

**SPIRITUALITY AND SUICIDE:  
Bereavement Support and Prevention  
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**I. Epidemiology and Research**

- National / State Suicide Statistics
- 89.4 deaths by suicide per day nationally (2005)
- Each suicide intimately affects six other persons (“suicide survivors”)
- An estimated 5 million Americans have tried to kill themselves
  
- Suicide survivors show higher levels of feelings of guilt, blame, and responsibility for the death. (Jordan, 2001)
- Suicide survivors experience stigmatization and “negative support” (Calhoun, 1991)
- Survivors experience avoidance stemming from a supporter’s discomfort, awkwardness, lack of understanding, restrained social interactions. (Seguin, 1995)

**II. Theological Issues and Stigmatization of Suicide**

- Faith communities misunderstand clinical depression.
- Education about depression in faith communities is a crucial need.
- Suicide survivors often feel ostracized by faith communities
- Faith groups have tended to think of suicide as a sin.
- Faith groups have been influenced by the way the Bible speaks of Judas Iscariot’s death specifically.

**III. The Trauma of Sudden Loss**

- Post-traumatic stress reactions and acute distress disorder are to be expected results of the deaths of a loved one.
- Sensory brain imprinting of personal experience with the death (body or notification) is common.
- When death occurs from sudden, unexpected circumstances, bereavement reactions are more severe, exaggerated, and complicated.

#### **IV. Resultant Health Risks**

- Depression, suicidal ideation, weakened immune system functioning
- Increase in health-compromising behaviors

#### **V. Bereavement Support and Current Research**

- Suicide loss and the impact on religious beliefs
- Support from congregants and friends of the religious community
- The support of clergy / spiritual leaders
- Personal spiritual growth as a long-term result of the loss

#### **VI. Assessment For Suicide Risk**

- Serious intent
- A specific plan
- Presence of lethal means
- QPR for suicide prevention -> Question, Persuade, Refer