



S.O.S.
SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE
BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT
ASSOCIATION INC.

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July-September 2017

Dear Surviving Parent

- Kimberly Starr

The following is an excerpt from the book "457 Days: A Mother's Journey Along Grief's Path." by Kimberly A. Starr.

Thank you Kimberly for allowing us to publish this excerpt here in our newsletter for all to read.

Your world has completely stopped, but at the same time, it is spinning wildly around you. You can't stop sobbing. A sound is coming from you like you have never heard. Your knees are buckling under your weight, and you are falling to the floor. You may be physically sick, vomiting until your stomach is empty. You watch professionals take your child away and wonder what he or she will look like when and if you see him or her again.

You are being asked to make decisions about what comes next for your child's physical remains, but you are not able to decide. Your mind keeps going back to the last time you saw your child alive. You replay your last words with them and wonder if you hugged them and told them you love them. Then you go further back and think about the signs you somehow missed and how this must be your fault. Your mind will also go back again and again to the last time you saw them dead.

You will stand in the grocery store with everyone moving around you like nothing has happened. You will want to scream out, "My child is dead!" so they understand your pain. It will be like a movie playing in front of you.

You will want answers. Maybe your child left a note that gives you some solace. But the note's content will



not be enough. There are always going to be more questions. You are likely never going to understand completely why this happened. You will spend a lot of time thinking about it. You will go through his or her room, backpacks, notebooks, and computer files, looking for more information or a special keepsake he or she left for you. You may or may not find it. Either way it will still not be enough.

Some of your friends won't know what to say, so they will stay away. Others will try to find the right words and will say something hurtful without meaning to. Some will research the right things to say to someone in your situation. Some will send you cards and e-mails months from now, and you will be grateful they have not forgotten your loss and pain. Some will offer to sit quietly and hold you.

You will have a hard time making decisions—not just big ones, like what to do with your child's belongings or room or what the headstone should look like, but also little ones, like what to have for dinner or what to wear. The first few months will be a blur. You will have memory issues where chunks of time are missing or you cannot remember conversations. Your work will suffer.

You will not enjoy socializing as you once did. You will hide behind closed doors and pulled shades so you do not need to interact with others. You will avoid phone calls and texts. You will turn down invitations that you would have once happily accepted. When you do find the wherewithal to go out, you will come home exhausted and emotionally drained. It will not be because people are unkind. It will be because interacting with others will enervate you.

Some of your friends, family, and co-workers will want you to get over it and will tell you so. Your grief will make them uncomfortable. You will give yourself deadlines for feeling better. After the holidays. After the child's first birthday that he or she is not with you. After the first anniversary of his or her death. But you won't get over it. Grief does not have a timeline.

You might consider going to counselling and then decide you don't need it. Go anyway. This is not a journey to travel alone.

You will be changed. But you will not always feel as hopeless and helpless as you do right now. Things will get better, but it will take time and effort.

Please. Take the time to connect with resources especially developed for those who are traveling this road. Check out Facebook and online survivors' groups. Go to meetings.

Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. You will connect with people who understand your journey, who will say what you are saying is exactly how they feel. You will feel at home, especially when home feels so empty now.

You are not alone.

Wishing you peace, love, and light on this journey,

Kimberly A. Starr

Presidents Report

- Cherrie Cran

Hi everyone and welcome to the July – Sept 2017 newsletter. This newsletter we focus on the loss of a child. As we search for and request articles / stories to post here it sometimes happen that there is a 'theme'. This newsletter we identified a couple of things to share, and they are both addressed to grieving parents.

Please note that the things that these articles talk about also apply to any suicide loss, no matter what relationship you had with the one who has died. So, even if you aren't a grieving parent, please still read them and take what you can from them for yourself or as you try to support others.

Newsletters

If anyone has anything they would like us to publish in this newsletter please send them through to secretary@sosbsa.org.au as we are always looking for newsletter content.



Fundraising

Community benefit booksale



Saturday
22 JULY
9am to 2pm

Logan West Library

69 Grand Plaza Drive
Browns Plains
Ph: 3412 4160

Proceeds go to:

**SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE BEREAVEMENT
SUPPORT ASSOCIATION INC.**

Nothing priced over \$1.00

Hardcover and Paperback books. Non-Fiction and
Fiction - Junior, Young Adult and Adult.

CDs, Magazines and Audio Books
All items are subject to availability



Community Book Sale

Saturday 22nd July at the Browns Plains Library.

Please come along and get yourself some books at bargain prices or just call in for a chat.

Looking forward to seeing you all there.

If anyone has any ideas for fundraising please let us know – our membership has dropped off, and we need to raise funds to allow us to continue to operate. If you wish to make a donation or become a member, you can do so on our website at www.sosbsa.org.au Under the 'about us' tab you will see Membership and Donations if you hover over the 'about us' tab. All donations of \$2 and over are tax deductible.

Take care and be kind to yourself

Cherrie xoxo

Brisbane Support Group
(473 Annerley Road Annerley)

Friday fortnightly at 7:30pm

July – 14, 28

August – 11, 25

September – 8, 22

Contact: Cherrie 0423 567 055

Management Committee



President: Cherrie Cran

Vice President: Donna Cumming

Treasurer: Darrin Larney

Secretary: Sinead McMullan

Members: Vacant

Other S.O.S.B.S.A. Support Group Meetings

Cairns Support Group

Cairns Red Cross Wellbeing Centre Cnr Grove and Lake Street, Cairns
Entrance off Grove Street.

2nd Tuesday of every month at 7:30pm.

Contact Fran: 4045 2955
or 0407 695 891

Bundaberg Support Group

Neighbourhood Centre
111 Targo Street, Bundaberg
2nd Wednesday of every month at 10:30 am

Contact Peter: 07 4155 1015

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Membership

Pensioner / Student	\$20
Adult member	\$30
Family	\$50
Not-For-Profit Org.	\$50
Affiliate Business	\$100

You are now able to do this all online:
www.sosbsa.org.au (About us tab/Membership)

or contact secretary@sosbsa.org.au

Memberships help pay for printing, copying, mailing
and our telephone help line.

SOSBSA Phone

Volunteers WANTED

We are looking for expressions of interest
regarding volunteering for our
1300 help line.

Training will be provided.

Contact secretary@sosbsa.org.au
or 1300 767 022 for more information.

Newsletter Contributions

We are always looking for articles to run in our newsletter. If you would like to share something or found something you think might benefit others please email me at secretary@sosbsa.org.au.

SOSBSA Facebook

We now have more than **16,800** people who follow us on facebook.

Join in our online support group.

Search **SOSBSA**



Other Suicide Support Groups

If our support groups don't meet your needs – please check our website for a list of other support groups across Australia

Go to www.sosbsa.org.au

*Hover over 'Support Groups' in the top bar
Choose the appropriate sub-section.*

Please note – this information is only as good as the information we are provided – if you see errors please let us know at secretary@sosbsa.org.au

Items for Sale

You can now purchase items from us online with payments through paypal

www.sosbsa.org.au ('Items for Sale' tab)

Mourning Dove Pin

Purchase one of our beautiful pewter Mourning Dove pins to honour and remember your loved one

\$8.00 each (+\$3 postage)



Grief's Little Emergency Kit

Gentle reminders to keep us strong.
Fits perfectly into a handbag or drawer.
A small gift to give someone who grieves when you feel lost for words

\$4.00 each (+\$3 postage)



or email us at secretary@sosbsa.org.au



TOGETHER WE'LL WALK THE STEPPING STONES:

Come, take my hand, the road is long. We must travel by stepping stones.

No, you're not alone; I'll go with you.

I know the road well, I've been there.

Don't fear the darkness, I'll be there with you.

We must take one step at a time,

But remember we may have to stop awhile.

It is a long way to the other side

And there may be obstacles.

We have many stones to cross; some are bigger than others.

Shock, denial and anger to start,

then comes guilt, despair and loneliness.

It's a hard road to travel, but it must be done.

It's the only way to reach the other side.

Come, slip your hand in mine.

What? Oh, yes, it's strong. I've held so many hands like yours. Yes, mine was one time small and weak like yours.

Once, you see, I had to take someone's hand in order to take the first step.

Oops! You've stumbled. Go on, one step at a time.

There's no need to hurry.

Say, it's nice to hear you laugh. Yes, I agree,

The memories you shared are good.

Look, we're halfway there now; I can see the other side.

It looks so warm and sunny.

Oh, have you noticed we're nearing the last stone

and you're standing alone?

We've reached the other side.

But wait, look back. Someone is standing there.

They are alone and want to cross the stepping stones.

I'd better go, they need my help. What? Are you sure?

Why, yes. Go ahead, I'll wait. You know the way; you've been there.

Yes, I agree, it's your turn, my friend -

To help someone else cross the stepping stones.

by Barb Williams, of Ft. Wayne, Indiana

A Letter to Parents Surviving a Child's Suicide

- Sam Fiorella (from *The Friendship Bench*)



I recently passed the one year anniversary of my 19 year old son's death by suicide. In that time I've experienced the rollercoaster of emotions you would expect someone in my shoes to endure.

This journey has been complicated by the creation of a mental health awareness initiative inspired by my son's efforts while alive. By being so open about his struggles (and the fact that I was so clueless about them), I have welcomed a slew of invited and uninvited conversations with other parents who are also grieving the loss of a child to suicide or struggling to support a child who has attempted suicide.

Further, I have discovered many more families who are suffering that I don't know or have not been able to reach out to. In some cases it's just a matter of there being too many of them and too few of me. In others, it's either too soon for them or too painful for

me. Yet there is so much I want to say and share with them.

That is why I'm writing this particular post. It's for all you parents who are grieving the loss of a child to suicide or those who are attempting to support grieving family and friends. If I don't have the chance to speak to you personally, here's what I want you to know.

A Letter to Parents Surviving a Child's Suicide

There Is No Timeline

The first bit of insight I wish to share is that there is no timeline for this journey that you're on. If you're a planner, throw that attitude out the window. If you're looking for an agenda of what to expect, when, and how to do it, you'll be disappointed.

Understand that you've been put on a journey that has no end but it will continue to move forward. Each day will bring new challenges, new surprises, and new moments of clarity and even joy. Yes, even joy.

Don't set yourself up for further anguish and frustration by expecting to do this on a timeline. Know that you're on a journey unique to you and that while it may be rocky, each day does get a little better.

There Is No Right Answer

"Why did this happen?"

If you have not asked this question yet, you will.

If you knew your child was suffering you'll want to know why you couldn't stop him from taking his life. If you didn't know, you'll want to know why she did it or why you didn't recognize it. There are probably many other questions you're seeking answers to.

Simply put, there's no right answer.

Know that people who have been diagnosed with depression or who have attempted suicide in the past have died by suicide. Know that those who have been seeing a counsellor and taking various medications have also taken their lives. So for those of you who did not know your child was suffering, know that even if you did, you may not have been able to prevent the tragedy.

On the other hand, there are those who have attempted suicide once, twice, or more times that have never attempted it again and live seemingly happy, normal lives (although often aided by medication and/or counselling).

The point is there is no answer to those questions. It's OK to ask them or feel the frustration but don't beat yourself up thinking you could have done something to prevent it. You may have or you may not have – you won't know.

Understand that people who died by suicide were ill and that the illness eventually took them. It's similar to having a child suffering from cancer; even when it's detected and treated, you can't guarantee that they won't eventually lose their battle with the disease.

I Give You Permission

I give you permission to smile or laugh if you find something that encourages you to do so. I also give you permission to cry and shout if that's what you're feeling at that moment.

For quite some time I was conflicted by the mixed emotions I was experiencing. The day after I learned about my son's death someone recounted a story that was quite funny and I laughed out loud among a room full of people somberly mourning my son's passing. I immediately felt embarrassed for the outburst; how dare I laugh at such a time.

In the weeks and months after his death, I would talk about or share a picture of me going about my life, be it enjoying a soccer game or taking a needed vacation from life. In a few instances I felt guilty for allowing the public to see that I went on living or guilty that I was living. That guilt was compounded by others criticizing me for doing so – or for doing so publicly.

What took me a long time to realize – and what I want you to know – is that while I felt that I needed permission from others to laugh, cry, or live my life, I really didn't. If you're feeling that way, I'm giving you permission. As a survivor, I give you permission to smile, laugh, and live – if you feel like it.

Walk Your Path, Accept Your Spouse's Path

There a number of studies that point to the fact that a majority of couples who experience the loss of a child end up in divorce court. Some point to the feelings of guilt or isolation, the inability to resolve the loss of their child with the perceived "natural order of things" or, most often, the inability to manage the complicated trauma and grieving process each parent experiences.

The key is to quickly understand that each parent will experience the grief differently and his or her reactions will be unique to them. If you look at your spouse and think "how can he do that?" or "why isn't she doing this?" understand that they're thinking the same about you.

You must experience the journey in a way that gives you the peace of mind and therapy you require and he or she must do the same. That journey will be completely different for each of you and more often than not, may seem at odds with one another.

Give yourself permission to deal with your grief and mourning in your way and give him or her latitude to follow their journey without judgement or timeline.

Be Kind to Yourself

I felt like I needed to be there for my wife, my daughter, my parents, my son's friends, and everyone else. I needed to "be normal" for my daughter and keep working for the sake of my business and employees. I had to be strong.

What I discovered quickly is that I could be of no use to anyone without first allowing myself to be kind to me. I needed to allow myself some personal time to simply enjoy something – anything – that would give my brain and heart a break from the pain.

For me, it was something as simple as allowing myself to take the time to do something that I loved but rarely did, like attend live soccer matches or watch my favourite teams play on television. I embraced a passion I had my entire life but rarely allowed myself the time to enjoy. That was just a few hours each week but it made a difference.

Within 6 months my wife and I took an unplanned quiet vacation to Jamaica, again, in order to take a breather from everyone and everything. Some thought it odd that we could vacation while mourning our son but it was a necessary kindness we afforded ourselves that helped us along our journey.

Find a Support Group

My wife and I have experienced our grief differently, yet there is one thing we will agree to: Joining a support group of peers who have experienced the loss of a family member to suicide was one of the best things we could have done.

We met with grief counselors immediately after our loss, which was OK but did not have a lasting effect on moving us along our journey. We spoke to friends who were all genuinely trying to help us – and we appreciated them – but could not find the release we required.

It wasn't until we joined a suicide survivor's support group that our healing began. Being surrounded by others who truly understand the myriad of emotions unique to the survivors left behind in a suicide is amazing therapy.

Listening to others share their journeys can be difficult but also cathartic. Sharing your own story is never easy but when you look into the eyes of other parents and see that they **really** understand you; a feeling of calm comes over you...and you'll find yourself wanting to share more and more.

The loss of a child to suicide is so unique that even you'll find it difficult to relate to those who have lost their children to physical illness or accidents. In fact, many like us don't want to speak to others for fear of judgement. I get it.

Bereaved parents support groups are useful but where possible, find a support group of suicide survivors.

Being "OK" is Exhausting

At some point you'll go back to work. You'll eventually start participating in group activities, you'll be out in public again. People will ask "how are you?" but you will know they don't really want to know the answer. They care and they want to help but they don't want to hear your answer, you'll see it their eyes or how they fidget when they see you coming. It's not that they don't want to help or listen, they just won't know how to respond.

You'll not share what you're feeling when you want to crumble into their arms and cry for half an hour.

So you'll say you're "OK" when you're the exact opposite. You'll not share what you're feeling when you want to crumble into their arms and cry for half an hour. You'll go on with your day, pretending to be OK. And when you get home from work at 6:00 PM you'll be ready for bed, utterly exhausted and spent. Being OK is freakin' exhausting. It has been one of the most emotionally taxing experiences for me this entire year. Even now, over a year later, when I give a 15 minute or 60 minute presentation to kids or parents about mental health, I need to sleep for 18 hours to recuperate.

Allow yourself the time to rest, you'll need it just from being.

Celebrate the Life of Your Child on Special Occasions

As you can imagine, I didn't look forward to my son's birthday, Christmas or Father's Day. However, I learned that my fear was caused more by the multiple warnings I received from well-meaning friends and family than the reality of the event.

"Oh wait till Christmas that will be a very hard time for you."

"I can't imagine what you'll be going through on Father's Day....be strong."

I discovered that I did not miss my son any more or less on those special days than I did the day before or the day after. I realized that I was allowing others' perceptions to guide my expectations of these days and how I would ultimately experience them.

I discovered that I did not miss my son any more or less on those special days.

I had a revelation on Father's Day; it's not a day to mourn the fact that I'm no longer a father to my son but a celebration of the fact that I was honoured to be his father for 19 years. His birthday is not a day for me to mourn the fact that he is no longer here to blow out the candles but to celebrate the joy he brought to my life and that of our family and friends in his 19 years.

To help, look for rituals that make you feel better or support your beliefs. We've started a tradition of lighting and releasing Japanese lanterns by the lake on occasions like his birthday or the anniversary of his death. With each release we give thanks for him and celebrate his life.

That small change in attitude – with a little planning – has made these celebrations more meaningful and helped us to move along that journey instead of getting stuck on it.

Your Child Did Not Do This to You

Among the unending variety of emotions you'll experience, anger and/or guilt will be two of the strongest.

"Why did he do this to me?"

"What did I do wrong?"

"I should have prevented this."

What I've discovered from speaking to many teens and young adults who are suffering with depression is that at their lowest moments, they are not thinking of you – or anyone for that matter. They simply can't think or experience any reality beyond the pain and anxiety they are feeling at that moment.

In lucid moments, they may have the perspective to see their struggle but when depression or whatever mental illness they're suffering from takes hold of them, they don't have that perspective.

A student suffering from depression recently said, in response to the adage that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem: "You don't get it, depression ISN'T a temporary problem! It's a permanent problem."

They simply don't have the option out, just like they don't have the option out when they're involved in a fatal car crash or when an embolism explodes in their brains.

The point is, when their illness takes over, it's like any physical illness that we seem to be able to reconcile. As survivors, we must find a way to accept that this was not a rational choice. The illness of depression took that choice away from them.

They did not die from suicide...they died from depression. The choice was not theirs.

Lean In

One phrase that was shared with me while chatting with my suicide survivor's support group was "lean into the pain." It is meant to encourage you to not avoid the emotions you are experiencing, no matter how difficult they may be. Grief – and all the emotions that it pulls – is just an obstacle on the journey. Avoiding it will prevent you from getting to where you need to be.

Similarly, I've discovered that you must also lean into the joy and happiness when it presents itself. If you have the opportunity to enjoy a moment in life, lean in and enjoy it. You'll definitely have bad days in the future but enjoying a moment of happiness or joy will neither prevent nor induce that bad day. The reverse is also true; allowing yourself to experience the pain on a bad day won't prevent a good day from coming.

Each will happen and each should be welcomed as a necessary part of the journey.

It Won't Be OK but It Will Be Fine

I'm sorry to tell you that it will never be OK. It's simply not possible to lose a child to suicide and ever be OK. However, you will be fine.

There's no pain or experience like losing a child to suicide; however, you – like so many other parents before you – will eventually discover a new normal, a new way of living. It's not perfect, but it will allow you to continue your life in order to celebrate the life of the child you lost, support and love the children you may still have to care for, and/or contribute positively to your friends' lives and those of your community.

Don't get stuck in the mindset that you'll never be able to deal with the loss. You will not get over it but you will find ways to manage it. The speed at which you progress through this journey is in part determined by an acknowledgement that you'll never be the same but that a new normal will eventually set in.

The Journey

You may have noticed my constant reference to a journey in this letter. That wasn't by design. It's a fact that you'll come to realize if you have not done so already. Whatever you're experiencing, you are on a journey and one that is truly unique to you.

Embrace the journey; like life itself, it will be riddled with highs and lows and each must be experienced to become the person you are.

Lastly, you don't need to walk this journey alone. There are support groups, professionals, and individuals who can help. My experience has been that my peers – those who have also lost a loved one to suicide – are the best support.

Reach out to them. Reach out to me if you wish. Just reach out.

In Memoriam



If you would like an 'in memoriam', please send an anniversary record to us at

For everyone whose anniversary of their loved one is during April to June : On this anniversary of your loved one's death, may you remember the best experiences you shared, the most meaningful words that were spoken, the happiest moments you had together and the comfort that has given you the courage to go on.

Loved one lost to suicide: **Tiffany Harris**

Date of Birth: *20 September 1990*

Message: Died aged 23 years- too young. Loved and missed by her Mum, Anne. Wishing you peace and calm seas wherever you are xo

Your Name: *Anne Harris*

Date of Birth: *19 Sept 1987*

If you wish to receive this newsletter via email, please email us at
secretary@sosbsa.org.au

QLD Helplines

Standby Brisbane 07 3250 1856

Standby Response Service 0438 150 180

(24 hour mobile crisis response to suicide bereavement.)

Sunshine and Cooloola Coasts 0407 766 961

National Helplines

LifeLine: 13 11 14 (24 hour)

Mensline: 1300 789 978 (24 hour)

Suicide Callback Line: 1300 659 467 (24 hour)

National Hope Line: 1300 467 354 (24 hour bereavement support)

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

Kids Help Line: 1800 55 1800 (24 hour)

SANE Helpline: 1800 18 SANE (M-F 9am-5pm)