

## International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day

On average, there are about 130 suicides each day in the United States. That is over 45,000 suicides each year. In our beloved state of Montana, we were #3 in the country for the deaths by suicide per capita in 2019. We suffer loss by suicide in Montana at nearly double the national rate. Youth suicide rates (15-24) more than doubled from the 50s to the mid-90s, dropped for a few years, and then began going up again in the early 2000s. That hits close to home for me as my son was just 15 when he died by suicide in 2014. The [statistics](#) are a sobering reminder that there is much work to be done. I believe suicide is preventable.

When a person dies by suicide, the loved ones left behind are often referred to as Survivors of Suicide Loss. For every suicide, it is estimated that there are 135 people that knew the person that died. By 2017, as many as 40-50% of our population in the US has known someone who has died by suicide. It is also estimated 1 of 60 Americans are survivors of suicide loss, including me. And, that number is growing every day. Any time a loved one dies, the grieving process is difficult. We suicide loss survivors often face additional unique challenges such as guilt, anger, stigma and PTSD that only serve to add additional complicated layers to the grieving process.

November 20, 2021 is **International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day**. This important day falls on the Saturday before Thanksgiving each year and provides healing and support to survivors of suicide loss by providing a connection with other survivors, understanding of the unique nature of their loss, and most importantly, healing through [HOPE](#). This day is important for many reasons. The statistics above speak volumes. Now almost 8 years into my journey as a survivor of suicide loss I can tell you there are loss survivors out in our workplace, social networks, neighborhoods and in our families. As I shared above, the grieving process is extremely difficult.

To help a suicide loss survivor, we can learn what to say and not to say to survivors and what to do to support them while they grieve (Resources below). We can become better educated about mental health and suicide to help reduce the stigma associated with suicide and suicide loss. On November 20<sup>th</sup> we can reach out to our family, friends and co-workers that are survivors and let them know we continue to think pray for them as they grieve. I know from personal experience that it is a lifelong journey. We can illuminate our home with a candle as a symbol in support of survivors that day or evening. And, if you are a Suicide Loss Survivor in search of healing, AFSP Montana is sponsoring events in 2021, some of which provide a virtual option. Click on [AFSP International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day](#) and then go to [Find an event](#) and search for [Montana](#).

### Resources:

- [AFSP Surviving a Suicide Loss](#)
- [Handbook for Survivors of Suicide](#)
- [AFSP Healing Conversations](#)
- [How to Talk to a Suicide Loss Survivor](#)
- [Supporting a Loved One Who Has Lost Someone to Suicide](#)

And finally, remember depression is treatable and suicide is preventable. If you are in crisis and want help, call the Montana Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) or text "MT" to 741 741.

~Bill Wheeler

P.S. The Jacob Wheeler Foundation hopes to soon begin plans for a Lantern Lighting Ceremony January 1, 2022 after missing 2021 due to the pandemic. More to come.