Beyond Surviving: Suggestions for Survivors

Iris M. Bolton, Author of My Son, My Son

- 1. Know you can survive; you may not think so, but you can.
- 2. Struggle with "why" it happened until you no longer need to know "why" or until YOU are satisfied with partial answers.
- 3. Know you may feel overwhelmed by the intensity of your feelings but that all your feelings are normal.
- 4. Anger, guilt, confusion, forgetfulness are common responses. You are not crazy, you are in mourning.
- 5. Be aware you may feel appropriate anger at the person, at the world, at God, at yourself. It's okay to express it [in healthy ways].
- 6. You may feel guilty for what you think you did or did not do. Guilt can turn into regret, through forgiveness.
- 7. Having suicidal thoughts is common. It does not mean that you will act on those thoughts. [Seek help if these feelings persist!]
- 8. Remember to take one moment or one day at a time.
- 9. Find a good listener with whom to share. Call someone if you need to talk.
- 10. Don't be afraid to cry. Tears are healing.
- 11. Give yourself time to heal.
- 12. Remember, the "choice" was not yours. No one is the sole influence on another's life.
- 13. Expect setbacks. If emotions return like a tidal wave, you may only be experiencing a remnant of grief, an unfinished piece.
- 14. Try to put off major decisions.
- 15. Give yourself permission to get professional help.
- 16. Be aware of the pain in your family and friends.
- 17. Be patient with yourself and others who may not understand.
- 18. Set your own limits and learn to say no.
- 19. Steer clear of people who want to tell you what or how to feel.
- 20. Know that there are support groups that can be helpful, such as Compassionate Friends or Survivors of Suicide groups. If not, ask a professional to start one.
- 21. Call on your personal faith to help you through.
- 22. It is common to experience physical reaction to your grief, e.g. headaches, loss of appetite, inability to sleep.
- 23. The willingness to laugh with other and at yourself is healing.
- 24. Wear out your questions, anger, guilt, or other feelings until you can let them go. Letting go doesn't mean forgetting.
- 25. Know that you will never be the same again, but you can survive and even go beyond just surviving.

From Suicide and its Aftermath (Dunne, McIntosh, Dunne-Maxim, Norton et al., 1987).