of time passing; tangible proof that you are moving through this.

A CALENDAR



When my mom passed, I circled a day on the calendar about four months in the future – the day that the local ice cream shop would reopen for the summer season. I hoped that on that day the weather would be warmer and I might feel a little better. It helped to have that day in the future to work towards – and by the time it arrived, I was, in fact, feeling stronger.

BOOKS, SHOWS, AND CLIPS

Since loss eventually plays a role in every human life, there are many resources available on the topics of death, grief, and healing. Here are a few that I found particularly helpful in the early days after my mom's death.

Around the Year with Emmett Fox – A book of brief daily readings to help mark the passing of time and cultivate hope and faith (\$15 on Amazon)

The Amen app – An app with many guided prayers, meditations, and Biblical sleep stories (free on the App Store or online)

The Calm app – An app with many comforting sleep stories and meditations (\$70/year on the App Store or online)

Healthy, Wealthy, & Wise – A 3-hour video to play as background noise (free on YouTube)

Finding Meaning in Our Grief – An hour-long podcast episode with grief and loss expert David Kessler (free online)

TO YOU:

By losing a loved one to suicide, much has ended — but it is not the end of your story. Your story must continue on, and there is hope for your healing.

In the early days after losing my mom to suicide, people would say to me, “It won’t always feel like this.” At the time, I found that both unbelievable and maddening. I was unbearable pain that made ten minutes feel like an eternity.

But now, about 4 years after my mother’s death, I can confirm that those well-intentioned people were right.

Your pain *won’t* always be so intense. You *will* laugh again. You *will* find a way to rebuild your life. If I can, you can.

For now, focus on marching through the next 30 days. Allow yourself at every turn to be held by these words, by your own body’s incredible ability to heal, by your community, and by a Power much, much greater than you or I, which whispers deep down in your soul that it is still your time here.

Yours Truly,

Lillian Bicchieri

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am able to write this Guide because God sent me an army of people who kept me afloat in the wake of losing my mom. I don't have room to thank them all, but I will acknowledge a few whose selfless love and support are woven throughout this Guide.

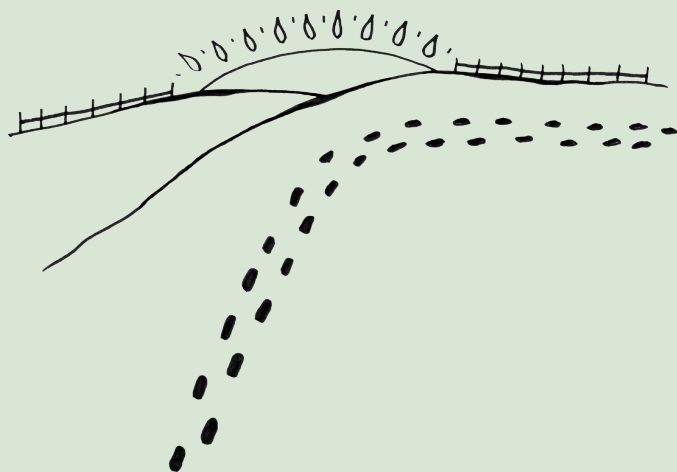
To Manolis Christakis: Thank you for being a true friend to me in the darkest moment of my life and for pointing me to God when I needed it most.

To the Ubes, Deirdre, Maggie, and Bri: You just never stopped showing up. I love you so much.

To my counselors and therapists Reverend Carol Asiaghi, Dr. Jayan Landry, and Reverend Deya DeMarco: You so patiently held space for my deepest pain and gently guided me back towards the light. You are my teachers. Thank you.

To my dad Steven, my brother Noah, my sister Molly, and my brother-in-law Brandon: We are in this together, always. Everything I do is for you.

To my mom, Joan: You gave me your strong heart and your hopeful spirit – my two greatest tools in surviving your loss. Thank you for teaching me that True Love never dies.



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