

To: All PerformCare Providers
From: PerformCare
Date: January 5, 2026
Subject: Suicide Prevention Memo #27: Suicide Loss Survivors: Factors Related to Increased Risk and Complicated Grief

We begin our Suicide Prevention series for 2026 by discussing the aftermath of suicide, impact upon those affected, and ultimately how it affects their own suicide risk going forward. According to Cerel et al. (2019), 135 people are affected by each death by suicide in the United States. Of the 135, about 15 to 30 would be considered a close connection, such as loved ones or friends. These numbers are significantly higher than the previously often quoted six people and show the wide-ranging impact of suicide.

Reactions that emerge after a death by suicide that can impact suicide-loss survivors' (SLS) own risk are many, and include grief, anger, feelings of guilt and abandonment, stigma, and trauma. These reactions may occur acutely and resolve relatively quickly or become entrenched and chronic over time. Studies show that they in turn can contribute to increased risk of suicide in survivors. Tal Young et al. (2012) summarized findings about suicide risk in SLS and noted that within one year of suicide, SLS report two to three times increase in suicidal thoughts and plans, as well as near four-fold increase in suicide attempts among SLS.

Suicide risk assessment must account for these factors. Comprehensive risk assessment should include specific examination of whether one is connected to a suicide, the nature of that connection (e.g. professional vs personal), the quality of that connection (i.e. relative, friend, etc.), and recency of the suicide death. Further exploration of the SLS' reaction to the event may be warranted. Bereavement following suicide may be complicated by factors unique to suicide death, including the ongoing stigma associated with suicide, and feelings that the deceased, by "choosing" to take their life, abandoned and rejected their loved ones. Complicated grief, sometimes referred to as Prolonged grief, is persistent and intense longing and sadness following a loss/death. It can occur when survivors become "stuck" at a point in the grieving process and unable to process and integrate some of the post-suicide loss emotions and reactions mentioned above. Incidence of complicated grief in SLS are as high 43%, compared to 10 – 20% in the general population (Tal Young et. al. 2012). You can find more about complicated grief and how it impacts suicide risk in survivors of suicide [here](#) and [here](#).

In summary, providers are reminded to remain vigilant to the increased suicide risk that SLS presents with. Understanding factors that contribute to the increase, particularly complicated grief, will improve a provider's clinical assessment, how providers manage patient's suicide risk, and even more broadly, their clinical care.

References

Cerel J, Brown MM, Maple M, Singleton M, van de Venne J, Moore M, Flaherty C. HowMany People Are Exposed to Suicide? Not Six. *Suicide Life Threat Behav.* 2019 Apr;49(2):529-534.doi: 10.1111/sltb.12450. Epub 2018 Mar 7. PMID: 29512876.

Tal Young I, Iglewicz A, Glorioso D, Lanouette N, Seay K, Ilapakurti M, Zisook S. Suicide bereavement and complicated grief. *Dialogues Clin Neurosci.* 2012 Jun;14(2):177-86. doi: 10.31887/DCNS.2012.14.2/iyoung. PMID: 22754290; PMCID: PMC3384446.