SURVIVING A SUICIDE
SOME IMMEDIATE SUGGESTIONS
…. Jeri Livingstone

Your family has been touched by tragedy. You can survive this tremendous sorrow … please believe that.

From the very first day, make caring for yourself a high priority. Although you may have enough adrenalin to rise to the occasion … even making arrangements, spreading the word, caring for other family members, receiving condolences, etc, you must safeguard your physical and mental health to the best of your ability. For instance:

* Accept offers of help. Surround yourself with loving, competent friends who are quick to listen and slow to give advice.
* Tears are extremely healthy. Drink a lot of water and keep them coming – they are nature’s way of washing away the toxins that build up from stress. Then, eat bananas to replace the potassium that you lose from crying.
* Get as much sleep as you can, but avoid excessive use of alcohol or medication.
* If you must drive a car, BE SO CAREFUL! You are distracted and forgetful, and as such, very much at risk when you get behind the wheel of a car … as are other drivers who share the road with you. MAKE A CONSCIOUS EFFORT to put your grief on HOLD when you fasten your seat belt. Postpone it until you get where you are going!!
* Similarly, if you find you are being overcome with sadness and tears that interrupt your work or other necessary activities, try this: Say to yourself, “I can’t do this right now, but will make an appointment to do this at \_\_\_\_ (7 PM, Bedtime, etc.)” It just may allow you to get through the rough spot, since grief cannot be IGNORED but may allow itself to be POSTPONED. Then keep that appointment – at 7PM, go to your room, lay down, and cry until you can no longer cry. In this way, you will have taken control of your grief, instead of vice versa. This may be easier said than done, but is worth a try.
* Reach out for help. Although you may not be ready to go for counseling or attend a support group, make initial contacts … it may be comforting to know what kinds of help are available when you are ready. If seeing a counselor, find one who has experience with trauma and grief issues. If a counselor makes you uncomfortable, find another one immediately.
* The GRASSP (Grieving, Resilient and Surviving Suicide’s Pain) Groups meet monthly at locations in Allen, Hardin and Auglaize Counties. Check the PVFF website [www.pvff.org](http://www.pvff.org) under support groups for locations and times.
* A word about sharing details or answering questions … you may want to freely communicate to others the “story”, or may feel very protective of this information. Remember – this information is yours to disseminate, or to keep as private as you wish …. You may instinctively know how much to say, to whom, and when. If you are very open about the manner of death, you may be surprised to hear that many others have experienced suicide in their own families, and that information will be readily shared with you.
* From Iris, I borrow and repeat the following: Be patient with yourself. Wear out the “why?, the anger, the guilt … know that whatever you are feeling is normal. Don’t let anyone tell you how to feel or what to do. Grief is as individual as a fingerprint… find your own way through it and don’t let anyone “SHOULD” on you.
* One final thought …many people who are contemplating ending their lives are able to do so by a thought process of de-valuing their own existence. They may perceive themselves as a burden, and – although we may see it very differently!!– Actually feel they are doing what is best for the family. If your loved one has been very troubled, has led a chaotic existence of physical, mental and/or emotional problems that led to hopeless despair, you may take comfort in knowing that his or her suffering has surely ended and they are now at peace. This sounds very obvious, but is worth a reminder as you go through the days of your new reality. Try to turn the energy spent caring for that person toward caring for yourself….. One day, one hour, one minute at a time.