



Center Highlights

Volume 21, Issue 1 SPRING 2021

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Looking back at 2020 brings a mixed bag of feelings and stories to tell. For our staff and volunteers as well as our clients, living through this pandemic has brought its fair share of challenges, some universal and others unique, all very personal.

At The Center for Loss and Bereavement, finding strength through this time has reinforced for us the importance of practicing the strategies we encourage in others. Like our clients, we have assuaged the grief and stress of this pandemic by adjusting expectations where able and adequately caring for oneself and others. We have been present with our clients and each other while acknowledging painful moments that have touched the lives of so many. We practice mindfulness, compartmentalize needs, and connect with nature in meaningful ways that bring peace and positive feelings. We strive to focus on gratitude in how we tell our stories and turn towards hope.

Being inspired by good will in others has also carried us all through this year. In addition to being overwhelmed by the generosity of those who supported our virtual 5k in August and the growing list of donors who have given to our Covid relief support and our 20th anniversary campaign, we have been so grateful for the ability to carry on our work with many through telehealth platforms. We were especially struck by the courage of several clients who brought hope to others by sharing their stories of grief, healing, and growth as part of our *20 Years of Impact* fall celebration. These individuals passionately expressed their journey with heartbreaking loss and the ways in which they found support, connection, and guidance through the programs at the Center. Being able to take those messages to a greater audience through this virtual platform was not only touching to us, but uplifting to many others.

Should you have missed the opportunity to hear these hope-filled messages that so many are seeking right now, please visit our 20th anniversary event page, bereavementcenter.org/20thanniversary, and take in their full stories. Share them with others who may be hurting right now and encourage them to reach out for help. Be part of a new story that makes a difference for someone else in need, and thank you for remaining one of our most treasured gifts in community mission work.

Emily Vincent, LPC FT



REFLECTING ON *20 Years of Hope...*

“Don’t give up on yourself. The road right now may look short and dark, but when you are able to see the light again, you will realize there is still so much road to travel on. The Center of Loss and Bereavement will help you get there. That loss will never go away, but there is HOPE. That is exactly how this place makes me feel – hopeful.”

- Megan

“I couldn’t imagine where I would be right now mentally in terms of my grief journey if it weren’t for the Center... If you sign yourself up with the Center, I know you will find a sense of community with others that have lost loved ones and you’ll be able to tell your story and talk about your grief... you are not alone.”

- Adrienne

“Over the years, I have found individual counseling and the monthly Loss of Child group {and Nello’s Corner} to be extremely helpful... We left behind what we were able to teach to those who work and volunteer at the Center about our grief, hoping they can use it to help others who experience a loss that is as difficult as ours.”

- Kelli

“The Center has done wonders for me... I just hope we can keep this going. I’ve been blessed and I thank God I made that phone call four years ago...”

- Reanna

“They not only helped me through the grief that I went through, and the mourning, but I’ve continued to see them even two years after my wife passed away... they’ve been able to help me with a few other issues that all come back to the loss of my spouse.”

- Mark

“I found a caring compassionate place to talk, cry, and laugh. I needed tending, and felt tended to... I was able to find comfortable ways to ‘sit with my grief’... I believe that I will always have this grief, I will always miss Lance, and I will always love him. My grief is quieter now, not gone, and not always in the background, but quieter...”

- Nancy

Updates from **Nello's CORNER**

Nello's Corner is our peer support group program offered during the school year for those youth ages 4 through high school who have experienced the death of a significant family member. Currently meeting virtually, our child-driven model allows group participants to guide staff and volunteers to what is needed most as they seek connection with others. Here is a glimpse into how the multiple age groups are developmentally processing grief within the safety of a Nello's Corner circle.

LITTLES (ages 4-6 years)

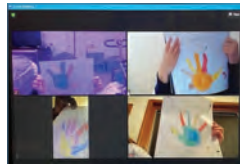
Staff facilitator Allison shares that our youngest group participants are doing a wonderful job adjusting to virtual groups, and are actively engaged. Many activities have revolved around memories, including creating circle of love ornaments and memory hearts with supplied materials. Of developmental importance to little ones, music and books have been instrumental in posing grief topics, such as learning to recognize, name and cope with feelings.



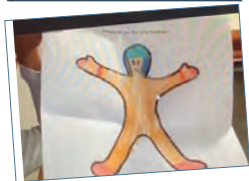
YOUNGERS I (ages 7-8 years)

This age group may display lots of feelings that often present through behaviors not always identified as being connected to their grief. Staff facilitator Jamie shares two activities recently used to help the children open discussion about different ways to safely express and understand grief emotions.

A "Feelings Turkey" was created to show the color of emotion(s) felt around different situations, such as a person that died not being there during holidays.



Exploring how feelings can sometimes also be felt physically, an outline of a person was used to identify how bodies respond to emotions.



YOUNGERS II (ages 8-9 years)

This age group has lots to say and loves to be funny and lively, chatting about sports one minute and openly sharing about grief the next. Details of loss and reminiscent stories are central to group time. Allison has attempted some rewriting of song lyrics with these children and is in awe of their displays of vulnerability, followed by quick pivots to simply wanting to be "regular" kids.

MIDDLERS (ages 9-12 years)

A support group can offer connection and help with isolation as older elementary school children often face challenges of feeling different from peers. Jamie's group of all females has been exploring helpful ways to cope through journaling, use of music, and meditation. The girls have been encouraging to one another, exemplified in one activity of being a "Secret Santa" - writing supportive messages to each other.



Staff facilitator Pat's group has developed trust between members as they recognize that group is a place where they are not alone and feelings can be expressed with others who understand. Being older, talking about problems and common worries can be better managed when shared together. Activities presenting situations of "What Would You Do or Say", or creating Worry Jars have been utilized with this group as they explore healthy ways to cope with challenging situations.

MIDDLE SCHOOL (ages 12-14 years)

Never at a loss for things to talk about, this interactive group has bonded over school woes and common interests in addition to grief. Leadership is rotated among the participants, who bring topics for discussion to the meetings such as dreams, staying connected, silver linings, empathy, stress, and personal traits connected to those who've died. One activity was writing about grief in 6 words:

*This is so annoying. Like what?!?
It's static but I am very hopeful.
I am tired all the time.
Life has become a total train wreck.*

TEENS (high school ages)

Staff facilitator Shelley and volunteers have used different concepts, images, phrases and "projects" to help stimulate thinking, understanding of grief and oneself, and communicating with one another. Some examples are Six Words of Grief Stories, Word Art using their ideas and words as to how their grief feels, sharing of Grief Secrets, and drawing pictures of what their grief looks like.

Shelley shares that the teens have responded well to this virtual style of grief processing, and while it is an on-going development of awareness and trust, they are "opening up and digging deep".



HELP US CONNECT!
Contact us at **610-222-4110** if a child you know could benefit from this program.

Plans are in the works for Camp Millie 2021

TRAILBLAZERS!

June 21, 22, 23, 24

Visit www.bereavementcenter.org/campmillie for details.

Hitch up the wagons and head for the trail! Camp Millie participants will become pioneers as they incorporate familiar western images with individual stories of loss, change, survival and hope. Activities include mask making, country-western hoe-downs and a possible rattlesnake ruckus. Camp Millie is designed for children ages 6 through young teen who have experienced the death of a family member.

Camp will be held at Central Community Center on Steelman Road, Lansdale. Families provide their own transportation and bag lunches. If health conditions restrict an in-person camp, plans for a virtual Camp Millie using a modified schedule will be offered.

Camp enrollment will be limited to a smaller number this year. While previous campers are welcome to submit a registration, priority will be given to new campers.

Contact us at 610-222-4110, ext. 118 for more information and the link to our Registration Form.



DONATIONS OF GIFT CARDS
for Amazon, Walmart, or craft stores
are greatly appreciated and help to
defray our costs of our materials.

Thank You!



All support groups are currently being held in a virtual format and uphold the same relaxed environment that provides a safe space to connect with others and share in support just as if we were together in-person. Groups are held as interest is shown and are facilitated by a trained professional. As circumstances from the pandemic improve, we will transition back to in person groups.

For dates, times, and cost, or to inquire about other group services, please call 610-222-4110.

Specialized Support Groups

CURRENT SIX-WEEK ADULT SUPPORT GROUPS

**Loss due to Suicide, Loss of Spouse for various ages,
Loss due to Addiction, Loss of Sibling, Loss of Parent**

ONGOING GROUPS

Monthly Loss of Child

For adults who have experienced
the death of a child as a teen or adult
2nd Monday of each month, 6:30-8:00p.m.

Biweekly Young Adult Group Support (YAGS)

For ages 19-29 who have experienced significant loss(es)
Every Other Wednesday, 7:00-8:15p.m.
Ongoing/No Fee

NEW GROUPS AVAILABLE

After the Bell

A group for educators and school personnel
who are facing issues of loss and grief with
students, coworkers and/or selves.

Support Group for Healthcare Professionals

A group to support front-line healthcare professionals in
processing the grief and loss they experience, providing a
safe and confidential outlet for release and camaraderie.



Throughout this past year, the Education and Community Outreach Program has grown to offer increased services and educational opportunities to help support more people. We value the ability to connect with other professionals and with the public to discuss areas of grief and loss that have been so prevalent in daily life. As we continue into this new year, we will uphold this pillar of our mission to provide specialized knowledge and valuable resources in supporting our growing community, while seeking new ways to make meaningful connection through partnerships.

We are continuing to offer 'Centered Conversations' forums every other month in addition to our regularly scheduled Professional Roundtable Trainings and Tailored Presentation requests, all which are being held virtually at this time. We were honored to present to various groups this past fall, including parents/caregivers of Upper Perkiomen School District, the elementary staff of Cheltenham School District, and doctoral students at Widener University. Therapist Claire Drexler was featured on a podcast hosted by Central Schwenkfelder Church, discussing how various aspects of grief and loss have presented throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Our Center also hosted an interactive grief discussion for Friends in the City (FIT-C), and presented for the Pennsylvania Long-Term Care Virtual Family Council as well as for BucksMont Collaborative, as part of a panel discussion on grief. We are so grateful to have been given the opportunity to connect with various groups this past year and look forward to raising more awareness on grief and its special considerations in our work.

Our Center continues to grow in professional support through the Greater Philadelphia Grief Collaborative as well. We have been incredibly grateful to engage with such reliable, inspiring grief centers through this complicated year of service delivery. Also through this pandemic, our team has been enriched through participation in many National Alliance for Grieving Children (NAGC) member discussions and other professional trainings focused on the grief and bereavement field. All of our efforts dedicated to the furtherment of education and peer consultation ensures that we are providing quality, inclusive support to the families and communities we serve.

Professional Trainings/Tailored Presentations by Request

Grief presents itself differently in various systems, such as schools, faith-based or community organizations, and all-sized businesses. This year especially, deaths due to COVID and other losses experienced in remote settings have also brought unique impacts to groups of colleagues and peers. Upon request, we will work with your organization to develop a tailored presentation about grief, death or dying, in consideration of your needs.

If your organization is seeking more intimate guidance and support for a specific time-sensitive grief related matter, please contact our Education and Community Outreach Director, Ashley Herr at amh@bereavementcenter.org or by phone at 610-222-4110 ext. 123.

(Please Note: All Education and Community Outreach services remain virtual at this time.)



PROFESSIONAL ROUNDTABLE TRAINING

Empathy for the Empaths: Applying Grief Principles from the Professional's Perspective
February 25, 2021 12:00 - 2:00 pm

Many are drawn to work in the human service field based on the rewarding aspects of helping and serving others. However, it is important to acknowledge and address the challenges and hurdles that we experience personally in order to maintain an optimal level of authentic presence. Self-care and building support systems play an important role in the grief-process as well as in the sensitive work that we do. In this training, we will discuss the concepts of compassion fatigue, companionship, and basic grief principles as they apply to helping professionals so that we can increase our mindfulness and health, and continue caring for those in need.

Resilience, Rebirth & Resourcefulness: Meaning-Making in the Face of Adversity
April 22, 2021 12:00 - 2:00 pm

Throughout the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has opened our eyes to the effects of death and non-death related loss. We understand that as time passes, grief often changes. This training will help professionals foster the concepts of resilience and resourcefulness within the individuals, families, and groups that you serve in promoting growth and healing in the face of adversity.

Cost is \$40 per training, or register for 2 trainings at a discounted rate of \$70. 2 CEU's Available for each.

Live Webinars *CEs* Available!



Join Us! The Center is pleased to now offer a variety of topic-specific forums throughout the year. These discussions offer all members of the community an opportunity to engage in interactive discussion and to build insight surrounding important aspects of grief. Though registration is required, these forums are offered at no charge to participants.

Continuing Bonds

Wednesday, March 17th 1:00-2:00p.m.

Resiliency & Growth

Thursday, May 20th 1:00-2:00p.m.



Grief Notes on... The Power of Gratitude

BY STEVE KELLER

Most of our clients are acutely or chronically bereaved due to the death of a loved one, usually a cherished family member. If that is not enough, their struggles have been exacerbated by the pandemic that has killed over 400,000 people in our country. In addition, racial strife, civic unrest, political polarization, economic losses, rampant unemployment, virtual schooling, social distancing, and disrupted social routines all have contributed to the enormous grief burden.

As uncertainty and grief mount, people become increasingly prone to chronic anxiety and/or depression. After losses, we tend to focus on what we no longer have. In such times it is difficult to count your blessings and find any reason to be positive. However, as the grief process progresses, it becomes gradually easier to find things for which to be grateful. Grief researchers and clinicians encourage clients, as they are able, to focus on and cultivate such thoughts and feelings of gratitude. Being grateful for what remains after you have experienced a loss can be a powerful way to deal with, and heal, that loss. Turning your attention to how your life was enriched because that person was in it, for example, rather than on the vacuum the loss created, is a profound and healthy approach to confronting grief. Gratitude has the potential to help those in mourning rise above their loss. It is life affirming. It can provide hope. And, perhaps most important, it can help us move forward and focus on the abundance that surrounds us now.

When you are in a state of gratitude you become more expansive, open, feel lighter, happier, and more content. Gratitude has been characterized as “a natural antidepressant”. There is a physiological basis for this. When you express or receive gratitude, your brain releases the neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine, both of which immediately improve mood. In addition, the stress hormone cortisol is reduced, normalizing cardiac functions, reducing anxiety, and improving immunity and sleep cycles.

The perks of gratitude can be enhanced by practicing it consistently. Although initially it may feel contrived, this mental state grows stronger with use and practice. Start small by simply noticing things that give you pleasure, such as the loving snuggle of an affectionate pet, the hearty laugh of a grandchild, or the warm morning sun. Try to “take in the good” with all of your senses, embodying the experience. As you do this, the physiological benefits start to accrue. Be mindful of your thoughts as they occur throughout the day. As you notice negative thoughts, attempt to block them and replace them with thoughts of gratitude. With time, you will begin to see favorable changes in your mood, thoughts and behaviors.

“Everything can be taken away from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

Victor Frankl



Here are a few additional practices to cultivate gratitude:

- 1. Create a gratitude jar** - simply set a jar on a table, jot down what you are grateful for each day, stash entries into jar. Watch them collect!
- 2. Nighttime reflection** - write down or mentally note three things that you appreciated about your day before you go to sleep.
- 3. Extend thanks** - make yourself happier and nurture an important relationship by conveying your thankfulness for others’ impact on your life.

In the words of Victor Frankl, “Everything can be taken away from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

As you choose your own way during these challenging times, I invite you to nurture hope and to be grateful for your life each day.

A Look Back...

Celebrating 20 Years

We are honored to continue the celebration of our 20th Anniversary! From our founders to our staff, board members, and volunteers – to our clients, community partners, and supporters – each person that touches our mission reminds us every day of our potential to grow through grief and to be strengthened by others.

Thank you for joining us in paying tribute to our 20 years of service impact!

To view virtual stories of history and service, and to contribute to this milestone of mission work, please visit:

www.bereavementcenter.org/20thanniversary



Running for a Cause

Last Fall, The Center for Loss and Bereavement proudly hosted its first 5K! Tying together virtual and staggered teams at the beautiful Heebner Park, it became a wonderful event. Thank you to our many teams, sponsors, and participants for supporting the important work we do, and for surrounding those grieving in our community with inspiring hope! We can't wait until this coming fall to host **STRIDES of HOPE** again! Thank you to our top teams, top fundraisers, and congratulations to our 5K runners!

TOP TEAM FUNDRAISER: Asher's Army

TOP INDIVIDUAL FUNDRAISER: Audrey Ditzler

MOST TEAM MEMBERS: Milestone

TIMED RACE WINNERS: 1st Overall Female: Nikki Scott 23:16
1st Overall Male: Robert Dulin 18:15

See all results and participant photos here:

bereavementcenter.org/stridesofhope

Thank you to all those who supported or participated in our "Strides of Hope 5K"!



A Look Ahead...

Our fabulous events' committee is planning some fun, safe events for later in 2021. We look forward to hosting a **FIELDS of HOPE** Sunflower Festival this summer and will be having our second **STRIDES of HOPE** 5K this fall!

Please follow us on social media and check the events page on our website as more details are posted.

We hope to see you!



Thank you to all those who supported or participated in our "Strides of Hope" 5K!

- | | | |
|--|--|------------------------------------|
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 John O'Brien
In memory of Gail Elrod
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In memory of Carter Gallagher and Cindy Plantarich Zeige, and in honor of Sandy Plantarich Gallagher
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In memory of Eric Suzuki
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 Robb and Gina Parlanti
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The Center *for* Loss and Bereavement
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Our Mission

The Center for Loss and Bereavement is a non-profit resource of specialized knowledge and professional support that provides meaningful connection and restorative guidance for those impacted by grief.

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