

Thomas Joiner was the speaker at our last suicide prevention conference and I wanted to relay some information he shared with us. If you are interested, he has published two books:

Myths About Suicide and
Why People Die by Suicide

While these books are difficult to read, they contain a great deal of good information.

He describes suicide as “inherently fearsome” and “daunting” and is referencing how difficult it is for someone to take their own life. His research has shown that individuals who commit suicide feel a disconnection from others and a lack of belonging, combine with feeling they are a burden to the ones they love. Often you hear of suicide being “selfish”. Thomas Joiner describes the process the individual goes through and how they see their death as “selfless” in that they will no longer be a burden to the ones they love. It is hard for those of us on the outside to understand this thinking. The challenge is the suicidal individual is not thinking rationally at the time of their death, but we try to rationalize their behavior. Joiner states “we are wired for survival” to take one’s own life requires planning and while the act itself may be impulsive, typically the planning has gone on for some time.

Family Members

The impact of suicide has a ripple effect on the family and everyone surrounding the person. When an individual dies by suicide, studies show it directly impacts over a hundred people and if it is a school aged youth even more.

This is from Web MD and I thought it may interest all of you:

The effects of suicidal behavior or completed suicide on friends and family members are often devastating. Individuals who lose a loved one to suicide (suicide survivors) are more at risk for becoming preoccupied with the reason for the suicide while wanting to deny or hide the cause of death, wondering if they could have prevented it, feeling blamed for the problems that preceded the suicide, feeling rejected by their loved one, and stigmatized by others. Survivors may experience a great range of conflicting emotions about the deceased, feeling everything from intense emotional pain and sadness about the loss, helpless to prevent it, longing for the person they lost, and anger at the deceased for taking their own life to relief if the suicide took place after years of physical or mental illness in their loved one. This is quite understandable given that the person they are grieving is at the same time the victim and the perpetrator of the fatal act.

Individuals left behind by the suicide of a loved one tend to experience complicated grief in reaction to that loss. Symptoms of grief that may be experienced by suicide survivors include intense emotion and longings for the deceased, severely intrusive thoughts about the lost loved one, extreme feelings of isolation and emptiness, avoiding doing things that bring back memories of the departed, new or worsened sleeping problems, and having no interest in activities that the sufferer used to enjoy.

We often see family members while they are grieving. It is important for us to recognize how complicated the grief is and how it differs from other types of grief work. We need to pay extra attention to the family members own perception of suicide and be complete in assessing their risk. In addition, stigma associated with this type of death is pervasive. This group needs our attention and understanding.

In our area, there are several Survivors of Suicide groups that are very active. If you need a referral, the contact person for Bucks County is Nancy Heacock (215) 545-2242. They meet at St. Paul’s Church in Warrington.