

Suicide Awareness

Tony ([00:02](#)):

Erica and Sharon are sisters who began a Grief Journey in 2006, when Erica's 10-year-old son, Austin drown together, they participated in a grief education program were so moved by this experience. They studied and became specialists so they can help the broken-hearted find recovery. In 2015 tragedy struck the family once again, when Erica's oldest son, Donovan was killed in a motorcycle accident. Erica and Shannon are committed to sharing their experiences of love, loss, and healing through this podcast. Now your Grief Specialists, Sharon and Erica.

Sharon ([00:40](#)):

We are facing a national epidemic as a society. My friend's suicide rates in the United States have increased 25 to 30% since 1999. Are we talking about this enough? Are we out there spreading the word and really having the conversations I'm here to tell you that Erica and I have definitely seen at least a 50% increase in calls about death by suicide?

Erica ([01:18](#)):

We, because this is so prevalent and because SU September is suicide awareness month, we have decided to commit the entire month of our podcast to suicide because we are not talking about this enough.

Sharon ([01:36](#)):

It's time to change the conversation. My friends, we have to get the word out there. And sadly, when I say we have increased 50% and getting calls of death by suicide, most of them have been under the age of 18.

Erica ([01:53](#)):

Yes. Even in our very small community in Texas. Right before Jordan graduated in May, we had news of two high school students like a week before their graduation. You know, you would think at that time, it it's a time to celebrate. It's a time to party. You don't have to go to school anymore and you don't have to eat the nasty cafeteria food. But for some people, they, that's not, they're not even thinking about that because whatever pain, whatever struggle they're having, the only way they see is to just end their life. And I, I don't even know what that must be like for those parents, their surviving parents and the friends.

Sharon ([02:43](#)):

Erica, we talk a lot about having the conversation about suicide, right? With our young littles around the house. And now I'm talking about our teams. I want to ask you a question. Have you had the conversation about suicide with Jordan and what do think is the appropriate age to start to start talking about it?

Erica ([03:02](#)):

So, this is where I get, and I don't mean to be silly because this is a serious topic and I'm not being silly. But when we got the news about the one boy that died by suicide the week before graduation and I read on it was the co-fund me, I think it was some information on, on his family's social media page. And his parents wrote a small little part of parents talk to your children, parents reach out, look for the warning signs. And like this question, just came over me. Like what warning signs? Like Jordan is already solemn. He never comes out of his room. He just always seems, you know, kind of moody. So that's the part that I, where I'm being a little facetious. Cause it's like, what does it look like? Because I would never know any difference. Cause he's always kind of irritable and cranky. You know what I mean? It's like you ask him a question and if I ask more than my question allotment, I just start getting, you know, sass and attitude. So, when Jordan came home that day, I, it was my first time having the conversation. I said, I read this from his parents, and I want to know like, have you ever thought about suicide? And he said, no. And I said, well, I don't even know what a warning sign will look like for you because you always just seem like you're withdrawn and you're mad at the world. And he, you know, he laughed and he's like, I know. Right. You know, cause that's our, our relationship. But I said, I know I really want you to, have you ever thought about it? And he's a mom? No, I haven't. And I said, well, if you had, do you feel comfortable that you would come to me? And he said, yes. Now, I mean, if he would have taken his life the next week, you know what I mean? It's like, how do you know?

Sharon ([04:51](#)):

Yeah. So, some of the warning signs are talking about wanting to die or kill yourself, looking for a way to kill oneself. Like really looking it up on the internet or really just sharing about it, talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose that is definitely talking about feeling trapped or being in unbearable pain. Right. Or talk about being a burden to others, right? Increase, use of alcohol or drugs acting anxious all the time. Agitated, restless, sleeping too much, sleeping, too little withdrawing or feeling isolated, showing rage or talking about and seeking revenge. So, these are some of the, the warning signs that we look for. But I also believe that these are blatant signs that are sometimes aren't they just don't appear there.

Erica ([05:47](#)):

Right. Because it seems from the recent conversations we've been having with survivors, there was no morning signs. There was no letter left. There was no, there was nothing. So, then you're just left with all these questions, these unanswered questions that you have to

carry for the rest of your life. And that to me is so sad for the survivors because all they want to know is why.

Sharon ([06:16](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. There's also something else I've been reading about lately is, you know, suicide ideation is where the person is really thinking about it all the time. But there's another thing that I think also happens. And it's with people who are in deep grief and not necessarily from death, but suicide adjacent, they're adjacent to the suicide just enough that they just walk along side. They have reasons not to do it, but they're just there. And they mentioned it quite often and they talk about it. And one of the things that you and I just talked with Ellen Romano about, and she is a grief specialist that specializes in suicide survivors is that most times we find that people who talk about it a lot are not going to do it. That doesn't mean that they won't do it. But I believe that this also this walk that we can do just alongside, because times are tough and painful.

Erica ([07:22](#)):

Yeah. And that's one of the things that I wondered is that a myth, because I remember being told that in my psych classes, when I was in college, that someone who verbalizes a lot about it are, are they're least likely to do it. It's the ones that never even mentioned it. And next thing you know, everyone, the family, the community, their survivors are all in shock because they never saw coming like Robin Williams or Kate Spade. You know, I think I read an article that Kate Spade's dad said he had just talked to her, and she was going on a vacation. She was packing for vacation.

Sharon ([07:59](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. So, one of the things that you and I have toyed with is how deep do we go in the conversation? How deep do we go in the conversation with our kids and how deep do we go in the conversation with the griever who say, I just want to die? I don't want to be here anymore. So, let's start with that one. You and I know it is so common to hear that. Number one, it's very common here that when someone has experienced a very close loss or death in their family, it is very normal for you to feel like you want to go be with them. And so, we have a lot of times griever say it, sometimes Erica will be working with the griever for three or four months before they actually verbalize it the first time. Or sometimes we know that they're thinking about it. I've actually, we've actually been with clients where we ask them, hey, are you thinking about this? Because they won't even verbalize it because they feel like it's such a sin or it's a taboo to even say it.

Erica ([09:01](#)):

Right. And, and because it is such a norm that to feel like you want to die and to express it is because it's such a normal part of the grieving process. We did a whole podcast on that. Cause I want it, I want to die because we wanted to put that message out there. If this is okay to have this feeling where it differs on this topic is if you have the plan of action.

Sharon ([09:28](#)):

Yes.

Erica ([09:32](#)):

Cause we've talked to people that have practice some things. So that that's a different look and that's a different conversation. So, in that regard then how deep do you go in that?

Sharon ([09:50](#)):

So, I think you go all the way in, yeah. You go all the way in, and you talk to them. I was on, when I lived in California, it's the first time I've ever said that I just moved to Texas a week ago. I was on the suicide prevention at the, at one of the colleges near my area. And we actually had a psychiatrist that came in and share. And he said that even as psychiatrists, as psychiatrists and therapists, we were afraid to have that conversation to really go there. And he said that he had a woman that was coming in and she was being treated with medication. And he shared about how she was like had her hair hanging in front of her face and she didn't really talk. And he would have sessions with her. And most of the time she didn't say anything. And one day she just said to him, I want to die. He said, out of nowhere, she just said that. And he said, he just looked at her and he just said, I bet you do. I bet this is the worst experience you've ever had. I bet your heart is just broken. And he said, she looked up at him and it was the first time in years I'd ever really made eye contact. And so, he said he got it. He got out, came out from work behind his desk and sat in front of her. And they had a whole conversation about suicide. And it was then that he realized people are dying to talk and share. They're dying to talk and share. He had, we're afraid to have the conversation as if having the conversation is going to go make them do the thing that they're constantly thinking about.

Erica ([11:37](#)):

It's almost along those same lines of why they don't want to teach sex education in school because they feel like that's giving them permission to go out and have sex. It's almost along those same lines. We kinda break the stigma of talking suicide and feeling as though that's giving someone permission to go out and take their life. That's not the point. The point is like Ellen said in our previous show, connection and hope. Yeah. Well, those are the things we have to try to give the person that feels as though death is their only option. Do we need to make a connection with them and find whatever is going to give them hope? And you and I did a show about suicide long before we've ever even had this much experience of talking to people about suicide. And one of the things I remember saying is if you can find nothing in your world, because we've met people who give us that they don't have a support system, they don't have a tribe. They don't have anyone. And I remember making a suggestion of, even if you have your favorite fuzzy socks, you know, it seems trivial, but you have to find something tiny, little thing that gives you hope. To make it to the next day. And then next day you find the next thing and you just, you've got to keep that going because people need you in this world. They need you. And that's, that's where I

feel that when you get to the point where you make that decision, that you're going to end your life. It's because you don't feel that you have any value, you feel that anyone would care if you weren't. And I want to say to anyone right now, thinking of that as an option for themselves, people absolutely need you. If you ended your life today, you would affect a community of people that you don't even know. Yes. And you would be breaking the hearts of so many. So, if you can't find that hope for yourself, think about the people you would be affecting that you're leaving behind.

Sharon ([13:59](#)):

Yes, absolutely. And that brings me to the next point, Erica, who was, what I started with earlier is how deep do we go with our young, with our littles in our, on our teens. And I think we need to show them the other side of suicide. We can't just sit and talk about it. Just like what you just said, oh, we need to show them just like sex ed. We need to have suicide ed and we need to talk to them and show them and have them experience, like really see what was left behind because my honest opinion, and this is for me in my own brokenness and seeing all the mothers that are weeping right now on our shoulders that we're hugging and holding up. I believe that these didn't know some part, I believe that they don't really understand that it's so final one. And number two, they don't realize what they're doing to their family, the survivor that's left behind. Right?

Erica ([15:06](#)):

Yeah. I think that when you get into such a, a dark place and you're carrying such a heavy burden of your pain of whether it be depression or whatever it is, you just don't feel the love and the caring for, because it's like, I remember when, when Donovan died, I just felt, I couldn't feel the feelings.

Speaker 2 ([15:28](#)):

You just, you just don't feel the feelings is that. So, I feel, I can only assume that that's what someone who is contemplating taking their life just doesn't feel the love or the care or the concern of those around them because they've gone so dark. So it would be, I think, extremely profound to show our young people, the survivors and how their lives have been forever changed by that.

Sharon ([15:58](#)):

Yeah. I just don't think that they, they have the bandwidth and the capability to see it all the way through to that point. I honestly believe that friends, if you are someone who is considering taking your life, one of the things I want to talk about a few things that we want you to do, we want to really reach out to you and talk about making a promise with someone, anyone, and promise that you'll share it, that you will let the words come out of your mouth, to someone who is close to you and will understand and will not completely freak out and not, it doesn't even have to be.

Erica ([16:42](#)):

Cause I think at that point, you kind of feel like you don't have anyone close to you, but just putting some yes, a teacher, someone, you, someone you have a genuine fondness for maybe like an appreciation of how they talk or how their presence.

Sharon ([17:00](#)):

Just tell someone. Tell someone, you know, thoughts, thoughts are one thing, but actions are something different, right? You can be having thoughts about it, but not acting on it. Your suicide thoughts don't have to become a reality. They don't, you can really sit with the thoughts, but share the support. Something happens, Eric, and you and I talk about this all the time. When we say the thing out loud, when we say that thing out loud, it's when the freedom starts to happen. Even though you're in a lot of pain right now, give yourself some distance between the thoughts and the actions tell somebody that helps it puts somebody in between. And it really helps.

Erica ([17:44](#)):

And sometimes when you are in some of treatment for mental health struggles, it could be a side effect of a medication you're taking. So that's why it's so important to if you're taking a medication and you start having these thoughts, speak about it because it could be your, if your body is reacting to your medication in a way that's not healthy for you, so you need to go share it. So, you could get that fixed and, and tagging on that.

Sharon ([18:16](#)):

Avoid using recreational drugs, avoid using alcohol altogether. If you're having these thoughts, suicidal thoughts can become even stronger if you're using drugs or alcohol to mask the pain that you're already experiencing. So, it's really important. One that you talk to somebody about the medication you're on, because that could really have happened. And two that you avoid using anything to overcompensate for the pain.

Erica ([18:46](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. You know, I've never shared this, and it just came to me right now and I've, I've been carrying this for a while, but there was a time during the pandemic where I really struggled because our business was infected and you know, Jordan kind of like, you know, he's was graduating. It was a whole bag hodgepodge of emotions that I hadn't sorted through. And I just remember having a breakdown when I, after drinking alcohol and I had a conversation with Louis where I just said, I don't feel like I have any value and I just cried. And he said, what are you talking about? And I, then I said, the words, I understand why we had a family member that died by suicide. I understand what he did, what he did. And it scared the. It really did. It scared him to death, but that's how I felt in that moment. And like you said, giving it voice, made me realize, cause the next day he was like, you were weird last night. And I, and I said, you know, I've been carrying this around. It was like, all of these emotions I had balled up the business was affected. You know, like I

said, Jordan was getting ready to graduate high school. Kayla moved out; she's living her adult life. You know, I just am like, who am I going to be now? And I hadn't sorted it out. I just was keeping it all balled up together. And I, I remember how sad I felt when I said those words. Cause that's really how I felt. I didn't feel like I had any value. And so, I'm saying I'm sharing this to express that I, I know what sometimes what it feels like to be in that place where you struggle and if you don't give those emotions voice they really will play tricks on you. You know, your mind, your thoughts, we always talk about thoughts. Your thoughts will really take you in a direction that not meant to be because you know, of course I have value. I bring the comedic timing to the show without me. I, like I said, I share this because Sharon and I always speak our truth and I want people out there to know we're not just a dog and pony show. We are real people, and we experience real things. And there's not anything that you could say to a subtle shock us or that we haven't experienced.

Sharon ([21:23](#)):

Yeah. Thank you. Thank you for sharing that. Keeping in mind that thoughts and actions, right? The thoughts, we can have the thoughts, but let me ask you a question though. I'm going on in my next thing, but does saying it out loud, give you the release?

Erica ([21:38](#)):

Not that night, because like I said, I had been drinking and, but the next day when I had the follow up conversation sober and let the, you know, realize I'll let the cat out of the bag, it really let me know. I had to organize like unpack. I unpack it back. We talk about our backpack all the time. I had to unpack it and look at it and be like, what is this? So that follow-up conversation. The next day, reassuring Lewis that I wasn't planning on harming myself, but that I needed to re real focus on what was going on. Made me feel a lot better because I started to unpack things for myself.

Sharon ([22:21](#)):

So, then you brought it to the next point, which is that when we keep it inside, it just becomes so much bigger. The thoughts become so much bigger. Okay. So, we have these thoughts, they're in our head, but we haven't gone to the action. And the action is something totally different. One of the things you want to do is also make your home safe. So, you want to remove the things that could hurt you, remove pills, remove knives, razorblades, firearms, get them out of the house. If you're really having these thoughts, getting these things out of the house. And it is also a way packing them all up to have that conversation with somebody, hey, take that box of stuff that you've packed up to someone's house and say, Hey, I'm having a hard time letting someone else know these feelings and not keeping these suicidal feelings to yourself is step one.

Erica ([23:18](#)):

Yeah. You know there's so many crisis lines with some of the research we've been doing to try and better support the phone calls that we're getting. There are so many different

options. If you don't want to talk to someone, you know, and I don't know why sometimes it's easier to tell you're a stranger than it is to, you know, the people in your circle. There there's even a line that you can just text if you don't want to get on the, and I would say have that information right now, but I remember looking it up. I don't have it, but I guarantee you, I will have it in the show notes. I will have that line in there where you can reach out and just text someone and communicate with them that way versus getting on the phone.

Sharon ([24:00](#)):

I think that people need to hear this. Also. They need to have hope because people do get through this. You were talking about hope earlier, people get through this. They can come through a suicidal episode and be on the other end. Yeah. We'll do come through out on the other side and that we need to talk about that too, because there is another side. This is something that can bring us way down, but we can fight our way back and make it out. And they manage to survive these feelings.

Erica ([24:34](#)):

Yeah, they do. In the moment. It feels so unbearable in that moment. But that moment will pass.

Sharon ([24:42](#)):

Yeah. There are so many people out there that are wanting to support you through this. We don't believe that to be true, but there are people out there that will help and will listen without judgment without freaking out. We can't freak out. If someone comes to you, if you're on the support and someone comes to you, don't freak out calmly, calmly start asking them some questions. What do I do? just ask the questions. I want to get down there and I don't want to change my facial expressions. I want to be as calm as possible. And I want to know what it's like. Have you, how long have you been thinking about this? How long have you been thinking about it? What are the thoughts that you're, that are going through your head? Do you have a plan? Oh, you do. Tell me about that plan. Ask them to tell you about the plan, get them talking about it. Hey, Erica and I are not professionals. We're not gonna tell you. You shouldn't go to a psychiatrist or a therapist because absolutely you should. But if you come to us, even in your grief, we're going to have this conversation with you.

Erica ([26:09](#)):

Oh, for sure. For sure. Because we want to normalize this part. We want to normalize that it's, it's part of the grief. And if we could help you get on a healing journey, maybe it'll lighten that load and those thoughts will go away because you're working on your healing.

Sharon ([26:32](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. I think just really trying to also visualize the other side of it, which is sometimes very hard to when you're down deep, you know what other people will go through, what they will feel and what they experienced. You are important. You're important to us. You're important to the humankind. You're important to your family. Even though I know, I know that some days it doesn't feel like that you are you're needed, and we need you here.

Erica ([27:06](#)):

Absolutely. A thousand percent you are needed. You have, you have people in your community that will be devastated without you.

Sharon ([27:16](#)):

Yeah. Thank you, friends.

Erica ([27:21](#)):

Bye friends.

Sharon ([27:21](#)):

Erica, so many friends don't know where to meet us at or where to find out more about us or what they need to do next. Let's give them a tip.

Erica ([27:35](#)):

The easiest way to find us is to click on the link and you will have access to all of our places, our podcasts, our Facebook, private group, our webpage and our email.

Sharon ([27:50](#)):

Yeah, exactly. That's simple. And our free blog friends click the link tree in the link below, and you'll find everything you need to know about us there. Thank you for allowing us and for this minute.

Erica ([28:05](#)):

Thank you so much. Thanks for listening to our podcast