

2023 Light After Loss Postvention Convention

Session Descriptions

Opening Remarks: Postvention as Prevention

Shannon Ortiz, LPCC-S, CEO and Founder of Light After Loss

Suicide postvention is an organized, immediate, short- and long-term response to suicide loss survivors. The intention is to provide support, promote healing, and mitigate grief and trauma responses to being exposed to a suicide death. Research also shows that appropriate suicide postvention is also part of suicide prevention, as being a suicide loss survivor is a risk factor for attempting suicide. The work of Light After Loss in Stark County will be highlighted.

Morning Keynote: Posttraumatic Growth After Suicide Loss Across the Life Span

Dr. Melinda Moore, Ph.D., Eastern Kentucky University

Research on bereavement, especially suicide bereavement, has focused on the psychopathology of this loss. A new area of positive psychology, Posttraumatic Growth (PTG), offers another vehicle for understanding the consequences of these experiences by investigating the possibilities for personal growth within the context of any sudden and traumatic death. In this keynote, Dr. Moore will describe her experience of loss and how it led her to a career dedicated to transforming clinical training, but also to an area of research that increased her appreciation for her own posttraumatic growth.

Afternoon Plenary: The State of Postvention in Ohio

Molly Mottram, Chief of Staff of Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation

This presentation will provide updates for attendees about suicide prevention and postvention in Ohio. Molly Mottram, Chief of Staff of Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF), will present current Ohio suicide statistics, review current and upcoming OSPF initiatives and projects, and discuss the status of postvention work in communities around Ohio.

Afternoon Keynote: Therapeutic Writing and Songwriting for Healing Grief and Trauma

Maureen Pollard, MSW, Registered Social Worker (Ontario)

Participants will be introduced to the theory about therapeutic writing and songwriting, including information about the benefits and risks of writing about grief and trauma. Strategies for reducing risks and including self-care will be introduced as a part of the therapeutic writing process. Participants will be invited to experiment and gently guided as they try a variety of writing exercises, including free writing, writing from prompts, poetry, and songwriting. No experience is necessary and participants will not have to share their writing with the group.

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Breakout Session #1

How Volunteers Support Suicide Loss Survivors (Light After Loss Volunteer Training)

Kristi Horner, FPS, Founder and Executive Director of Courage to Caregivers &
Jenny Woodworth, LISW

We are often not prepared to best support the survivors of suicide loss in an appropriate way. Supporting someone who has lost someone to suicide can be especially difficult. They've suffered a traumatic loss and are facing traumatic and likely complicated grief. Understanding the special nuances, being aware of suicide triggers in a trauma-informed way, as well as navigating a sensitive mental health conversation is essential. This is not a typical grief and loss journey, and as such, requires additional training and awareness. This workshop is meant to provide greater understanding as to what to say (and not to say), how to face the looming questions of "why" and address blame/shame, as told from a suicide loss survivor experience.

This breakout session will count as training to become a volunteer with Light After Loss.

This breakout sessions does not count for CE's.

Supporting Young Survivors of Suicide Loss: Evidence-Based Strategies to Support Children and Youth

Melissa Wolfe, MA

As young survivors of suicide loss, children and teens have additional supportive needs which mental health clinicians must attend to. This session will present ways to appropriately discuss death by suicide with children and teens. Additionally, evidence-based interventions to support children and teens, focusing on both short- and long-term strategies, will be discussed.

When Professionals Weep: Addressing Suicide Loss and Enfranchising Grief Through Counseling Supervision

Kailey A. Bradley, MA, LPCC-S, NCC, FT

It is a myth to suggest that mental health professionals should remain stoic in the face of disorienting loss. One profound example of disorienting loss is suicide loss. Suicide loss is highly stigmatized and when this occurs in a professional context, that stigma is amplified. Counselors often identify that losing a client to suicide is a prevalent fear and if occurs results in vicarious trauma. Counseling supervision is an important part of counselor development and can be protective for supervisees confronted with suicide loss if adequately trained and prepared. However, many counseling supervisors do not feel adequately trained to provide adequate guidance to supervisees. Overall, supervisors can normalize feelings, model appropriate grieving, and develop rituals for their supervisees who seek to move forward with their loss. This training will focus on specific ways counseling supervisors can help supervisees feel enfranchised and validated when navigating suicide loss (either professionally or personally).

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Breakout Session #2

Suicide Survivors in Therapy: A Panel Discussion

Facilitator: Shannon Ortiz, LPCC-S, CEO and Founder of Light After Loss

Suicide survivors face a unique journey of traumatic grief, and many seek professional counseling for support. However, this special population has different trauma and grief related needs than other clients that are seeking counseling support. This presentation will provide clinicians with an overview of the needs of suicide loss survivors when they come to treatment. Additionally, suicide loss survivors that have engaged in therapy will provide a panel discussion of their experiences. Specifically, panelists will discuss when and how they engaged in counseling, what they found helpful from the counseling experience, and what things counselors did that either enhanced or hindered their healing process.

Suicide Loss and the LGBTQ+ Community

Jared Sparks, MA, LPCC

Suicide is the second leading cause of death amongst young people ages 10 to 24 and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning youth are at significantly increased risk, being four times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers. The Trevor Project estimates that more than 1.8 million LGBTQ+ youth seriously consider suicide each year in the United States. Understanding better ways to work with the LGBTQ+ community as well as how to better advocate for queer individuals is just one step in the direction of helping reduce and/or prevent the likelihood of queer individuals completing suicide. Through this training, clinicians will be educated on the history and statistics of suicidality and suicide loss within the LGBTQ+ community as well as increase their ability to provide safe spaces and advocacy for the queer individuals entering their office and daily life. This session will also focus on how clinicians can support those who have lost an LGBTQ+ loved one to suicide.

When the Worst Happens: A Macro-Level Overview of Postvention in Schools

Elena Aslanides-Kandis, LPCC-S

While we may never feel ready, we can feel prepared. This session will help participants understand postvention at a macro-level in a school community when a loss occurs. Focusing on lessons learned in Stark County, Ohio, this session will walk you through crisis response efforts focusing on the first 24-48 hours after a loss.