

TO FELLOW SURVIVORS...

My name is Louise. I'm a survivor-mom. My only son died by a self-inflicted gunshot wound in 1998. My favorite nephew hung himself in 1994. Road2healing was founded in January 1999 to help my fellow survivors work through this horrendous pain. Please allow me to share my heart with you...

* I won't tell you not to blame yourself because every survivor does. However, I will tell you that you are not to blame. In your head you may know that, but it will take a while to convince your heart.

* Suicide isn't about *us*. (How much we loved/didn't love them, what we did/said, what we didn't do/say, etc) Suicide is about *them*. Please be kind to you.

* All the 'why's, how's, if only's', etc. are something that every survivor has to work through in their own way. You will wrestle with it, and wrestle with it, and wrestle with it, then slowly you'll begin to be OK with the fact that you will probably never *really* know. In time you'll learn to release it. But no one can work through these issues for you. You'll have to do it on your own, in your own time frame. Healing is a process and takes time.

* The roller coaster of emotions, racing thoughts and the 'one step forward, three steps back' that you will go through is normal. About the time the "fog" wears off, it crashes in on you all over again. There is nothing 'wrong' with you. There are certain time frames that seem to emotionally 'body slam' us. These setbacks happen to all of us so please don't be discouraged.

* Men, women and children all grieve differently! Men usually would rather not talk about it at all, and women seem to have a driving need to discuss it over and over for months. Teens quite often will leave the room when the subject is brought up. Please allow each family

member the right to work through this in his or her own way. It's hard enough without us putting expectations on each other of 'the right way' to grieve. There's a 70% divorce rate among couples that have a child die (any cause of death) so please be careful.

* Parents, please remember that your other children need your love now more than ever. I hear stories of kids that thought they weren't loved as much as the deceased one, and even felt like the parents wished it would have been them that died instead of their sibling. Often kids feel as if they have had a double loss- one to death, one to grief. Please don't distance your children or take away special times, such as traditional holiday gatherings. This may be very difficult for you, but they desperately need to know you love them enough to go on with life. *And remember, they have also suffered a great loss.*

* Tears are very healing. You need to release your pain & work through all the issues, but don't let depression and grief get a hold of you. It's all consuming! This isn't easy, but that doesn't mean it's not do-able.

* Don't expect those around you to understand what you're dealing with or feeling. *Only another survivor will really understand, and it's not fair to expect more of non-survivors than they can give.* They can be very compassionate and kind, but they will never sincerely understand. Remember, you didn't understand either until now. (((Hug))) So please don't take their lack of understanding as something personal against you.

* Try to be kind to yourself, even though you don't feel like it. Eat a little and take vitamins, even if you're not hungry. Lie down and rest even if you can't sleep, etc. Allow yourself the time you need to heal and don't punish yourself for taking longer than you think you should need. At the same time, please don't give in to depression. This is a long road with MANY ups and downs and stress will deplete your system if you don't take care of you. One day you'll be glad you did.

* Don't be ashamed to join a support group. Studies have proven that those that 'keep a stiff upper lip' will develop health issues later from unresolved grief. Talking with other survivors is the best therapy there is! The one that tries to be so strong is usually the one that struggles most with it later.

* When suicide hit our lives we also became victims. Becoming a survivor instead of a victim is something that you must choose to do, and it has to be worked at. It's hard work! But one day you WILL laugh again, and it won't be a forced laugh. It seems impossible now, but give it some time. You really can reclaim your life one day. Many of us have!

* It's not unusual for a survivor to feel such devastation that THEY begin to struggle with suicidal thoughts. The pain will not always remain that intense, and you need to give it time to heal. You CAN reclaim your life if you refuse to give up. Don't quit. Remember, you are not just a survivor, you're a SURVIVOR!!

Little by little hope will be restored and having a future will look like a possibility again. Memories that are agonizingly painful will become bittersweet and precious, pain will lessen, and laughter will cease to be forced.

Tomorrow will hold promise again.

If we, at Road2healing, can be of any help please let us know. Survivor Handbooks and other helpful information can be found on our web site or ordered by writing to us. We offer support groups, private chatrooms, printable information, and a list of local support groups online. Please don't feel alone or be ashamed to reach out for help. We're here for you!

*Louise Wirick, Founder
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