

1. Presentation Title: Surviving Suicide: What We Want You to Know About the Process of Grieving, Healing, and Living.
2. If a panel presentation: Surviving Suicide: What We Want You to Know About the Process of Grieving, Healing, and Living.
3. Session or Panel Presenters: Amy Sciangula, LCSW (Social Worker) with panel members Heidi Todd, MS (Teacher), Martha Neth, MLS (Librarian), Amber Vanzant (Special Education Teacher), and Samantha Rognerud.
4. I am bereaved by suicide, a parent of children bereaved by suicide, and a mental health professional.
5. Presentation Audience (choose one from the left and one from the right column):
  - a. Survivor of Suicide Loss - Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced
  - d. Clinician/Peer Support – Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced
6. If the presentation was previously given: N/A
7. If you presented at a Bridging the Divide Summit in the past: N/A

Educational Objectives: At the conclusion of this presentation, the professional mental health participant should be able to identify what techniques and approaches in their professional practice with survivors are seen as respectful, helpful, and engaging. The professional mental health participant should be able to demonstrate thoughtful engagement with a survivor in their practice. The survivor participant should be able to acknowledge that they have the right to ask questions in attempting to find a good therapeutic fit. The survivor participant will be able to identify examples of questions they can use to screen potential mental health providers.

Abstract: Historian Arnold Toynbee wrote, "There are always two parties to a death; the person who dies and the survivors who are bereaved." Every year in the United States, 33,000 people take their own lives. Every one of these deaths leaves an estimated six or more "suicide survivors." In June 2015 a group of women met through a survivor's group at Judi's House in Denver, Colorado. They had each recently lost someone they cared deeply about and were left trying to understand why and where to turn. The complexity of feelings that accompanied the loss (extreme guilt, anger, and sadness) made the grief process that much more difficult. Despite their combined professional and life experiences, they struggled to know what to do, what to say, how to best help their children, and where to turn for help. What they learned during the process is that survivors are challenged in a variety of ways. There is a strong need to mourn the loss of the person they loved while trying to come to terms with a death that was traumatic

and unexpected, bringing a myriad of intense emotions. This need is further complicated in that those closest and able to offer support may not know how to offer that help or what to say. This includes mental health professionals who work with bereaved persons but may not fully grasp how to start from where the bereaved person is and how their trauma is impacting the ability to form a therapeutic relationship. Those impacted by suicide may desperately want and seek out a support system via a professional, but do not know or feel comfortable asking questions to determine if that therapist is the best fit for them. This session will provide new and seasoned professionals an opportunity to hear about the struggles a survivor faces, as well as a chance to ask honest questions to the panel about what hindered and helped the healing process in therapy. Survivors in the audience will have the opportunity to ask panel members what questions they should pose when seeking support and how to best convey their needs to a therapist.

The track for this presentation is people with lived experience with suicide. The presentation will help survivors of suicide regain their equilibrium by providing real life experience to mental health providers and welcoming open questions about what helped and hindered the healing process. Survivors in the audience will be empowered to ask potential therapists questions about their style and expected outcomes at the onset of the therapeutic relationship. Survivors will hear what questions were helpful to those who have gone through the process of finding a supportive therapist. The presenter and panel members have each completed group work at Judi's House, and continue to process their losses through individual therapy and/or outside supports. They will engage the audience through limited personal stories, with ample time for question and answer opportunities.