

What is Survivor Guilt?

A misunderstood, underrecognized mental health impact of cancer



The term “survivor guilt” refers to feelings of guilt, shame, or worthlessness about being spared from harm that another person suffered

Some signs of survivor guilt include:



Feeling pressure to “live up to” certain expectations to justify surviving



Expecting bad things to happen as “karma” for surviving



Believing you are unworthy of happiness or that someone else should have survived instead



Percent of childhood cancer survivors know at least one child who lost their life to cancer

Survivor guilt is a response to the grief and trauma of childhood cancer, stemming from the awareness that survival outcomes are often random

Survivor guilt is NOT



A choice



Attention seeking



Easy to ignore

Survivor guilt can affect patients, survivors, siblings, and other family members. It is associated with other symptoms of traumatic stress, and people who are coping with survivor guilt often feel confusion or shame.

Support groups, therapy, and caring responses from loved ones can all provide relief from survivor guilt.

