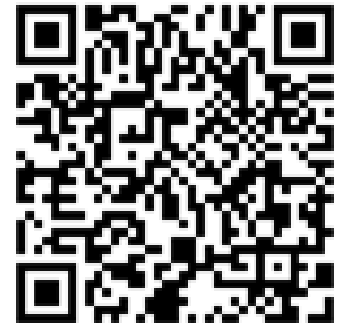


# Suicide Prevention & Understanding Grief after Suicide Webinar

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Charlene Ray  
November 2, 2023

*Please complete the pre-training survey here:*





# Today's Trainer

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**Charlene Ray,  
MSW, LICSW**

- Forefront Trainer

# Forefront Suicide Prevention

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Forefront Suicide Prevention is a Center of Excellence at the University of Washington.

Our mission is to help people take action to prevent suicide in their communities.



LEARN



# Take care of yourself

This training covers a topic that can be emotionally challenging for many people.

We encourage you to lean into feelings of anxiety and discomfort, but if you need to step away for a moment, you are welcome to do so.



# What we'll cover today

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1

How grieving a suicide loss compares with other types of grief

2

The physical, mental, & emotional components of grief after suicide

3

The unique needs of someone who is experiencing suicide grief & how to best support them

4

Explore healing strategies for living with suicide loss



Suicide loss survivors

Other grief survivors

Grief supporters

**Who's here  
today?**



**“A person never truly gets ‘over’ a suicide loss. You get through it. Day by day. Sometimes it’s moment by moment.”**

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– Holly Kohler





# Learning objective 1

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**Grieving a suicide loss and how it compares with other types of grief**



# What is grief?

“As human beings, whenever our attachments are threatened, harmed, or severed, we naturally grieve. Grief is everything we think and feel inside of us when this happens. We experience shock and disbelief. We worry, which is a form of fear. We become sad and possibly lonely. We get angry. We feel guilty or regretful. The sum total of all these and any other thoughts and feelings we are experiencing is our grief.”

– Alan Wolfelt, Grief Educator





HOW WE  
WANT  
GRIEF TO  
WORK



HOW GRIEF  
ACTUALLY  
WORKS





**“Much of the pain from suicide grief can come from trying to keep the pain secret.”**

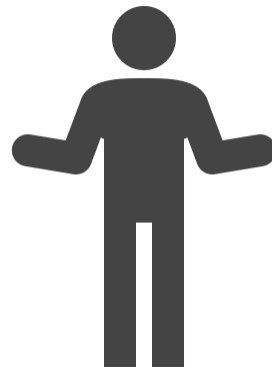
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– Alan Wolfelt

# How is grief after suicide different?



Suicide runs counter to human instincts  
for self-preservation



Potential investigation and/or media coverage

Potential focus on the act rather than the person

Lack of clear social tradition

Shock, stigma, and taboo

Reframe your relationship

"Why?" questions

Sudden and traumatic loss

Potential self-blame



# The six needs of the mourner

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- Acknowledge the reality of the death
- Embrace the pain of the loss
- Remember the one who died
- Develop a new self-identity
- Search for meaning
- Receive ongoing support from others





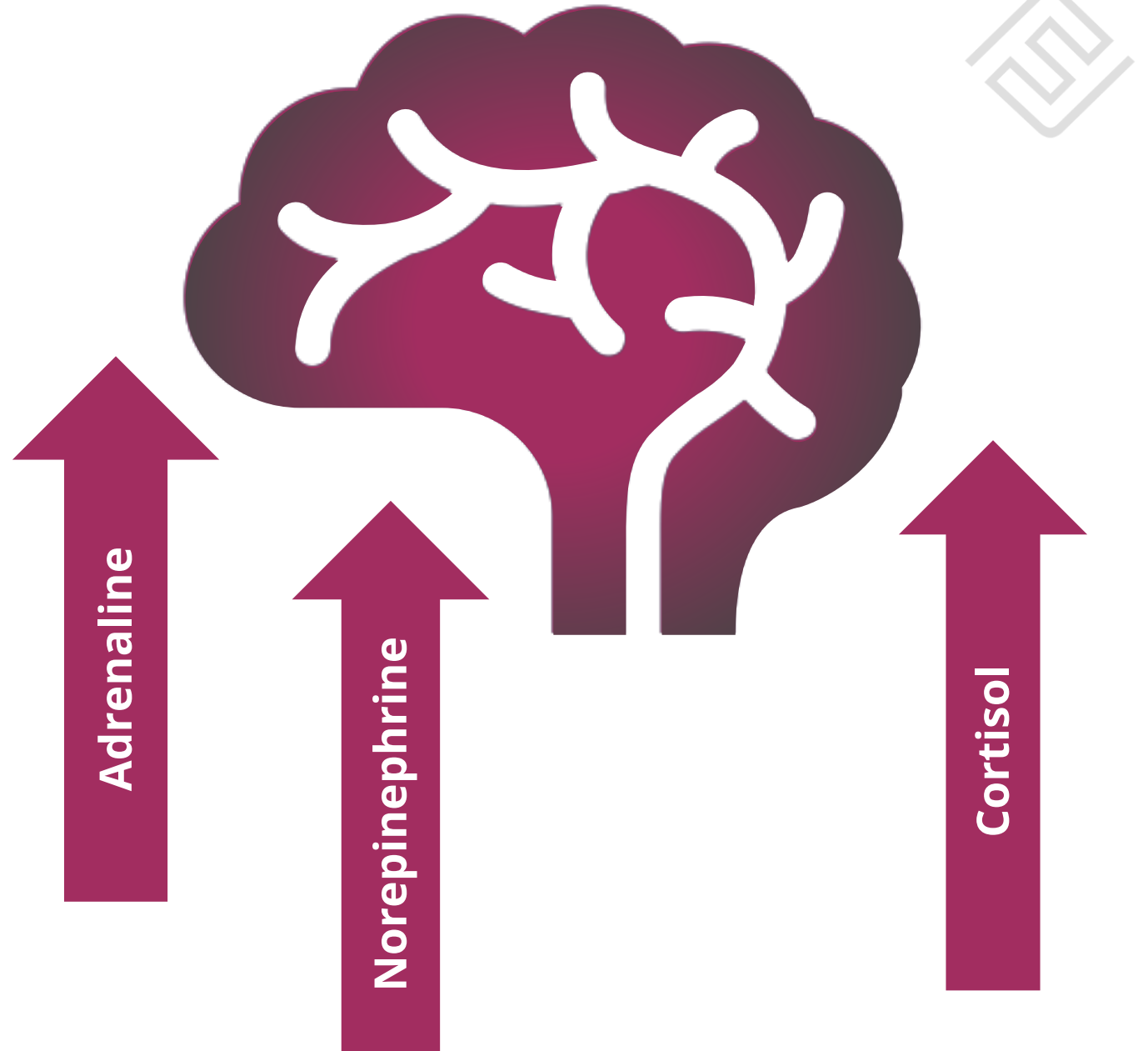
# Learning objective 2

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**Physical, mental, and emotional  
components of suicide grief**

# The neurology of grief

“Grief brain” happens when stress chemicals rise – for example, adrenaline, norepinephrine, cortisol



# Common signs and symptoms of grief



## Mental

- Anxiety
- Confusion or foggy brain
- Memory challenges
- Numbness
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Time distortion
- Trouble making decisions

## Emotional

- Difficulty coping with feelings
- Immovable sadness or irritation
- Sudden changes in mood
- Tears

## Physical

- Exhaustion & fatigue
- Disturbed sleep
- Loss of appetite
- Physical aches, pains, and soreness



# The uniqueness of grief

- A person's unique personality
- Whether one is living alone or isolated
- Other stresses in life
- Experience with loss in the past
- Cultural, spiritual, and religious background



# Questions one might have:

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How long will  
grief last?

Will I get  
through it?

Why did this  
happen?

Am I going  
crazy?

Where is my  
loved one?

Is it okay to  
want to be  
with them?

Will I ever  
feel better?

Will  
happiness  
ever  
reappear?

# Navigating early and acute grief

- One to two years
- Don't be afraid to speak their name
- Why do so many people say the wrong things?
- It's okay to talk about it or not talk about it
- Let friends and family know what you need if you can
- Where did everyone go? Ongoing support after the first months
- Turning point after year one





# Solid support is essential

- It is important to have a 'companion' in your grief
- It is helpful if they have experience in major grief
- A suicide loss support group can also be helpful





# Companioning youth through grief



Let them lead

Encourage  
questions

Welcome all  
feelings (yours  
and theirs)

Be patient

Include  
them in  
conversations

Be honest and  
direct

Attend to your  
own grief



# Learning objective 3

**How to support someone experiencing suicide grief**

# Things NOT to say to someone who is grieving

- They are in a better place now
- I know how you feel
- Everything happens for a reason
- God never gives you more than you can handle
- Let me know how I can help (be more specific and offer help)





# Things that are helpful to say

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- I am so sorry
- I don't know what to say
- Tell me what you want to remember about (say their name)
- If you want to tell me your story, I am here for you.
- Or say nothing and just be present, no fixing just allowing





# Acknowledge their loss

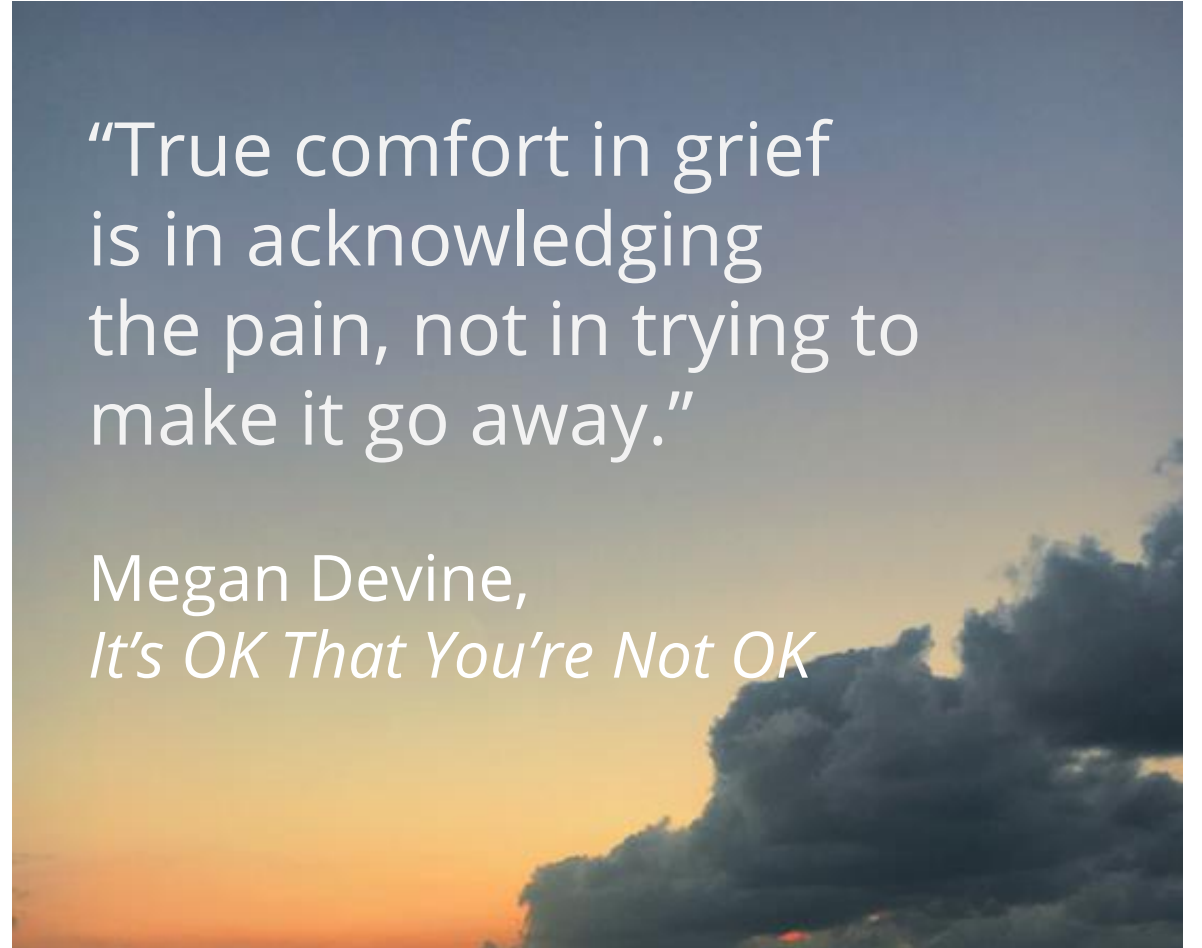
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- "I am terribly sorry to hear of your loss..."
- Use 'died by suicide'
- It's OK when tears flow
- Focus on the loved one, not the death

"True comfort in grief is in acknowledging the pain, not in trying to make it go away."

Megan Devine,  
*It's OK That You're Not OK*



# Components of empathy

**Helpful things to say:**  
*I'm so glad you told me.  
Tell me more, I'm listening.*



**Try to see the  
world as the  
person who is  
grieving sees it**



**Be non-  
judgmental**



**Validate their  
feelings**



**Communicate  
that  
understanding**

# Other considerations

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- What if someone you are supporting says “I want to follow my loved one” – what should you say or do?
- If someone is thinking about suicide, that doesn’t necessarily mean they will act on those thoughts. How can you tell the difference?



# How do I ask about suicide?



Sometimes when people are...

\_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_

they're thinking about suicide.

Are you thinking about suicide?

**Insert any warning signs  
you see here!**

## ***Example:***

*"Sometimes when people are feeling depressed and isolated and are also going through a major life change, they're thinking about suicide. Are you thinking about suicide?"*



# Cultural responses to suicide

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- Responses to suicide loss can vary significantly between cultural, ethnic/racial, and religious/spiritual identities
- If you're supporting someone – what do they value? How do those values affect how they feel about suicide?
  - Not sure? Follow their lead!



# Take the initiative

Make a specific plan to help and then follow through.

Examples:

- *"I can bring you dinner on Tuesday night at 6 pm. Is that okay with you?"*
- *"I can come on Saturday and mow your lawn. If that works, I will be here about 10 am."*



# Plan ahead for the tough days

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Special holidays

Birthdays

First anniversary

International  
Survivors of  
Suicide Loss Day  
Nov. 18, 2023





# Learning objective 4

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**Explore healing strategies for living with suicide grief**



# Creating a healing space when grieving



It can be helpful to have a quiet place, a haven away from the rest of the world, to retreat to when grieving.

Light a candle

Pray/Meditate

Cry

Read  
supportive  
words

Listen to music

Use movement  
to express  
your feelings

Write

Speak your  
truth

# Tools we create for ourselves

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- Common barriers that can keep us on Planet Grief (sleep, appetite)
- Calming fears
- Managing guilt
- What about hope?





# Nurture yourself

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- When we are grieving:
  - It is important to give ourselves far more space and time than we usually do.
  - Normal day-to-day self care may not be enough.
- Give yourself permission to rest and to say no when we need space to feel, think, and be.





# Traditional & non-traditional support

- Support groups
- Talk therapy (with a grief specialist)
- EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)
- Meditation
- Journaling
- Social media support groups
- Self-compassion
- Medication
- Nature based healing





# Living with grief & making meaning



On the grief journey, as one moves through early grief, one may:

Have an increased awareness of time

Develop deeper compassion for self and others

Become stronger

Experience a deep change and a renewed sense of purpose

Find the courage to make a new life

# Helpful resources in a crisis



## Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:

- Press 1 for veteran services
- Oprima 2 para español
- Press 3 for the Trevor Project
- Press 4 for Native and Strong in Washington



## Crisis Text Line: Text “HEAL” to 741741

- Mande AYUDA para español

**Trans Lifeline:  
1-877-565-8860**

**The Trevor Project:  
1-866-488-7386**



Download more  
resources here!

# Grief resources

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- **SAVE.org:** Grief resources
- **Healing Center:** Seattle support groups
- **Center for Loss:**  
[www.centerforloss.com/2016/12/exploring-uniqueness-suicide-grief](http://www.centerforloss.com/2016/12/exploring-uniqueness-suicide-grief)
- **Eluna Network**





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**We love deeply,  
we grieve deeply**





# Thank you!

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Visit us at: [intheforefront.org](https://intheforefront.org)

   intheforefrontwa

Questions? Concerns?  
Email [ffront@uw.edu](mailto:ffront@uw.edu)

*Please complete the post-  
training survey here:*

