

HIGHMARK

CARING PLACE 

finding hope in grief

COMPASSION IN ACTION

Activities for Finding Hope in Grief

G-K





GETTING TO KNOW YOU PUZZLE

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To facilitate group and team building and allow the children to get to know something about other group members. Begin to build a safe environment for the children to process their grief. To promote sharing on a variety of topics.

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Identifying and expressing feelings

Materials:

- List of questions with varying levels of detail for different rounds (*choose some questions from the “Questions for Q & A Activities” in the Appendix*)
- Pencils, markers, pens and paper to write down responses
- PUZZLE piece pictures to be matched (*one PUZZLE per pair of children in your group, cut into two unique pieces—ensure enough copies of the same picture are available for all pairs in each round*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Let the group know that they will be doing an activity together that will help them get to know one another.
- Ask the group to think of their likes, dislikes, hobbies, and activities they enjoy.
- Ask the group to also think about different feelings they have.
- Let the group know that they are going to find out something about fellow group members and then share it with the group.
- Prior to group, work with the Caring Place staff to determine the number of pictures needed for the activity. Staff may have the PUZZLE pieces pre-made.
- Decide how many rounds you will want to play with the group. During each round, all group members will be using the same picture, so enough copies must be made beforehand (*for example, with 10 members, you’ll need 5 identical pictures cut into 10 halves per round*).
- Ensure each picture is cut differently into two PUZZLE pieces.
- Attach the pre-prepared Questions (*perhaps categorized by Level 1, 2, 3*) to the back of the PUZZLE pieces using Velcro for easy access.

Activity Description:

- For each round, you'll use copies of the same picture (previously cut into two pieces), with each child getting one of those PUZZLE pieces.
- Participants are asked to find the other half among the other group members.
- Once the members have found the person with the other half, the pair will ask each other the questions that are Velcroed to the back of their PUZZLE pieces.
- Group members can record their answers on their papers.
- After each pair has finished, group members can share with the larger group what they learned about their partner.
- The next round of pictures (with potentially different Question levels) can then be handed out to the group members, and the process repeats.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Have children reflect on similarities found between group members.
- Questions to consider:
 - *"What are some commonalities between the group members? Differences?"*
 - *"Did you meet someone who has something in common with you?"*
 - *"Are there any unexpected similarities or differences found?"*
- Thank the group for participating and sharing.

Notes:

- Questions can vary from likes/dislikes, feelings and reactions to situations, and Questions about each member's grief.
- As participants become more comfortable with one another, Question level can increase in detail. (*Level 1 Questions could be on Likes/Interests, Level 2 Questions on feelings, and Level 3 Questions about loss of their loved one, for example.*)
- This activity fosters a sense of connection and helps build trust within the group by encouraging personal sharing in a structured and interactive way.
- The PUZZLE matching aspect adds an element of fun and helps break the ice before more personal discussions begin.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This is appropriate for both Introductory and Ongoing Groups; for an Ongoing Group, you can focus on Questions that focus deeper on grief processing as appropriate.

GIANT CHAIN

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To introduce the group members and the people who died in their families. To provide children with a concrete way to see how they are linked together as a group by the death of a family member.

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Telling their story

Materials:

- Long strips of paper
- Markers
- Magazines
- Crayons
- Glue
- Scissors
- Stapler

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Introduce the Activity: *“Today, we’re going to make something really special together—a GIANT CHAIN. This CHAIN is going to help us learn a little bit about each other and also remember the special people in our lives.”*
- Discuss that everyone has favorite things, activities they like to do, etc. Ask the group for examples.
- Next, thank them for sharing their favorite things. Then, encourage them to share the favorite things of their person who died.
- Tell the group they are going to decorate a strip of paper with the things they just shared.

Activity Description:

- Explain how to decorate a strip of paper: *“On one side, you can put things about you. On the other side, you can put things about the person you’re remembering.”*
- Give the group different options: writing, drawing, gluing pictures from magazines, stickers, etc.
- Each child takes a long strip of paper, writes their name on one side, and the name of the person who died on the other side.
- Then, they can add their favorite things on the side with their name and their person’s favorite things on the other side of the CHAIN.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- *“This is a time to share a little bit about what you created. You don’t have to share everything, just what you feel comfortable with. When it’s your turn, you can tell us about your CHAIN, who you’re remembering, and maybe one or two things you put on your paper that you’d like to share.”*
- **Encourage and Affirm:** When a child shares, use simple, positive affirmations: *“Thank you for sharing that”—“That sounds like a wonderful memory”—“It’s nice to hear about [person’s name].”*
- **Acknowledge Emotions Gently:** If a child becomes sad while sharing, you can say: *“It’s OK to feel sad when you talk about [person’s name]. It shows how much you loved them.”* Don’t try to change their feeling, just acknowledge it.
- **Explain the CHAIN Assembly:** *“We’re going to connect all of our special strips together to make one big, long CHAIN. This is where we see how we’re all connected.”*
- **Focus on Shared Experience, Not Just Shared Grief:** *“Look at this amazing CHAIN! Every link is unique, just like each of you. But together, these links make a strong, long CHAIN. It’s a bit like us in this group. We’re all here because we’ve all experienced losing someone very special.”*
- **Emphasize Connection and Support:** *“Even though everyone’s story is different, we all understand what it’s like to miss someone. This CHAIN shows that we’re connected, and we can support each other here.”*
- **Display the CHAIN:** *“This CHAIN is going to hang here in our room for the rest of our group. It’s a reminder of everyone who is part of our group and the special people we’re remembering. Thank you all for being so brave, creative, and for sharing today. This CHAIN is truly special because of each one of you.”*

Notes:

- Since both sides of the paper strip will be used, you may not want to have the group use materials that will be easily smudged or dislodged, such as glitter, paint, or large objects glued onto the paper. If you do use these materials, you may need two meetings to allow time for drying between completing each side.

For Ongoing Groups:

- In Ongoing Groups, the group makeup would be different so the experience would be unique. If they made a CHAIN in their Introductory Group, you could ask them to talk about anything different or new they put on this CHAIN versus the last one they made.

GIFTS FROM THE PERSON WHO DIED

Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To encourage the group members to identify the non-material gifts they received from the person who died

Task/Need:

- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died
- Helping them understand who they are after their loss

Materials:

- Small boxes (jewelry size or slightly larger)
- A variety of different types of wrapping paper
- Ribbons
- Gift tags
- Small pieces of paper (*Staff may have pre-made prompts; also see after this activity*)
- Markers or pens

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- **For younger kids:** The book *Badger's Parting Gifts* may be a good introduction to this activity.
- **For older kids:** Begin the activity with a discussion of what the family members who died taught or gave the children in the group. Probe for things as basic as genetic traits (shared with a parent or other family member) such as hair or eye color, to things like skills, habits, and behaviors.
- Explain that group members will use small slips of paper to write down the GIFTS and wrap them in a box. Give group members the option to write messages to their people who died as well.

Activity Description:

- Allow the group members to select a box to wrap and the wrapping paper that most reminds them of their family member.
- Suggest that they use some small pieces of paper to write the GIFTS that they received from their family member and put them in the box.
- Finally, have them wrap the boxes with the paper, ribbons, and tags that they have chosen.
- While group members are engaged in the activity, be curious about what they are writing on their papers.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Invite the group members to share their GIFTS with the rest of the group.
- Discuss what it was like to do the activity.
- What does it feel like to share their GIFTS with others in the group?
- Point out any commonalities of the group:
 - *“It sounds like many of you learned _____ from your person who died.”*
- Engage in a discussion about the holidays and traditions.
 - *“How have the holidays changed since your person died?”*
 - *“What time of year do you miss your person most?”*
- Be sure to have group members take the boxes home at the end of the activity.
 - *“What will you do with your box?”*
 - *“Where your box be kept?”*
- Wonder if the group members have a special tangible gift from the person who died (*for example, a keepsake, birthday gift, holiday or special occasion gift, etc.*).

Notes:

- As with all memory activities, be sensitive to children and adults who may not have many memories or who may have conflicted memories. Staff can provide ideas and support.
- This activity could be used in Adult Groups for discussion if they don’t want to actually wrap their GIFTS in the gift boxes.
- Another modification is to inquire what GIFTS group members gave to the person who died. (For example, *“I always made my mom laugh.”*)
- For group members with few memories or who have trouble identifying gifts, substitute GIFTS for WISHES—*“What do you wish your person could still give you?”*
- What gifts do group members wish they could still give to their people who died. Connected with this, you may want to have them fill the box with these GIFTS.
- They may want to incorporate these wrapped GIFTS into their holiday and birthday traditions at home. Ask the group for suggestions for using the boxes for these purposes.
- Suggest the group thank the person who died for their lasting GIFTS by writing them a note on their wrapping paper. Wonder aloud together if there are things they can actually do to thank him/her (for example, write a poem, share that GIFT with others).

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity is appropriate for Introductory and Ongoing Groups; if group members have done this in an Introductory Group already, ask how the GIFT they received from their person either stayed the same or changed. Have they discovered new gifts over time?
 - What gift would they choose now?
 - Are there gifts that other family members received from your special person?
 - What gifts did your person have that you would like to share with your group members?

My loved one taught me...

A food or recipe that reminds me of my loved one...

I remember my loved one saying...

Advice my loved one gave me...

I wish...

I hope...

A gift I gave my loved one is...

A trait I have that is similar to my loved one...

A time my loved one made me laugh was...

A time my loved one was kind and helpful to others...

GOODBYE BANNER

P—Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To reflect back on the Session and say goodbye. Allow group members to express any feelings about the group ending.

Task/Need:

- Group closure

Materials:

- Large Post-It sheet or other large piece of paper
- Markers

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Acknowledge that it's the last meeting.
 - How do group members feel about it being the last night of group?
 - Remember to validate feelings and ask if anyone else feels a similar way.
- Reflect on the group meetings:
 - Ask about what they liked or found valuable about the group.
 - What's something that stands out to them about their time together at the Caring Place?
 - Examples could be an activity they did, a conversation the group had, or something they learned about themselves or about grief.
- What is one thing they will remember about the group?
- Describe creating a BANNER:
 - They will use the large paper to create a BANNER as a way to mark the end of the group's time together.
 - *"This BANNER will be a way for each of us to leave a message, a memory, or some wisdom for the group, and to say our goodbye to each other."*
- Each member writes their name and last words for the group (*messages, wisdom, things they'll miss, etc.*) on the BANNER. Decorate the BANNER.

Activity Description:

- Invite each group member to find a spot on the BANNER where they can write their name and share some *"Last Words"* for the group.
- Encourage group members to write some of the ideas they shared during the Framing portion of the activity:
 - Activities, the things they remember most, etc.

- “*Last Words*” could be anything they want to share:
 - A message to the other group members
 - Something you’ll miss about our group
 - A piece of wisdom or encouragement they want to share about grief
 - A favorite memory from their group session
 - A feeling they have about the group ending
 - A drawing or a symbol that represents their time at the Caring Place
- Instruct the group members to use the supplies to decorate their section of the BANNER, or the BANNER as a whole.
- Remember to observe what the group is doing and offer gentle encouragement.
 - For younger children, offer to scribe their words. For teens, respect their space but be available if they want to chat while they write.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow sharing of what was written.
- What was it like to write or draw “*Last Words*” about the group?
- Consider prompts like:
 - “*I wonder what feelings came up for you as you decorated the BANNER?*”
 - “*It sounds like many of you will miss _____ about the group.*”
 - Offer the group choices regarding what to do with their BANNER.
 - If they choose to keep it in the room, where should they hang it?
- Thank group members for their participation in the BANNER and throughout the group session.

Notes:

- Play some background music as the group works together on their BANNER.
- Think about using drawings instead of words for groups with very young children.
- Another adaptation for the activity is to create a GOODBYE VIDEO, recording memories and things the group learned during their time at the Caring Place.
- Adult Groups could simply discuss the prompts listed above to commemorate their time in their group session instead of creating a BANNER.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This can be done in Introductory or Ongoing Groups, and no modifications are needed as the group will likely have different discussions or thoughts to share.

GREETING CARD TO OR FROM THE PERSON WHO DIED

Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To help group members understand and acknowledge that their connection and feelings for the person who died can continue, even though the person is no longer physically present

Task/Need:

- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died
- Helping them understand who they are after their loss
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Card stock paper
- Construction paper
- Markers
- Scissors
- Glue
- Rubber stamps, ink, and envelopes (*optional*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Open the discussion about GREETING CARDS:
 - Have group members ever sent or received them?
 - When did they send or receive them?
 - What did they like about sending or getting a card?
- Relate the discussion to the person who died:
 - “When you think about the person who died, did you used to exchange cards with them?”
 - “When did you exchange cards with them?”
 - Holidays, birthdays, or just because?
 - Wonder if the group misses getting cards from their people who died.
- Validate any feelings or experiences the group shares about GREETING CARDS.
- Introduce the purpose of the activity: “Sometimes, after someone important dies, we might miss those ways we used to connect, like giving or getting CARDS. It can feel like that connection is just... gone. But what we often find is that the love and memories we have, the special connection, actually can continue. The love we felt, the things they taught us, the ways they shaped us—that can live on.”
- Explain that the group is going to make a CARD for their person who died and move on to the Activity Description.

Activity Description:

- Give group members the following options for their CARD:

- *“You can either make a CARD to the person who died, almost like sending them a message around a holiday, a special anniversary, or just saying hello.” (Provide examples: “Maybe you’d tell them what’s new, or something you wish you could tell them, or just say ‘I love you.’”)*
- *“Or, you can make a CARD from the person who died, to yourself. This is about imagining what they might want to say to you if they could, on a special day or any day. Maybe words of comfort, encouragement, or anything else they might want to say, or you might want to hear from them.”*
- Emphasize choice—*“There’s no right or wrong way to make this CARD. You can write as much or as little as you want, draw pictures, use the different papers—make it uniquely yours. It’s really about expressing those thoughts and feelings that might still be there for you.”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Transition from creating to sharing by inviting group members to read their CARDS, and explain any pictures or decorations on their CARDS.
- Acknowledge the effort the group made on the CARDS.
- Ask how the group felt to make the CARDS.
 - Validate group members’ feelings and point out any similarities.
- Broaden the discussion.
 - For example, *“Beyond CARDS, what are some other ways you all feel connected to the person who died?”*
 - *“What are some things you do to keep their memory alive and feel close to them?”* (Prompt with examples if needed: *“Maybe you wear something of theirs, listen to their favorite music, talk about them with family, or visit a special place?”*)
- Ask the group where they will keep their CARD at home.

Notes:

- If group members created CARDS for themselves, they may choose to save them for a special day to open as a gift from the person who died.
- Offer envelopes so the group has a safe place to store the CARD.
- Be mindful of the age of your group members.
 - For example, younger groups may require more direct prompts whereas adults may not need as many prompts to get started with the activity.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Inquire when the group made a CARD before.
- How was the previous CARD the same or different from their CARD now?
- What would they like their person to know now? What would they like their person to tell them now?

GRIEF BALL TOSS

Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To allow group members to express thoughts, feelings, and memories about their grief experience

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- A full-size soccer BALL
- Grief-related questions that have been written or adhered to the sides of the soccer BALL

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Ask, *“Has anyone ever had a question that they wanted to ask about grieving but didn’t? Sometimes people that have had a family member die have some of the same questions, thoughts, feelings, and fears.”*
 - Inquire if group members think the above statement about others having similar feelings after a death is true.
- Explain that the group is going to play a game with a BALL full of different questions about grief.
 - *“This game allows us to talk about some of the common questions that grieving people ask.”*
 - Offer the opportunity for the group to add questions too.

Activity Description:

- The group members stand in a circle or sit at the table and gently toss the BALL to whoever they would like to answer a question.
- The catcher of the BALL answers the question where their right thumb lands, or they can choose between the questions where either of their thumbs lands.
- Give the option for the other group members to answer the same question before the BALL is tossed again.
 - Point out any similarities in responses.
 - Validate and normalize feelings.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Thank the group members for their participation.
- What did they learn about the group as they answered the questions?

- What answers were surprising?
- How did it feel to answer the questions?
 - Have the group identify different feelings that came up for them during the activity.
- Encourage group members to keep thinking of questions people might ask and bring them to future group sessions.
- What questions were more difficult to answer? Which ones were easier?
- How did it feel to hear some similar answers?
 - What questions would they have answered differently from others?

Notes:

- Instead of writing questions on the BALL, you may want to write numbers and have the numbers correspond to a list of questions on a separate sheet of paper. This way, the questions can be changed from session to session to address different needs, ages, and tasks of grief.
- Depending on the intensity of the discussion, think about a cool down activity, like the Activities Room before the end of the night.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Have group members add their own questions about grief to the BALL or to separate sheets of paper.
- Ask group members to compare their experiences and feelings about grief from the first time they came to the Caring Place to now.

GRIEF DUCK, DUCK, GOOSE

P—Y

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young

Purpose: To give the group members an opportunity to share their grief experiences

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Telling their story

Materials:

- None

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Explain that this game is an opportunity for group members to share and support each other's sharing.
- Ask the group if they ever played the game DUCK, DUCK, GOOSE.
- Add that the group is going to play a version called GRIEF DUCK, DUCK, GOOSE where they can share something about themselves or about their person who died.
- Review the **I PASS RULE**.
- Review the game rules.
 - Gentle tap on the head/shoulder. Model this for the group.
 - Emphasize gentle running or fast walking as group members get to an empty spot.
 - Run around the circle not through it so there are no collisions with seated group members.

Activity Description:

- GRIEF DUCK, DUCK, GOOSE is played like the regular DUCK, DUCK GOOSE childhood game.
- Everyone sits in a circle on the floor.
- One person is "IT" and walks around the outside of the circle, gently patting each person on the head and saying either "DUCK" or "GOOSE."
- When the person who is "IT" says "GOOSE," the person who was patted on the head rises and chases the person around the circle and tries to get to the empty spot first.

- Whoever is left standing is now “IT” and has the opportunity to share something about themselves or about the person who died in their family. (Choose some questions from the “Questions for Q & A Activities” in the Appendix).

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Note some common threads that came out in the conversation:
 - *“It sounds like many of you like ____.”*
- Ask if commonalities were heard during the game.
- *“What other things would you like to tell the group about yourself or your person?”*
- What did they like about the game? Was it fun?
- Observe the group’s behavior:
 - *“It looked like you were all smiling. Did you think the game was fun?”*
- *“What did you learn about the other people in the group?”*

Notes:

- This can be altered into a FEELINGS DUCK, DUCK, GOOSE game, where the person who is left standing shares a time when they felt a particular feeling, such as sharing a time they felt sad, happy, angry, etc.
- Make sure there is ample space for group members to move around without bumping into furniture.
- Have icebreaker questions ahead of time. Younger children, especially Preschoolers, will need prompts, like:
 - *“Tell us your favorite color.”*
 - *“What was your person’s favorite color?”*
- Pause the game if group members are overexcited. Have everyone take a big deep breath to calm down or slow the tempo of the room.

For Ongoing Groups:

- No modifications needed, as this is for group building.

GRIEF ISLAND: WHAT WOULD YOU BRING?

T—A

Suggested Group(s): Teen, Adult

Purpose: To help group members identify and reflect on what's most important to them for coping with grief, focusing on memories, supports, and personal strengths through a symbolic activity

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died
- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Paper
- Pencils, pens, markers
- Pictures of peaceful islands (*optional; see pictures in Appendix*)
- Art supplies for drawing or collage (paper, magazines, scissors, glue, colored pencils, markers—*optional*)
- Journals (*optional*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome the group and explain that today's activity will be focusing on their personal grief journey.
- Introduce the metaphor of GRIEF ISLAND.
 - *"Imagine you're preparing for a journey to a special, peaceful ISLAND, your GRIEF ISLAND. This ISLAND is a safe space where you can explore your grief. The unique thing is, you can only bring a limited number of items—maybe 5 to 7 things—that will truly help and support you on this journey."*
 - Show the picture of the ISLAND (if you use it) and ask them what comes to mind when they see it.
- Explain that the items that they pack are not necessarily for survival in the usual sense—they will be things they would pack to support their heart and mind while they process their grief.
 - *"Since this idea might be personal, we're first going to explore some ideas together, and then you decide what you would want to pack. If there are things you don't want to share, that is OK too."*

Activity Description:

- Lead the group in brainstorming together and allow discussion about what their ISLAND might be like.
 - Explain that they can only take 5–7 items to GRIEF ISLAND.
 - *“Let’s start brainstorming. What are the essential things you would pack to bring to your GRIEF ISLAND? You can write down anything that comes to mind or share aloud with the group, and we can make a large list together. Don’t worry about limiting your list right now or trying to pick the ‘best’ ones yet. Let’s just throw out some ideas.”*
 - *“These items can be tangible objects.”* (Like a photo, a blanket, a journal, a special gift, music.)
 - *“They can be memories.”* (A specific happy moment with the person you lost, or a place that brings comfort.)
 - *“They can be people.”* (Representing someone supportive, like a family member or friend. You might represent them with a symbol rather than a literal picture of them, if you like.)
 - *“They can be qualities or strengths you have.”* (Like resilience, kindness, creativity, patience, hope.)
 - *“They can even be activities that help you cope.”* (Like listening to music, exercise, drawing, writing, connecting with nature.)
- Once the group has made a large list, let them know that they can choose their top 5–7 items to take with them and write those down with some space beside each one.
- Once they have their list, ask them to think about why they chose it, and include that in the space next to the item.
 - If they need guidance on the *why*, give some ideas:
 - *“What feeling does this item bring out for you?”*
 - *“How does this item support you or remind you of something important?”*
 - *“What is its special significance related to your loss or your coping?”*
- Once they have their list, let them know that they can draw an ISLAND on another piece of paper, and include those items with them on the ISLAND. If they don’t want to draw one, that’s fine. Let them know they can also write briefly about their ISLAND or just keep their list. If they want to share, they’ll have the opportunity to do so.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Lead the group in sharing if they feel comfortable.
 - *“Would anyone like to share one item they chose and briefly explain why it’s meaningful to them on their GRIEF ISLAND? If you like, you can share more than that or just listen to others if you don’t want to share.”*
 - Point out similarities as they arise and encourage the group to ask questions of each other if they’re open to that.
 - Be curious and ask open-ended questions about the items that they chose; thank them for sharing if they do.
- Allow time for group reflection on how it felt to think about their GRIEF ISLAND and what they would take.
 - *“How did it feel to create your list of essentials? Was it difficult, easy, or something else?”*
 - *“Did anything surprise you about what you chose to bring, or what you didn’t choose?”*
 - *“What was it like to identify why each item is meaningful to you?”*
 - *“Now that you’ve identified these essentials, how might you hold onto them or use them more in your everyday life this coming week? Is there one item on your list you want to pay extra attention to?”*
- Thank the group for doing this activity and for sharing with the group.

Notes:

- This can also be done using collages. Ensure there is a wide variety of images (people, nature, objects, abstract patterns, words/phrases).
- Consider age and the maturity of your group. Older teens may have a greater ability for abstract thinking than younger teens.
- For younger or less verbally expressive groups, encourage more visual expression (drawing, collage) and use simple explanations. Keep prompts direct.
- For younger teen groups, you might rephrase: *“What things help you feel better?”* or *“What pictures show how you feel?”*
- Consider some immersive options—play wave sounds in the background or consider using a diffuser with essential oils that smell like the ocean or beach.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity works well in Ongoing Groups, as it provides an opportunity to re-evaluate current coping strategies and identify new ones with their group, and reinforce the idea that there are internal and external resources to help them navigate their grief.

GRIEF JOURNEY GAME SHOW

M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: Explore feelings and experiences of grief

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Index cards with grief-related categories written on one side and a “Money Prize Amount” written on the other side. (*Suggested categories are listed at the end.*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Set the cards up to form a pyramid with the prize amounts visible—either flat on a table or taped to a whiteboard. Place the more challenging categories toward the top (with highest prize amount at the top of the pyramid). Discuss the GAME SHOW “\$100,000 Pyramid” from television, as some may be unfamiliar with it.
 - *“In that GAME, two people work together. One person describes things related to a category without saying the category name, and the other person tries to guess the category.”*
- Let the group know that they will be playing their own version of the GAME SHOW with questions about topics related to why they come to the Caring Place and their GRIEF JOURNEY. One person will describe things related to a category and the rest of the group will try to guess the category.

Activity Description:

- Have one member of the group select a card. In the GAME SHOW, contestants typically work their way from the bottom row of the pyramid to the top of the pyramid as “prize money amounts” increase. However, you can set this up to meet the needs of your group.
- The group member who selected the card reads the back of the card and then tries to get the group to guess the category by naming things that belong in that category—without using the category word.
 - *“One person will pick a card, read the category silently to themselves, and then start listing things that fit into that category. The key is, you can’t say the word on the card, or anything that sounds too much like it. The rest of us will try to guess what category you’re describing. Once someone guesses correctly that person gets to pick the next card and describe a new category.”*

- Other group members attempt to guess the category. The first person to guess correctly begins the process over again.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Avoid making it purely competitive. Process similarities or differences in their experience of coming to the Caring Place.
- Shift to Reflection: *“Now that we’ve played, let’s take a moment to reflect on what this game helped us think about.”*
 - **Common Threads:** *“What were some categories or ideas that came up today? Were any categories more relatable than others?”*
 - **Surprises/New Insights:** *“Was there anything that someone described that surprised you, or made you think about grief or your grief journey in a new way?”*
 - **Identifying Supports:** *“We had categories like ‘PEOPLE WHO CAN SUPPORT YOU’ and ‘THINGS YOU DO TO FEEL BETTER.’ What did this game remind you about the importance of having supports and coping strategies?”*
 - **Validation of Different Feelings:** *“We talked about ‘THINGS THAT MAKE US FEEL SAD’ and ‘THINGS THAT MAKE US FEEL HAPPY.’ What did you notice about how we can hold different feelings at the same time, even when we’re grieving?”*
 - **Difficult Categories:** *“Were there any categories that felt particularly hard to describe or to guess? What made those challenging?”* (This acknowledges the complexity of grief).
 - **Hurtful Things Category Reflection:** If ‘HURTFUL THINGS PEOPLE CAN SAY’ came up: *“It sounds like many of us have heard things that weren’t helpful. How does knowing that others have experienced this make you feel? What can we do when we hear those things?”* (Focus on managing the impact, not changing others).
- Personal Takeaways & Empowerment:
 - **One Key Learning:** *“If you had to pick one thing you’re taking away from our GAME today, what would it be? It could be a new feeling you learned, a new support idea, or just the feeling of being understood.”*
 - **Using What Was Learned:** *“How might you use what we talked about today in your daily life? Maybe remembering a new way to express anger, or reaching out to a support person you thought of?”*
- Volunteer Reminder for Both Framing and Wrap-Up:

- **Empathy and Non-Judgment:** Approach all responses with understanding and avoid any language that could be perceived as judgmental. Validate feelings, even if you don't fully understand them.
- ***"I hear you" / "That sounds tough"*:** These are simple, powerful phrases for validating without offering advice.
- **Manage Time Effectively:** Ensure there's enough time for both the GAME and the crucial wrap-up discussion.

Notes:

- To adapt this activity for a deeper level of sharing with a teen group, you can adjust the categories to be more developmentally appropriate.

For Ongoing Groups:

- No specific modifications are needed; however you can choose categories that may reflect grief on a deeper level since they have completed an Introductory Session.

FEELINGS GAME SHOW CATEGORIES:

1. Things you see at a funeral/memorial service/celebration of life
2. Things you see at the Caring Place
3. Things that are sad
4. Things that make you happy
5. People who can support you
6. People you can talk to about your grief
7. Ways to express anger
8. Places you feel safe
9. Feelings you had when told that your family member died
10. Things that help you remember your family member(s)
11. Things people say when someone has died
12. Hurtful things people can say
13. Things you do to feel better
14. Why talking about your feelings is important
15. Things you would like to ask your family member
16. Things that change after a family member dies
17. Ways to show people you love them
18. Things that you would like to tell your family member who died
19. Things you worry about
20. Difficult things about the funeral/memorial service/celebration of life
21. Things that are hard to understand about death

GRIEF JOURNEY IN BLOCKS

M—T

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen

Purpose: To provide a tangible, visual representation of everyone's unique grief journey, allowing for the sharing of their story, making sense of their experience, identifying challenges and supports, and reflecting on how their journey has evolved

Task/Need:

- Telling their story
- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Helping them understand who they are after their loss
- Making meaning of the loss
- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Wood Blocks (as many as are available, various shapes and sizes)
- A wide assortment of arts & craft materials (pipe cleaners, construction paper, small pieces of fabric/yarn, glitter, glue sticks, tape, scissors, markers, colored pencils)
- Toy people or figurines (small, generic ones are best)
- Small toy cars, animals, natural items (small rocks, leaves if appropriate), play dough/modeling clay (*optional*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin with a discussion of the concept of a journey:
 - *“We’re going to explore something often talked about when we experience big life changes, especially after someone important has died: the idea of life as a JOURNEY.”*
 - *“Let’s think about a journey we all took today—getting here to the Caring Place. What was it like? Did your day start smoothly? Did you feel full of energy (a ‘high point’)? Or maybe you felt a little tired, hit some unexpected traffic, or faced a small challenge (a ‘low point’)?”*
 - Illustrate it to make it understandable: *“We can draw that out. It wasn’t a flat line, was it?”* (Draw an undulating line with peaks and valleys). *“Maybe your day started high, then a dip, then it got smoother. That’s a journey.”*
- Introducing the GRIEF JOURNEY concept:
 - *“Just like a short trip across town has its ups and downs, life after loss is very much a JOURNEY. It’s a winding road that’s unique for everyone.”*

- *“This road might have parts that feel smooth and easy, others that are really steep hills to climb, big unexpected bumps or holes, confusing detours, scary bridges over rushing waters, quiet rest stops, places where you found incredible comfort and support, or even dark tunnels you’ve moved through.”*

Activity Description:

- Explain the activity and the materials they can use.
 - *“We’re going to use these blocks and all these craft materials to build your GRIEF JOURNEY. This is your chance to really show what your road has looked like.”*
 - *“Think about your JOURNEY so far.”*
 - *“Your road before the death: What did it look and feel like?”*
 - *“How it dramatically changed during and immediately after the death: Was it a sudden drop, a huge wall, a confusing collapse, a terrifying bridge?”*
 - *“What has it been like since then: Bumpy? Winding? Steep? Has it cleared up in places? Are there signs pointing you somewhere new?”*
 - *“Where might the Caring Place fit in? Does it fit in? Can you build how it might appear on your JOURNEY—maybe a rest stop, a guiding light, a warm house?”*
 - *“And what about people or other things that helped you along the way? Can you use the toy figures, or pipe cleaners, or anything here to represent those supports?”*
- Ensure everyone has access to a good selection of blocks and various craft supplies. Place items centrally or give each person a small basket of mixed items—let them know that if there are other things in the room that they think fit on their JOURNEY, they are welcome to use them. Let them know how much time they will have to build—perhaps 25 minutes. Allow time for sharing at the end.
- Provide support while they are building and be curious. Ask questions about what they’re making.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Provide a couple minutes warning before time is up so they can finish. Then bring the group back together to allow time for sharing.
 - *“It looks like we’re all finishing up our amazing JOURNEY maps. Before we wrap up, we’ll take some time for sharing.”*

- *“Sharing your journey is always a choice. There’s no pressure at all to share if you don’t feel ready. You can simply listen to others, or you can point to one part of your JOURNEY that you feel comfortable talking about.”*
- Use open-ended questions to guide discussion.
 - *“Tell us about your JOURNEY. What are the key features or moments you’ve built?”*
 - *“What do these blocks (or materials) represent for you in your journey?”*
 - *“You mentioned this bumpy section here... what does that part of your road feel like?”*
 - *“This [figurine/colored item] you placed here—what does that symbolize?”*
 - *“Where is the Caring Place on your journey? What does it look like there?”*
 - *“What was the most challenging part of building your JOURNEY? What was the most meaningful or easiest part?”*
 - *“How does it feel to see your GRIEF JOURNEY built out in front of you like this? Does seeing it visually help you understand any part of your experience a little better?”*
- Help the group find connections through commonalities.
 - After a few individuals have shared—*“As we look at everyone’s unique roads, what similarities do you notice? What feels familiar, even if the details are different?”*
 - Focus on shared aspects—*“I noticed a few JOURNEYS with big Walls, or Drops, when the person died. It seems like that can be a really common feeling—that sudden, huge change.”*
 - *“It’s also amazing to see how many of us included ways that we’ve found support—through people, or places like the Caring Place, or even quiet moments of reflection.”*
- Thank them for building and sharing their JOURNEYS.

Notes:

- This activity can be done on paper as a drawing of the JOURNEY if blocks are not available or desirable when conducting the activity; alternatively, they can use Model Magic (put on a large piece of construction paper so it can dry and they can take it home).

- This activity may take more or less time than anticipated due to individual creativity. If it seems to be moving into another meeting, ensure that their buildings are out of the way or can be covered if there are other groups using the space before the next meeting.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity is best done towards the end of a session, or with an Ongoing Group, when sufficient time has passed to be able to reflect on their GRIEF JOURNEY.
- If they have made a ROAD/JOURNEY before in a prior session, ask them to reflect on what was the same and what was different about the ROAD they built this time—have they added more dips? Different supports?
- They can also build a “Future Paths” section to their JOURNEY.
 - *“We’ve built where we’ve been, but our JOURNEY keeps going. Today, let’s focus on what your GRIEF JOURNEY might look like going forward. Are there specific steps you’d like to take? What support do you imagine needing or wanting in the next part of your path? Are there goals you’re reaching for? What do you hope to build on this next section of your ROAD?”*

GRIEF MUSICAL CHAIRS

Y—M

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle

Purpose: To create an environment of safety & familiarity and to become more aware of group members and their stories

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Telling their story

Materials:

- Chairs
- Music

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Explain that often we have questions that we don't talk about outside of the Caring Place and that this game gives us the chance to ask those questions in a safe place.
 - *"Often in life, and especially when we're grieving, we might have questions about others, or about what's happening to us, but we don't always get the chance to ask them in a safe place. Or we might feel like there's something we want to share about ourselves, or about our person who died. This game we are going to play is going to give us a safe and gentle way to do just that."*
- Ask group members if they have ever played MUSICAL CHAIRS.
 - *"We're going to try a fun, active game tonight that's a little different. It's called GRIEF MUSICAL CHAIRS. Has anyone played regular MUSICAL CHAIRS before?"* (Allow for a brief discussion and then go to the next step.)
- If a member has played MUSICAL CHAIRS, invite them to explain it, then clarify how tonight's version may differ or be similar to times they have played before.
 - *"Our version of MUSICAL CHAIRS isn't about winning or losing. Instead, it's about connecting with each other and getting a chance to share a bit about ourselves."*
- Review the **I PASS RULE**.
- Review the rules of this game.
 - *"So, the chairs will be set up in a big circle. When the music plays, everyone will walk around them. Just like regular MUSICAL CHAIRS, when the music stops, everyone tries to find a seat. But here's where our game is special!"*

- *“Instead of someone being ‘out’ of the game forever, the person who doesn’t get a chair actually gets a very special role! That person gets to choose either—”*
 - A) Ask a question: *“To ask ANYONE in the group (or the whole group!) a question. It can be a question about something we share, a question about their person who died, or a general question about feelings. We can help you think of questions too!”*
 - B) Share something about themselves: *“Or, if you prefer, you can choose to share something about yourself, or about your person who died.”*
- *“Once that person has asked their question or shared their thought, everyone finds a seat again, and we start the next round with all of us playing together again. No one ever sits out of the game completely. It’s all about listening and connecting.”*
- *“Any questions about our special MUSICAL CHAIRS game before we get the music going?”* (Answer questions, and if confusion, demonstrate one quick round.)

Activity Description:

- GRIEF MUSICAL CHAIRS is played the same as regular MUSICAL CHAIRS.
- The chairs are placed in a row side by side with some facing forward and some facing backward.
- The number of chairs placed is **one less than** the number of group members.
- The group members walk in circles around the chairs while the music is playing.
- When the music stops, all members must try to get a seat.
- One person will be without a seat and is able to ask another group member a question about themselves, or the person who died, or can share something about themselves if they choose.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow time for reflection:
 - *“What was it like to play our GRIEF MUSICAL CHAIRS tonight? Was it different than you expected?”*
 - *“What did you learn about someone else in the group tonight that surprised you or made you feel connected?”*
 - *“Did anyone get to ask a question that they really want to know the answer to?”*

- *“How did it feel when it was your turn to be the one without a chair, and get to ask a question or share?”*
- Make the comparison of not getting a chair to sometimes feeling left out after a person dies.
 - *“It can sometimes feel a bit uncomfortable to be the one standing without a chair, or the one who is different. Has anyone ever felt that way after their person died, like they were the odd one out, or without a seat at the table in some situations?”*
- Thank the group for sharing.
 - *“Tonight’s game showed us how we can still have fun, learn about each other, and talk about important things—sometimes even things connected to our grief journey—in a gentle way. It’s a reminder that even when things feel difficult, we’re all here supporting each other.”*

Notes:

- If the group is unable to formulate their own questions, it may be helpful to have them choose from a basket of existing questions (see questions in the *“Questions for Q & A Activities”* in the Appendix).
- Be aware if there are children who have difficulty with movement or sound sensitivities. Provide adaptations like allowing them to signal their desire for a chair, or use quieter music.

For Ongoing Groups

- This serves as an excellent group builder for an Ongoing Session, promoting familiarity and comfort with other group members. No modifications are needed; however, you can use questions that are more focused on grief from the list in the Appendix if the group needs suggestions.

GRIEF QUOTES

T—A

Suggested Group(s): Teen, Adult

Purpose: To give group members the opportunity to discuss different grief perspectives.

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died
- Helping them understand who they are after the loss
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Prepared grief quotes (*ask staff which ones are available at site*)
 - GRIEF QUOTES Basket/Box
 - GRIEF QUOTES Flash Cards, or
 - GRIEF QUOTES Handout

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Place the QUOTE BASKET or FLASHCARDS in the center within easy reach of everyone.
- Inform the group that you've gathered various QUOTES that address grief, and to help prompt them for conversation—there will be not right or wrong answers in this activity, just an opportunity to share what resonates with them and hear each other's perspectives.
- Explain how they will participate:
 - If using a BASKET/BOX: *"I'll pass this BASKET around, and when it comes to you, please pick one QUOTE. Feel free to read it aloud if you feel comfortable, or you can pass to the next person."*
 - If using FLASHCARDS: *"I'll hold up and read a QUOTE for us. After I read it, I invite you to share any thoughts or feelings it brings up for you."*
 - If using HANDOUTS: *"I'll pass out the HANDOUTS. You can then take turns selecting one to discuss and share."*

Activity Description:

- This activity can be done in various ways. Choose the one most appropriate for your age group.
 - *HANDOUTS:* Distribute HANDOUTS with various GRIEF QUOTES to each group member, allowing them to select one (or several) to discuss and share whether they agree or disagree.

- *FLASH CARDS:* The facilitator holds up FLASHCARDS and reads GRIEF QUOTES to the group members, asking, “*What are your thoughts about this QUOTE?*” Group members then discuss their opinions.
- *BASKET/BOX:* GRIEF QUOTES are typed on individual strips of paper and placed in a BASKET/BOX. The BASKET or BOX is passed around to each group member to retrieve a QUOTE for discussion. (Facilitators can retain a handout copy for reference.)
- GRIEF QUOTES can also be categorized as follows: General Grief, Feelings, Memories, Hope/Support, etc.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow time for reflection and processing.
 - “*As we bring this activity to a close, how is everyone feeling?*”
 - “*Was there a particular quote that stood out to you today, and if so, why?*”
 - “*Did any of our discussions today help you feel more connected to others in the group, or to your own journey of grief?*”
 - “*Are there any personal insights or new perspectives you might be taking away from our conversation about these quotes?*”
- Invite revisiting this if they come across QUOTES outside of group that they would like to share.
- Thank them for sharing their thoughts and feelings.

Notes:

- GRIEF QUOTES may be used throughout eight- or ten-week Sessions. For example, if the topic for discussion for Week #3 is Feelings, use Feelings-related GRIEF QUOTES. The Week #4 topic may be Memories, so you could use Memory-related GRIEF QUOTES. Hope/Support GRIEF QUOTES would be appropriate for discussion toward the end of the eight- or ten-week Sessions.
- GRIEF QUOTES are appropriate for use in single or multiple group meetings.

For Ongoing Groups:

- As group makeup and dynamics change, this is appropriate for Ongoing Groups. You can ask group members to find QUOTES to bring in to share with the group; add new GRIEF QUOTES, poems, or reflections to the activity, and discuss those new additions.

GRIEF REFLECTION GAME

T—A

Suggested Group(s): Teen, Adult

Purpose: To allow group members to express thoughts, feelings, and memories about their grief experience

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died
- Making meaning of the loss

Materials:

- Deck of PLAYING CARDS or DICE
- Questions (*from any of these options*):
 - Use Questions at the end of this Activity write-up
 - Choose some questions from the “Questions for Q & A Activities” in the Appendix
 - If using this sheet, you’ll need to assign each card to a question (*where Ace=1, Jack=11, Queen=12, King=13*)
 - Use questions from the Dicebreakers activity in the Appendix
 - Use questions from *The Hand You Were Dealt* activity in the Appendix

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Ask the group if they play CARDS—what games have they played?
- Introduce the activity by explaining that the group is going to play a CARD (or DICE) GAME that uncovers questions related to everyone’s grief journey.
 - The GAME is designed to give everyone a structured, gentle way to explore their thoughts, feelings, and memories about their own grief journey.
 - “Sometimes, it can be hard to know what to talk about, or where to start. This GAME gives us some gentle prompts to help us share and hear from others.”

Activity Description:

- Explain the game:
 - “We have a deck of regular PLAYING CARDS here, and a question sheet—each CARD number (Ace to King) corresponds to a different question on this sheet that relates to grief, feelings, memories, and our experiences.”
 - “When it’s your turn, pull a CARD and we’ll ask a question that corresponds with the CARD you draw.”

- To choose who goes first, you can do it by whoever has the next birthday, or they can pull CARDS and whoever has the highest CARD can go first.
- Remind them of the **I PASS RULE**—if they don’t want to answer, they can see if someone else wants the CARD to answer it; or draw a different CARD. Emphasize choice and that there is no pressure to answer anything they don’t want to.
- When a CARD is drawn, you can see if others in the group would like to answer as well. If they do, you have the opportunity to draw connections and highlight similarities or differences in their answers.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- When everyone has had a chance to go once or when group time is ending, wrap up by thanking them for playing the game and sharing with everyone.
- Ask them to reflect on their experience:
 - *“How did it feel to play this GAME? What was it like to pull a CARD and answer a question about your grief journey?”*
 - *“How did it feel to have a dedicated place and time to discuss these often difficult or deeply personal things? What was it like to hear other people share their experiences?”*
- Highlight common themes and normalize any feelings shared:
 - *“As we listened, there were some common threads amongst your answers today. Many of you talked about... [mention a theme—for example, missing specific routines, feeling overwhelmed, finding comfort in certain memories, struggling with certain holidays, etc.].”*
 - *“Does anyone else notice any common themes that emerged? What felt familiar to you, even though everyone’s specific loss is unique?”*
- Ask about their experience listening to others share:
 - *“What did you learn today, either about your own grief experience or about someone else’s?”*
 - *“Did anything someone else said resonate with you or give you a new perspective on your own grief?”*
 - *“This activity helps us put words to our feelings and memories. Do you think doing this helps us in our grief journey or in finding ways to live with our grief?”*
- Thank them for playing and being open with the group.

Notes:

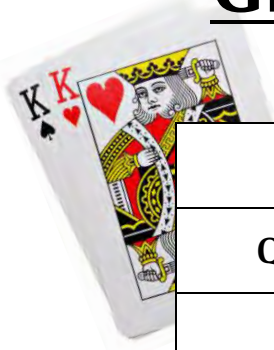
- **DICE Option:** Use DICE instead of CARDS. Check with staff to see if they have a list of questions to pair with DICE (see *Dicebreakers in the Appendix*).
- Also see the Appendix for the activity sheet, *The Hand You Were Dealt*.
- For larger groups, split into smaller groups to run both CARD and DICE versions, creating a “Casino Night” theme (while being mindful of any religious or cultural objections to gambling). Leave time to bring the whole group back together to process the activity. Point out common themes among group members.
- Ensure questions are sensitive and appropriate for the age group as well as appropriate for where group members are on their grief journeys—check with staff if needed.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This can be a great activity for Ongoing Groups—create a theme night of “*Caring Place Game Night*.”
- The game “*Spoons*” is also a great activity to pair with this to round out the evening and make it a full night—see full details in the “*Spoons*” activity writeup later in this manual.

See next page for Questions that go with each CARD

Grief Reflection Game Questions



KING	What is your favorite memory of the person who died?
QUEEN	What do you miss most about the person who died?
JACK	What did the person who died teach you?
10	What song reminds you of the person who died? Why?
9	What did you talk about with the person who died?
8	How did you find out about the death?
7	If you had one, what do you remember most about the funeral, memorial service or celebration of life? Do you remember it positively or negatively? If you didn't have one, what are your feelings about that?
6	When you think about all the things that the person who died won't be here for, how do you feel? What things come to mind first?
5	What feelings give you the most trouble? How so?
4	As you go about everyday life, what reminds you of the person who died?
3	What part of life is harder since your family member died? How so?
2	What would you like to tell the person who died?
ACE	What are the things you do to feel better?

GRIEF SPIRAL

M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To help group members understand the “SPIRAL nature of grief” by helping them identify what their grief experience is for them, and times their grief may become more and less intense.

Task/Need:

- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the GRIEF SPIRAL

Materials:

- Square or rectangular construction paper
- For younger groups, precut the paper into a spiral
- Markers
- Glue
- Hole punch
- String
- Scissors
- Assortment of materials to decorate spiral—glitter, foam letters, stars, words, word phrases, stickers, etc.

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Explain that they will be working on an activity today related to the GRIEF SPIRAL, noting that difficult feelings and thoughts can come back around for various reasons: time of year, special holidays, memories, and even growing up and reaching new levels of development and maturity.
 - *“Tonight, we’re going to explore something really important about grief—its shape and how it moves. Sometimes, people think grief is like a straight line that eventually just ‘ends.’ But we know it’s often not like that at all. It can come and go, shift and change.”*
 - *“We’ll be thinking about the idea of the GRIEF SPIRAL. Imagine a SPIRAL that winds its way around. Sometimes on that SPIRAL, our grief might feel very intense, like it’s close to the center and everything feels really big and overwhelming. Other times, it might feel a little further out, gentler, or more manageable.”*
- Ask:
 - *“We want to hear from you. What are these difficult feelings/thoughts that come up?”*
 - *“What can bring on those feelings for you? Are there things that might make your GRIEF feel more intense, or make you think about it more?”*

- Have an example ready of a SPIRAL for the group to see, or write one with them while they share what feelings or thoughts occur with GRIEF and what types of things bring them on for them.
- Have cut out SPIRALS available for younger groups.
- Using the example SPIRAL, show how feelings can travel/move along the SPIRAL.
 - *“You can see how thoughts and feelings might be closer to the center, or further out, and how different things can be marked along the SPIRAL’s path.”*
- Let them know that they will be able to make their own today, either with the cut-out SPIRALS or drawing their own.
 - *“You can choose what to include: the tough moments, the comforting ones, memories, hopes, coping skills, thing that bring your grief up, feelings... whatever feels important to you. And you can draw it, write it, glue on pictures or words.”*

Activity Description:

- Talk about the concept of the GRIEF SPIRAL.
 - *“If we think about GRIEF as more of a SPIRAL, often your feelings of GRIEF overlap and mix together. Sometimes the most intense feelings are experienced, then subside for while, and then return. Sometimes certain things bring up those intense feelings—a special day, a smell, songs, or something else you see or hear. Let’s keep talking about this while you create your own SPIRALS.”*
- For older group members:
 - Starting at the center of the paper, invite them to draw a SPIRAL to the outside of the paper.
 - On their SPIRAL, have them write down their thoughts and feelings where and in a way that makes sense to them.
 - Next, have them add things that activate their GRIEF or bring their GRIEF back around on the SPIRAL—they might be sights, sounds, places, times of the year, special holidays and other reminders of their person’s absence.
 - Allow members to decorate their SPIRALS in any way that makes sense to them.
 - When they are finished making their SPIRAL, you might invite the group members to cut along their SPIRAL line and see if that changes how they think about their SPIRAL. However, do not force this as some group members may find cutting their work distressing.

- For younger group members
 - Give children pre-cut SPIRALS.
 - On the SPIRAL, have the children add words indicating tough times and feelings on one side of the SPIRAL, and comforting words and coping activities on the other side of the SPIRAL.
 - Allow members to decorate their SPIRALS for personalization.
 - Punch holes in the center of the SPIRAL and add string if you would like to hang these in the group rooms.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow time for group reflection and for the group members to share their SPIRALS if they like, noting common themes about what people found to be tough.
 - *“Creating a GRIEF SPIRAL can bring up a lot of thoughts and feelings. There’s no pressure to share yours if you don’t want to, but for those who are willing, we’d love to see and hear a little bit about what you created.”*
 - *“Would anyone want to share theirs, or talk about something they put on it that they felt was important?”*
 - Encourage group members to ask questions or make comments about each other’s SPIRAL if they like.
- Discuss the commonalities and differences in each member’s SPIRALS, noting that everyone has different experiences and grief journeys are unique. Process feelings related to the activities, if they are willing to share.
 - *“It’s interesting, I hear several of you mentioning how holidays can bring that strong feeling of GRIEF back around. Does anyone else connect with that?”*
 - *“And look how different each of your SPIRALS is! It’s such a great reminder that while GRIEF is universal, everyone’s journey and feelings are completely unique.”*
 - *“What was it like to map out your GRIEF like this? Did it feel empowering? Overwhelming? Illuminating?”*
 - *“Did creating your SPIRAL help you notice any patterns or anything new about your own GRIEF process?”*
- Allow the group members to hang their SPIRALS up in the room or take with them.
 - *“You can choose to hang your SPIRAL in the room for a while, or take it home with you to keep as a reminder of your journey and all you’ve explored today. Whatever feels right for you.”*
- Thank the group for their work and sharing.

Notes:

- Adaptation to living on the GRIEF SPIRAL activity: Have the group focus on the things that make them think of the person who died. Discuss these while doing the activity.
- This can be a difficult activity for group members. Be prepared to provide support when needed.

For Ongoing Groups:

- If group members have done this in an Introductory Group, ask questions about their previous GRIEF SPIRAL that they made.
 - Have group members discuss previous SPIRALS.
 - Discuss how their SPIRAL may have changed since their last Session.
 - Ask what milestones or experiences have occurred since their last Session.

GRIEF SUPPORT BRIDGES

M—T

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen

Purpose: To help group members visually identify and construct their unique sources of support and personal coping skills, fostering a sense of agency and hope during their grief journey

Task/Need:

- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Popsicle sticks (approximately 15–20 per person plus extras)
- One poster board base per person (approximately 10”x 12”)
- Two smaller, rectangular strips of poster board per person (approximately 8”x 2” to serve as the vertical supports for the bridge arch).
- Flexible, sturdy adhesive: hot glue guns (with volunteer supervision and safety instructions) or strong craft glue/liquid adhesive that dries relatively quickly
- Tape for initial support for structure
- A wide assortment of decorating materials: Markers, colored pencils, paint pens, glitter pens, stickers, small fabric scraps, small decorative embellishments

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Precut the materials for the rectangular support strips.
- Have an example of a BRIDGE, without anything written on the supports.
- Introduce the activity and use the metaphor of a BRIDGE over a river.
 - *“We know that navigating grief can often feel overwhelming, like trying to cross a wide and sometimes stormy river. It can be hard to know how to get to the other side, or even just to find steady ground along the way.”*
 - Show them the example of the activity and reference the BRIDGE.
 - *“BRIDGES are amazing things. They connect places, help us get over difficult terrain like a deep river or a busy road, and they make journeys possible. In our own lives, especially when we’re grieving, we also need BRIDGES—but these aren’t made of concrete or steel. Our GRIEF SUPPORT BRIDGES are made of the things that help us get through tough times.”*
- Help make the connection to the discussion of coping skills and supports.
 - *“Today, we’re going to build our own personal GRIEF SUPPORT BRIDGES. Each popsicle stick you have represents one of these different kinds of supports in your life. On each stick, you’ll write down something or*

someone that helps you feel better when you're sad, stressed, or just needing a boost."

- *"There are no right or wrong answers here. Supports can be big, like a trusted family member, or small, like listening to your favorite song. They can be people, places, actions, or even memories. We want to identify everything that genuinely helps you."*
- Lead the group in brainstorming together.
 - *"Imagine a really tough day—you're feeling sad about your loved one, and other things aren't going well. What do you do to feel better?"*
 - *"Is there a person you love to talk to or spend time with who always makes you feel heard?"*
 - *"Is there a special place you go to feel safe, calm, or comforted?"*
 - *"Are there activities, like drawing, sports, gaming, writing, or cooking, that help you feel better or get your mind off things?"*
 - *"Sometimes even just a comfortable blanket, a favorite snack, or your pet can be a support."*
 - *"We want each stick to represent something meaningful to you."*

Activity Description:

- Guide them to identify and write approximately 10–15 (or more) different supports or coping strategies, writing one on each popsicle stick. Ask questions while they are making them:
 - *"What makes you feel supported by the people you've identified? What do they do?"*
 - *"Tell me about... [select a support identified by an individual]. How does that help you cope?"*
 - *"If this BRIDGE helps you 'cross' a difficult time, which one of these supports feels like the strongest beam for you right now?"*
 - *"Have you found any new supports recently that you want to add?"*
- Once these are completed, show the example and explain how to construct it.
 - *"First, create the arch for the BRIDGE. Take your two smaller poster board rectangles. You'll attach one end of each strip to opposite sides of your large poster board base to create an arch or a tunnel. This is the main structure of your BRIDGE that will hold your supports."*

- *“Now, one by one, take your popsicle sticks (your supports!) and glue them onto the BRIDGE structure. Think of them like the strong planks or beams that hold the BRIDGE together, making it sturdy. Place them across the arch or down the sides, wherever they feel strongest and most supportive to you.”*
- Let them know that once they are glued down, they can feel free to decorate their BRIDGE as they like.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Once they're complete, lead the group in sharing if they are comfortable.
 - *“We'd love to invite you to share your BRIDGE with the group. You can show us what it looks like and perhaps tell us about one or two supports you included that feel particularly important to you right now.”*
 - Encourage peer connection. After a sharing, you might ask, *“Did anyone else include [type of support] on their bridge? What's that like for you?”*
- Allow time to reflect on the process.
 - *“How did it feel to build your BRIDGE today? What was that experience like for you?”*
 - *“Was it easy or hard to think of things to put on your sticks? Why?”*
 - *“Did anything surprise you while you were making your BRIDGE?”*
- Thank the group for making their BRIDGES and being open.

Notes:

- Encourage Diverse Supports: Guide participants to think broadly about what constitutes a “support.” This can include:
 - **People:** Family members, friends, teachers, counselors, mentors, group leaders, faith leaders
 - **Activities:** Hobbies, sports, art, music, writing, gaming, volunteering
 - **Places:** A specific room at home, a park, a library, a quiet corner, the group room
 - **Comfort objects:** A favorite blanket, a stuffed animal (for younger teens), a special photo
 - **Pets:** A dog, cat, or other animal
 - **Internal strengths/strategies:** Journaling, deep breathing, listening to music, positive self-talk, problem-solving, planning

For Ongoing Groups:

- If your group has already completed GRIEF SUPPORT BRIDGES in an Introductory Session, this activity can be revisited in a different way to demonstrate growth, resilience, and the evolving nature of support systems.
 - “WHAT STRENGTHENS OUR BRIDGE?” or “NEW BEAMS FOR OUR BRIDGE”:
Frame the activity around adding new “beams” to their existing BRIDGES or identifying how existing supports have become stronger or more meaningful over time. If they don’t have the original BRIDGE, have them build a new one.
 - Focus on a new BRIDGE versus the BRIDGE they previously built:
 - *“Since you last built your BRIDGE, what new supports have you discovered or added to your life that help you cope with grief or tough feelings?”* (For example, a new friend, a new hobby, something they learned in group.)
 - *“Have any of the supports you already identified become even more important or helped you in new ways since then?”* (For example, a sibling becoming a better listener, music taking on a deeper meaning, etc.)
 - *“What have you learned about your own strength and resilience that could be a ‘support beam’ on your BRIDGE?”*
 - *“How has this group itself become a support for you?”*
 - During processing, allow them to compare and contrast the previous BRIDGE and the new one, as well as how their feelings are different or the same today.

GROUP JUGGLE

M—T

Suggested Age Group(s): Middle, Teen

Purpose: To foster team building, encourage sharing, and help group members develop comfort at the Caring Place and within the group. To provide a tangible metaphor for understanding the overwhelming nature of grief and the importance of asking for help.

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Tennis Balls (at least half as many as players)
- One or two Odd Objects (an apple, water balloon, banana, a small stuffed toy, etc.)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Ensure you have an open clear space in the room (or use the Community Room).
- Begin with a general question to introduce game: *“How many of you have ever felt like you’re trying to JUGGLE a lot of things at once? Or that when big changes happen, you have more to manage than usual?”* Allow a few moments for group to share thoughts, and if they like, what types of things they are currently JUGGLING in their life
- Tell the group that they’re going to play a game called GROUP JUGGLE. It’s a fun, active way to explore how we can handle increased demands and pressures, especially when our lives are impacted by a significant loss. Invite them to think of the Balls as being representative of the things they mentioned that they are currently JUGGLING.

Activity Description:

- Instruct the group members to form a circle, standing shoulder-to-shoulder before taking two steps backward to maintain the circle shape while providing space for tossing and catching the items.
- Explain the basic rules:
 - *“We’ll pass a Ball around the circle. Each person will receive from one specific person and toss to another specific person. Always call the name of the person you’re throwing to before you throw it.”*
 - *“I’ll start. I’ll toss it to [Name 1], who will then toss it to [Name 2], and so on, back to me. Let’s try it once with just this one Ball until we have the sequence down.”*

- **Adding LIFE’S DEMANDS (Multiple Balls):** *“Now that we’ve got the basic rhythm, let’s think about life. Sometimes, it feels like more and more things get added to our plate. These extra Balls represent those added demands and responsibilities in our lives.”*
- Begin adding additional Tennis Balls, one or two at a time, into the established pattern. The goal is for the group to keep as many Balls circulating as possible without dropping them.
- If a Ball drops, note that it’s OK and pause/start over. Just like in life, when things get difficult, sometimes things get dropped. Think through how they can troubleshoot (name calling, eye contact, etc.).
- **Introducing the CURVEBALL (Odd Object):** *“Sometimes in life, we don’t just have more demands; we get completely unexpected challenges or changes—like a CURVEBALL. Let’s see what happens when we introduce an Odd Object into our JUGGLING pattern.”* (Toss in one of the Odd Objects. Observe the group’s reaction—does it cause more drops? Laughter? Frustration? These are all valuable observations for the processing phase.)

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- After the game ends, check in to see how group members are feeling.
 - *“How did that feel? What was it like when we first started with one Ball compared to when we had many Balls and the Odd Object?”*
 - *“In the game, sometimes a Ball dropped. In our lives, what are some of the Balls (responsibilities, feelings, self-care) that sometimes feel like they drop when things get really overwhelming, especially after a loss?”*
 - *“We introduced an Odd Object, which was a bit like a CURVEBALL—something unexpected. How did the group react to that? What happened to the flow when something different came in?”*
 - *“When someone dropped a Ball in the game, how did that affect the rest of the group? What happened next? Did it feel like a big failure, or just a part of the game?”*
- Make connections to their real life situations and guide discussion with one or more of questions below:
 - *“Can you think of a real-life situation where slowing down or focusing your attention helped you manage something difficult?”*
 - *“How important was it to ‘call out’ to someone or make eye contact before throwing the Ball? How does that translate to communicating with others in real life when you need support?”*

- *“In the game, if one person was really struggling to catch or throw, what could they have done? How important is it to ask for help, both in the game and when you’re dealing with life’s demands after a loss?”*
- *“This game required everyone to work together. Who are the people in your life who help you JUGGLE your responsibilities and feelings?”*
- *“Based on what we learned today, is there ‘something you can drop’ in your own life right now—a demand, a worry, an expectation—that might help you feel less overwhelmed?”*
- Wrap up and thank the group for playing.
 - *“Thank you everyone for playing the game. What’s one thing you’ll take away from this activity about managing overwhelming feelings or responsibilities?”*

Notes:

- This activity can become chaotic or reveal group anxiety. Pay close attention to the group’s energy. If frustration or overwhelm sets in, pause the game, validate their feelings (*“It’s OK to feel frustrated, this is a challenging game!”*), and facilitate a brief discussion about what might help, or consider stopping if the group is becoming distressed. The goal is connection and insight, not performance.
- This activity can be adapted to suit the specific needs and abilities of the group.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity can be used in either Introductory or Ongoing Groups. If used in an Ongoing Group, consider these suggestions:
 - If this activity is used in an Ongoing Group, you might open by asking, *“Do you remember the GROUP JUGGLE activity we did? What feelings or insights did it bring up for you at that time?”*
 - Ask if they feel their JUGGLING has changed since the last time. Are they juggling more or fewer balls? Are the Balls different now?
 - Discuss if anyone tried to use the “strategies” (pacing, asking for help, communicating) in their lives between sessions, and what the outcome was.

GROUP PAINTINGS/DRAWINGS

M—T

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen

Purpose: To encourage group building, foster collaboration, and playfully explore adapting to change and contributing to shared experiences.

Task/Need:

- Group building

Materials:

- Large piece of paper (big enough for all to work on)
- Paint (plus paint brushes, cups of water, paint containers, napkins, and paint smocks/shirts)
- Markers
- Crayons

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Cover the table with a large piece of paper.
- Put paint, markers, and crayons in the middle of the table.
- Explain: *“Imagine, for a moment, that you can draw absolutely anything you want. No rules, no judgments, just whatever comes to your mind. What would that be? Now, take a section of the paper in front of you and just start drawing or painting that idea.”*
- Don’t give much direction on this activity to start.
- Emphasize that they can draw anything (anything that’s appropriate) in the space in front of them.

Activity Description:

- The task is to ask group members to start a DRAWING of anything they want.
- After a minute or two, have them stand up and move to the chair to their right and work on the second DRAWING for a couple of minutes (the DRAWING that the person sitting next to them started).
 - *“OK everyone, listen up for a quick moment! We’re going to try something interesting. After about a minute or two, I’m going to ask you to stand up and move to the chair to your right. You’ll then continue working on the DRAWING that the person next to you started. Don’t worry if it’s different from your idea, just add to it, change it, or build on what’s already there!”*
- Keep doing this until they have all had a chance to work on each PAINTING/DRAWING.

- Take note of their level of effort, be curious about the PICTURES.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Discuss the experience—have them think about all the PICTURES that they worked on and guide discussion:
 - *“Which drawing did you enjoy working on the most, and why?”*
 - *“Which one was more difficult for you to add to, and what made it challenging?”*
 - *“Did anyone feel ‘interrupted’ or like their original idea was changed in a way they didn’t expect?”*
 - *“Did anyone notice how they felt when it was time to move to someone else’s DRAWING? For some, it might have felt difficult to let go of their own work, and that’s OK. We all have different needs around control and creation.”*
 - *“What was it like to switch to a new PICTURE and suddenly have to work on someone else’s idea?”*
 - *“How similar or different are the final results from what you initially imagined your own DRAWING would look like?”*
 - *“Overall, how did you feel about doing this activity?”*
- Help the group understand the purpose of the group building activity.
 - *“This was a really unique way for us to create something together. What do you think was the purpose of doing an activity like this where we all added to each other’s work?”*
 - *Guide toward themes like: “It shows how we can work together even with different ideas.”—“It helps us practice adapting when things change unexpectedly.”—“We all contributed to something bigger than any one person’s drawing.”—“It’s interesting to see how others interpret and add to ideas.”*

Notes:

- Keep discussions centered on the *experience* of contributing, adapting, and collaborating, not on artistic skill or “What the art means.”
- Do not attempt to interpret what a child’s DRAWING means, or what their feelings during the activity “really” represent in terms of their grief journey. Your role is to listen and facilitate.
- Some children might be very quiet, others very talkative. Respect their individual styles of participation.

- It's possible that a group member might feel uncomfortable with others adding to their initial artwork, or express a strong desire to continue working on their own piece.
 - If a group member expresses this discomfort or strong preference, offer them the option to continue working solely on their original section if that makes them more comfortable. You can frame it as: *"I understand that can feel difficult sometimes. If you'd prefer to focus and finish your own DRAWING today, you are absolutely welcome to do so."*

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity is appropriate for both Introductory and Ongoing Groups. As DRAWINGS and group members would be different, no modifications are needed.

GROUP RULES OR AGREEMENTS

P—Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To establish an environment where group members feel safe in expressing the personal pain of their grief

Task/Need:

- Group building

Materials:

- Poster board or flip chart
- Marker
- Easel (if needed)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Explain to group members that at the Caring Place we want to create an atmosphere where everyone can feel comfortable talking about anything on their minds—even hard, personal things—if and when they are ready to.
- To create a safe space, we want the group to decide what RULES or AGREEMENTS they would like to put in place to allow them to feel that level of comfort.
- Emphasize that RULES are made by the group, not the volunteers (except for three that are across the board).
- Ask group members identify RULES they have in other settings (school, clubs, etc.)
 - Which of those would fit at the Caring Place?
- Brainstorm what RULES would help everyone feel safe in their group rooms
 - What would help them feel comfortable sharing or talking?
- You might want to begin with an exaggerated version of what RULES they may want to consider—*“How do you think our group would function if we all yelled at the top of our lungs to be heard?”*

Activity Description:

- This activity is **a must for all groups**.
- Group members create their own RULES. Display the RULES at each meeting.
- Include these essential RULES if not generated by the group:
 - **“I Pass”**: The right to not participate.
 - **“Confidentiality”**: What’s shared in the group stays private.
 - **“Nobody hurts anybody/Safety”**: Physical and emotional safety.
 - *“What are some ways we can keep each other physically safe?”*

- Respect (ask younger groups to define this to make sure they understand the concept)
- “What are some ways to keep our feelings safe?”

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Have group members and volunteers sign the RULES to show commitment to following them.
- Tell the group that it is a working list, and more RULES can be added throughout their Group Session.
- Thank the group for their input.

Notes:

- This activity should be done for every Group regardless of whether it is an Introductory Group or Ongoing Group.
- Review the RULES at the beginning of every meeting.
 - Remind everyone of the expectations they have for one another.
 - This can help set structure in younger age groups.
- Add RULES as needed throughout the session.
- Brainstorm ways to remind each other of the RULES (pointing to the list, etc.).
- For younger children, it is sometimes difficult for them to take turns talking. If it is an issue in your group, you can use a “*special Talking Stick*” where you can talk only if you are holding the Stick. If you use this idea, it is important to BE CONSISTENT in using it. In one group, the children made a Talking Stick and decorated it. This helped re-enforce their commitment to following the RULE.
- Keep in mind that while we maintain Confidentiality, we do not do so at the risk of safety. If a child, teen or adult says something in the group where you feel concerned for their safety, it is critical that you let a staff person know. You can also let group members know that we keep Confidentiality unless it is a safety issue.

GROUP WORD CLOUD

Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To show commonalities in feelings, thoughts, and emotions among group members

Task/Need:

- Group Building
- Telling their story
- Identifying and expressing feelings

Materials:

- One iPad
- CloudArt app, TagCloud app, or similar app
- Paper
- Pens or Pencils

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Acknowledge that everyone has thoughts, feelings, and emotions that are unique but also sometimes similar.
- Explain that you will be creating a visual representation of these thoughts, feelings, or emotions using a WORD CLOUD.
- Let members know they can also write their word on a piece of paper, and a volunteer can type it in.
- Let group members know that there are no wrong feeling words.

Activity Description:

- Choose a question from the suggested list below or create your own. Examples:
 - *“How do you feel when you think about your loved one?”*
 - *“Describe your grief.”*
 - *“How did you feel before the death?”*
 - *“How did you feel after the death?”*
 - *“How did you feel the first day back to school?”*
 - *“What are helpful or hurtful things others said to you after the death?”*
- Have each participant write down 3 to 5 words on a piece of paper that answers the chosen question.

- Pass the iPad around and have them type their words into the chosen app. Remind them that even if they see the same words already typed, they should still type the words they came up with independently.
- Generate the WORD CLOUD in the app.
- This can be completed as a group activity or individually. If created individually, encourage everyone to discuss their WORD CLOUDS with the group.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Ask the group members how they felt about doing the activity.
- Review the WORD CLOUD image created and discuss it as a group.
- Discuss any common themes or words that appear prominently in the WORD CLOUD.
- Reinforce the reality that, though everybody's circumstances are unique, they are experiencing common feelings or realities.

Notes:

- Questions can vary and cover a range of topics.
- The more frequently specific Words are used, the larger the Word will appear in the final image that is produced by the app. Use this as a point of discussion about the similarities and differences in experiences among group members.
- This activity creates a visual image using Words provided by the participants, showing commonalities.
- One variation is to have everyone make their own WORD CLOUD describing their grief using strips of paper of varying sizes. Depending on the intensity of the Word or Feeling, they would write the Word on larger and larger strips of paper. They can place the paper in any pattern that makes sense to them.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Ask group members if they remember doing this activity in a previous group, and if so, what WORD CLOUD Words they remember from before.
- Let group members develop their own questions to generate other WORD CLOUDS.

HEART PUZZLE

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To encourage collaboration, highlight the idea that broken pieces can form a new whole, and gently explore feelings of loss and connection through a tangible experience.

Task/Need:

- Group building

Materials:

- A large HEART-SHAPED PUZZLE cut from sturdy poster board or cardboard, then cleanly cut into 6–8 distinct, well-fitting PUZZLE pieces
- Markers, pencils, crayons, washable paints, magazines for cutting out images/words
- Glue
- Scissors

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Cut pieces into 6–8 distinct, well-fitting PUZZLE pieces. Ensure the pieces are unique enough that solving isn't immediate, but not so complex that it becomes frustrating. It's helpful to briefly assemble it yourself before the group meets to make sure.
- Set up a table large enough for the whole group to comfortably sit around and work on the PUZZLE together.
- If you plan to decorate the PUZZLE, make sure art supplies are within easy reach.
- Introduce the activity.
 - *"Today we're going to work together on THE HEART CONNECTION PUZZLE. Sometimes, when facing big challenges, it's easier to work with others than to try to do it all alone. Has anyone found that to be true?"* (Allow for brief responses.)
 - *"In life, especially when we've experienced something really tough like the loss of someone important, it can feel like our heart or our world has been broken into pieces. It's a huge challenge to put those pieces back together."*
- Show them the pieces so they know what they will be working with and mix pieces up. Let them know that their task is to work together to arrange them back into a HEART shape.
 - If the group has more than 10 members, consider having two separate PUZZLES.

Activity Description:

- Watch how the group interacts with each other and encourage cooperation.
- Avoid solving the PUZZLE for them. Let them figure it out together, even if it takes time. This is where the group building happens.
- If you notice someone quiet, you might say to them, *“What do you think about where that piece goes?”* to invite their input without putting them on the spot too much.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Congratulate the group on the completion of the PUZZLE and allow time for reflection on the process.
 - *“How did it feel to work on that together?”*
 - *“Was it easy or challenging?”*
 - *“Did working together make it easier?”*
- Connect it to the metaphor and allow time for thoughts/feelings related to that.
 - *“The Heart is a strong symbol for love, for connections, and for all our feelings, sometimes even when they feel broken or really hurt. When someone we love dies, it can feel like our Heart or our world gets broken into many pieces, just like this PUZZLE.”*
 - *“But just like this PUZZLE, even when things feel broken or scattered, we can sometimes find ways to put pieces back together, even if it’s in a slightly different shape or way than before. We can also get help from others as we do it.”*
 - *“What did this PUZZLE activity remind you of when you think about your feelings or your experience with grief?”*
- Ask the group if they would like to decorate their PUZZLE.
 - **Variation:** Decorating the pieces can also be done before the group members put the pieces of the PUZZLE together. By decorating their PUZZLE pieces prior to assembly, group members can clearly see how their unique contribution forms an integral part of both the session and the completed PUZZLE.
- Thank the members for being engaged and for sharing their thoughts.

Notes:

- **For older age groups:** You can provide an extra challenge by telling the group that they cannot talk while doing this activity. This helps the group to learn how to communicate in other ways, non-verbally. You can also designate a time limit

for the *No-Talking* part (For example, “*Let’s try this for 5 minutes, then we can talk again if needed.*”)

- **Another variation for older age groups:** Don’t tell the group ahead of time that the pieces form a HEART SHAPE. Instead, have them discover this as they work together to put the pieces together.
 - In this variation, have enough pieces for each group member. Let them decorate their piece first—adding words or pictures to share about themselves and/or their person who died.
 - Once the HEART is put together, have them reflect on why they think we had them work on this activity. It can be a way for the group members to realize they all have broken hearts, they all are missing someone—they are not alone in this experience.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity can be used in Ongoing Group with modifications as noted:
 - The number of pieces can be adjusted to match the group size, with each member decorating a piece to share something about themselves. This ensures a unique experience in every session, given the varying participants.
 - You can also vary the shape—perhaps a butterfly or tree instead of a heart.

HEARTS

P—Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To reflect upon their time at the Caring Place, say goodbye, and discuss changes that resulted since the first night of group

Task/Need:

- Group closure

Materials:

- Red construction paper hearts
- Markers

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin a dialogue with the group asking them to reflect on their time at the Caring Place:
 - How did they feel about coming to the Caring Place on the first night and how do they feel about it now?
 - *“What things have changed since you started coming to the Caring Place?”*
 - *“What will you remember most about this group?”*
 - What have they learned about themselves or others in the group?
- Then tell the group that they will use the PAPER HEARTS to write down some of those reflections and say goodbye to one another.
- For a large Group Closing:
 - Have group members work on HEARTS in their individual groups. HEARTS are then brought to the Closing Ceremony to be shared with the larger group.

Activity Description:

- Give each group member a PAPER HEART and let them choose a marker.
- Instruct them to write on their HEARTS what they learned or what has changed since coming to the Caring Place.
 - Remind them that they can write some of the things they shared in the previous discussion.
 - They can think about messages they would like to write for other group members
 - For example: *“The group helped me a lot.”—“I will miss my group.”*

- They may share in their group rooms and/or in the large Group Closing Ceremony to say goodbye to the Group.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Invite the group to share what they wrote or drew on their HEARTS.
- Observe any commonalities in the responses and summarize them for the group:
 - *“It sounds like many of you enjoyed _____ activity. What do you think about that?”*
 - *“Many of you shared that you learned more about feelings and enjoyed talking about the people in your lives who died.”*
 - *“I wonder if anyone else in the room found _____ activity helpful?”*
- Thank the group for their hard work during the session.

Notes:

- This activity can be done in the group rooms as a goodbye or used in the large Group Closing Ceremony.
- For younger groups, give them the option to draw pictures on their HEARTS instead of writing words.
- Alternatively, groups can write encouraging messages for new families which will be displayed in the group room to give hope to new families.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Prompt group members to think about how this time at the Caring Place was different from their last Group Session.
 - Be curious if they learned anything new or if they experienced other changes since their last Group at the Caring Place.

HELPFUL/HURTFUL MESSAGES

M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To reflect on the words or actions of others that have either been HELPFUL or NOT HELPFUL. To voice what group members might want the people in their lives to know about their grief. To assist in group building.

Task/Need:

- Helping them understand who they are after their loss
- Developing coping skills and supports

Materials:

- Several large *Post-it* easel sheets or butcher paper or whiteboard
- Markers

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Ask the group to think about what others in their lives (parents/caretakers, extended family, friends, classmates, teachers, school personnel, coaches, etc.) have said or done that was HELPFUL or HURTFUL.
 - *“When someone we love dies, the people around us often want to help, but sometimes they don’t know the best way. This can lead to situations where things said or done feel HELPFUL, and other times, they can feel really HURTFUL, even if they’re well-intentioned.”*
- Begin as a group to discuss the statements, questions, and actions of others who impact their grief experience.
 - *“Let’s think for a moment. What are some of the things people in your lives (family, friends, teachers, classmates) have said or done since your loss that truly felt HELPFUL? And what are some things that, perhaps without meaning to, actually felt HURTFUL?”*
- Explain that today they’re going to make lists together and talk about what they’ve experienced.

Activity Description:

- Label one large *Post-it* HELPFUL and another HURTFUL.
- Guide the conversation. Ask for contributions and either write them clearly on the correct sheet or encourage group members to write them.
- Encourage examples when appropriate, and acknowledge the group’s contributions. Ask if anyone else has experienced something similar when a group member provides a contribution or example to help make connections.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Review the HELPFUL / HURTFUL lists as a group. Point out similarities.
 - *“I noticed that some of you found it HURTFUL that [item from group list]. What do you all think about that? Or what are some other things that were the same?”*
- Validate differences and unique perspectives.
 - *“I noticed it was HELPFUL for one of you to [example] while for someone else it was overwhelming and NOT HELPFUL. What other differences do you notice between the lists? It sounds like the same thing can be either HELPFUL or HURTFUL, depending on the person. What do you all think about that?”*
- Ask the group if they would share this with others in their lives. Ask how they could share what is HELPFUL or HURTFUL with other people in their lives. What would they like others to do instead?
- Ask the group what it was like to think about what things were HELPFUL or HURTFUL. Ask if they learned anything unique about their group by doing this activity.

Notes:

- This can be done on posters, or another variation is to make a T-shirt with HELPFUL/HURTFUL messages.
- The group can create a general list or separate lists for groups (family, caretakers, peers, school personnel, etc.).
- This activity can be done individually. Use your knowledge of the group’s willingness to share (or interest in writing) to determine whether this should be a Group Poster activity or Individual Letter Writing.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Consider these modifications for Ongoing Groups:
 - Prompt the Group to share what is HELPFUL or HURTFUL now as compared to the first time they came to the Caring Place.
 - *“I wonder how we could communicate with others which ways are most supportive now.”*
 - Ask staff for more ideas!

HELPING HANDS

P—Y—M

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle

Purpose: To help group members identify and visualize their sources of support and coping skills, reinforcing that they are not alone and have resources when facing difficult feelings

Task/Need:

- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Large construction paper (*one for each child, for background*)
- Construction paper (*for cutting out HAND shapes*)
- Markers, crayons
- Scissors
- Glue, tape, stapler
- Stickers, glitter, or other decorative elements

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome the group back and let them know that they are going to work on an activity today focusing on who they can go to when they are having a tough time.
- Start the discussion and allow them time to reflect:
 - *“Can anyone think of a time recently when you had a really hard day, or maybe felt very sad or worried?”*
 - *“What did you do? Maybe talk about it with someone?”*
 - *“If someone was supportive—what did they do or say that made you feel a little bit better, or made the situation a little easier?”*
 - *“Does anyone have ideas about why it might be helpful to talk with someone or get support when you are going through a difficult time?”*
- Have the group identify who helps them when they have a tough day or time (friends, family members, teachers, coaches, neighbors, pastors, or others).
 - *“Let’s share some ideas together to help us think. Who are some general types of people that can be part of our HELPING HANDS?”* (Guide them with gentle prompts if needed: *“Someone who lives in your house?”*—*“Someone at school?”*—*“Someone who teaches you something?”*—*“A friend?”*)
 - Provide each child with a small piece of paper or sticky notes to privately jot down names as they think of them. Emphasize that this is just a personal list to start. If kids need help writing, offer to scribe the list for them.

Activity Description:

- Once they have a list, let them know that they can start the activity and explain they will be making a HELPING HAND for each person.
- Help the group members trace their HAND. Once they do that, have them write the name of one of their supports on the HAND. Offer to help younger children with tracing and writing.
- Let them know that they can decorate that HAND however they like—maybe in a way that reminds them of the person who is listed on the HAND. Tell them one side will be glued to the paper so they know to decorate only one side.
 - **For Younger Children:** *“What color makes you think of them? What kind of feeling do they give you? Do they give great hugs? Maybe draw a little heart or a smiley face! Do they help you laugh? Maybe draw something funny.”*
 - **For Older Children:** *“You can draw symbols or small pictures that represent that person or the way they help you. For example, if your teacher helps you with schoolwork, you might draw a book. If your friend helps you by listening, maybe some ears. You could write a word or two about how they support you, like ‘listening’—‘comforting’—‘making me laugh’—‘giving advice.’”*
- Once they’re happy with the design, have them cut it out—offer support if needed.
- Let them know that they are going to put all the HANDS on their large construction paper.
 - “This is going to be your HELPING HANDS POSTER. You can arrange your HANDPRINTS any way you like! You can make them reach for each other, spread them out, or create a big group. Use glue, tape, or a stapler to attach them.”
- **Important note**—If a child says, “I don’t have anyone,” gently ask, “What about someone who gave you a smile recently? Or a story you heard about someone kind? We can even think about special memories.” The goal is to build, not critique. If they only have one or two, that is perfectly OK. The process of identifying any support is valuable.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow time for sharing with the group.
 - *“Would anyone like to share their HELPING HANDS POSTER with the group? You don’t have to share everyone, just maybe one or two HANDS and tell us why that person is a special HELPING HAND for you.”*

- *“Are there any different kinds of people you included on your POSTER? For example, some who give hugs, and others who make you laugh, and others who give advice?”*
- Ask them how it felt to create their HELPING HAND POSTER.
 - *“Was it easy or tricky to think of all the people for your POSTER? How did that feel?”*
 - *“As you were making your POSTER and thinking about all the people who help you, what kind of feelings did you notice? Did you feel happy, comforted, peaceful, or maybe even a little surprised?”*
- Remind them that it is OK to ask for help and also be a helper to others.
 - *“It’s really important to remember that it’s OK, and even good, to ask for help when you need it. We all need HELPING HANDS sometimes, no matter what.”*
 - *“Think about one way you could be a HELPING HAND for someone else this week. Sometimes helping others makes us feel good too!”*

Notes:

- **Variation:** This activity can be adapted to give messages to the person who died who is physically beyond the touch of the group members.
 - On this HANDPRINT, children can write messages to the person who died, or they can list special memories, qualities, lessons learned, or ways the person’s presence still brings comfort or guidance.
 - *“Even though someone we love isn’t physically here anymore, their memory and love can still be like a HELPING HAND in our hearts. You can create a HANDPRINT for them, writing down a special memory you have, something they taught you, or how their love still makes you feel supported.”*
- **Variation:** This can also be adapted by tracing each of their hands and using the fingers of one to list supports in their life and the other to list coping skills.
 - **Hand 1:** MY SUPPORT HANDS—On the first HANDPRINT, the child lists their external supports (for example, Mom, Dad, friend, teacher)—one support on each finger or within the palm.
 - **Hand 2:** MY COPING SKILLS—On the second HANDPRINT, the child lists different strategies or actions they use to help themselves feel better when they’re sad, angry, or overwhelmed (for example, listening to music, deep breaths, talking to my pet, drawing, reading, going for a walk).

- **Example Prompt:** *“Let’s make two special HANDS. On one HAND, you can write all the people who help you. On the other HAND, think about all the ways you help yourself when you’re having a tough time—what things do you do to make yourself feel a little better?”*
- **Variation:** You can also adapt this activity to be a WALL OF SUPPORT.
 - Instead of each child making their own POSTER, their individual HELPING HANDS (from the core activity) become bricks in a collective WALL OF SUPPORT for the entire group. This visually reinforces the idea of group strength and shared support within the Caring Place.
 - For younger children, you could reference the story of the *Three Little Pigs* and the strong house that was built with bricks—with each additional brick making the house stronger. Each of their HELPING HANDS will be placed on a brick to create a strong WALL OF SUPPORT. The HELPING HANDS can be the names of people who support them, coping skills, or how they support others. When you put them altogether, you can see the strength of support that they have within the Group.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This is appropriate for Introductory Groups and Ongoing Groups—if doing in an Ongoing Group, consider one of the above variations. If they have made a HELPING HANDS POSTER before, ask them to think about if they added anyone new to their POSTER this time, or if anything has changed.

HOPE MOBILE

P—Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To explore and discuss the very important concept of hope within the grief journey, as well as *Children's Grief Awareness Day*.

Task/Need:

- Making meaning of the loss
- Developing coping skills and supports

Materials:

- Two large butterfly poster board cut-outs (*these will interlock to form the MOBILE'S 3D shape*).
- Markers
- Scissors
- **Decorative materials:** Stickers, pre-cut magazine photos (images of nature, smiles, gentle scenes), glitter, glitter glue, string/yarn, small beads
- **Pre-cut slips of paper:** For writing messages (*makes it easier to attach than writing directly on the butterfly for some, especially younger children or if there are many messages*)
- Hole punch
- Ribbon to hang finished MOBILE

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome group in and start conversation about HOPE.
 - *"Today, we're going to create something really special together—we're calling it the HOPE MOBILE. It's going to be a way for us to share our thoughts and feelings about HOPE, and to create something beautiful that reminds us that we're not alone."*
- Ask the group what HOPE means to them.
 - *"Before we start, I'd love for us to talk about the word HOPE. What does HOPE mean to you? When you hear the word HOPE, what comes to mind?"* (Give varied examples if group members are quiet: *"Is it a feeling?"—"Is it like wishing for something good to happen?"—"Is it knowing things can get better?"*)
 - *"Why do you think it's important to talk about HOPE, especially when we're also feeling sad or missing someone?"*
- Ask what brings them HOPE at the Caring Place and outside of it.
 - *"Where do you find HOPE? What helps you feel hopeful? This could be a person, a place, an activity, a memory, or even a pet."*

- *“What brings you HOPE here at the Caring Place, in our group, or from your friends here?”*
- *“What brings you HOPE outside of the Caring Place, at home, or at school?”* (Encourage specific, concrete examples appropriate for their age.)
- Instruct the group to think of messages of HOPE they may want to write to their loved one or other grieving children.
 - *“Today, we’re going to create messages of HOPE. These messages can be for many different people.”*
 - *“Who do you think might need to hear a message of HOPE?”* (For example, “Yourself”—“Other kids who are grieving”—“Your family members.”)
 - *“What about your special person who died? You could also create a message that reminds you of the hope you shared with them, or what you hope to carry forward in their memory.”*
 - *“So, as we work, think about messages of hope you might want to share: for your special person, for other children who are grieving, or even for yourself.”*

Activity Description:

- Explain that they will work together to make a MOBILE out of the two butterfly cut-outs.
 - *“We’re going to use these two big butterfly shapes to create our HOPE MOBILE together. Does anyone know why a butterfly might be a good symbol for HOPE?”*
 - *“These two flat butterflies will come together to make a beautiful 3D MOBILE that we can hang. (Hold up two butterflies and briefly demonstrate how they might interlock without actually cutting yet). This means we’ll be decorating both sides of both butterflies.”*
- Have the group members write messages on each butterfly and decorate them.
 - *“You can write directly on the butterfly with a marker, or if you prefer, you can use these small slips of paper, write your message, decorate it, and then we’ll stick it onto the butterfly. This is a great option if you have a lot to say, or if you prefer not to write directly on the big butterfly.”*
 - *“Remember to also use these fun art supplies to decorate the butterflies—stickers, glitter, markers, anything that makes it feel bright and hopeful!”*
- Help facilitate message creation.

- *“What words feel really powerful for you right now? What picture shows the HOPE you carry?”*
- *If a child struggles to think of a message, offer prompts: “What’s one thing you know about your special person that gives you HOPE?”—“What’s something good that you know is coming?”—“What’s a message you wish someone told you when you were feeling sad?”*
- After everyone is finished, ask if any group members would like to share their message.
 - *“Would anyone like to read or describe a message they added, or explain why they chose certain decorations for the MOBILE?”* (Acknowledge and affirm each share.)
 - *“What’s one message of HOPE on our mobile that really stands out to you, and why?”*
- Cut small slits at the top of one butterfly and the bottom of the other butterfly so they will fit together.
- Have the group decide what to do with the three-dimensional butterfly MOBILE (hang in a group room, display in the community room, etc.).

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Ask group members what it was like to write their messages and listen to the other messages written by their group.
 - *“Looking at our completed HOPE MOBILE, how does it feel to see all our messages and decorations together?”*
 - *“What was it like to write your messages? What thoughts or feelings did you have?”*
 - *“Did anything surprise you while you were making it or while others were sharing their messages?”*
 - *“Is there anything new you learned about HOPE today?”*
- Talk about what *Children’s Grief Awareness Day* means (if appropriate).
 - *“Did anyone know that there’s a special day dedicated to kids like you, kids who are grieving? It’s called Children’s Grief Awareness Day.”*
 - *“What do you think that day means, and why is it important to have a day like that?”*
 - *“When we created this HOPE MOBILE and chose to display it, we are actually doing something really important for Children’s Grief Awareness*

Day—we're showing the world that grieving kids are strong, full of HOPE, and deserve to be seen and understood."

- *"How does it feel to know there's a day just for kids like you?"*
- *"How does our HOPE MOBILE help bring awareness or HOPE?"*
- Provide information on this year's CGAD event as appropriate.

Notes:

- This activity could be adapted for pre-school children by allowing them to draw or use stickers or clipped magazine photos for their messages instead of writing them; however, they may not understand the concept of HOPE. Instead, volunteers should gently lead with verbal prompts (*"What makes you happy?"*—*"What is a safe place?"*—*"Who do you love?"*). Volunteers can write dictated messages on the butterfly/paper for them. Keep discussions short and very concrete.
- For younger kids, you can have them balance drawings with short messages or scribe for them.

For Ongoing Groups:

- If used in an Ongoing Group, you can use this as a group closing—messages that they might say to the next group or that they HOPE for each other. Additionally, if they have done this activity before, encourage them to think about what they included last time and how it has changed. What is the same, and what is different?

HOT POTATO (CARING PLACE STYLE)

P—Y—M

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle

Purpose: To allow group members to share thoughts, feelings, and memories related to their grief.

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Telling their story
- Identifying and Expressing Feelings

Materials:

- Questions (choose some questions from the *QUESTIONS FOR QUESTION & ANSWER ACTIVITIES* in the Appendix)
- HOT POTATO toy OR
- Small ball with music player

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin by asking the children if they've played HOT POTATO.
- Explain that this activity is similar. Instead of being "out," the person holding the toy when the music stops can answer a question.

Activity Description:

- Start the activity by squeezing the HOT POTATO (or if passing ball, start the music).
- Group members gently toss the ball or HOT POTATO around to each other.
- Whoever holds the toy/ball when the music stops is asked a question by a volunteer and answers the question; or passes (using the **I PASS RULE**) if they prefer. They can also share something of their choice instead.
 - For example, a child is asked a question and says I PASS. Volunteer can say *"OK! Is there something you would like to share instead? Maybe something you did this week or something you're looking forward to?"* Remember if they say no, that's OK; but it can be helpful to give options.
- When one child gets a question, you can also ask the group if they would like to share their answers to support group building:
 - For example, "[First Child's name], *thank you for sharing that your favorite sport is soccer. Does anyone else in the room like soccer? Would anyone else like to share their favorite sport before we pass the HOT POTATO again?"*

- Another example: *“Wow, thanks for telling us that your favorite memory was cooking with your mom. Did anyone else like to cook with their special person? Does anyone else want to share their favorite memory?”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Thank the group for their sharing, especially for answering questions that might have been difficult.
- Ask the group:
 - *“Which questions (if any) were hard to answer?”*
 - *“Were there any answers from others that were surprising to you?”*
 - *“Did you learn anything new about anyone else today?”*

Notes:

- For a room with more energy, it can be helpful to set rules before the music starts, such as, *“We’re going to gently toss the HOT POTATO to the person next to us.”*
- Supervise the handling of the HOT POTATO or ball to ensure safety and give reminders as needed. Example: *“Remember our rule of safety so we have to toss it to each other gently, so no one gets hurt.”*
- If needed, consider starting by having children simply pass the toy without answering questions, then introduce the questions. Additionally, start with group building questions first so they aren’t immediately being asked to answer some of the more difficult questions and have time to feel comfortable.

For Ongoing Groups:

- No modification is needed as group makeup is different and questions can be varied.

HOW DOES YOUR HEART FEEL TODAY?

P—Y

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young

Purpose: To help group members identify, express, and explore feelings related to grief in a safe and creative way.

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings

Materials:

- Model Magic
- Small crafting items like glitter, pipe cleaners, beards, small plastic jewels, googly eyes (*optional*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome the group back and introduce the idea of feelings and how their HEART is feeling.
 - *“Welcome back! As we start our time together today, let’s take a moment to notice how we’re each feeling inside. Sometimes, our HEARTS can hold a lot of different feelings, especially when we miss someone. Just like our bodies, our HEARTS can feel happy, sad, confused, quiet, even a little bit bouncy, or anything else you can think of.”*
 - *“It’s OK to feel all sorts of things, and all your feelings are important. We’re here together to share and understand them.”*
 - *“Today, we’re going to use some special clay called Model Magic to show how our HEARTS feel. There’s no right or wrong way to do this. Your HEART might look one way today, and a different way tomorrow. That’s perfectly fine because our feelings can change, just like the weather.”*
 - *“Who would like to tell me one feeling their HEART might be holding right now? Remember, you don’t have to share if you don’t want to.” (Allow for gentle sharing, model if needed. For example, “My HEART feels a little peaceful today.”)*

Activity Description:

- After the group shares, introduce Model Magic and explain the activity.
 - *“Today we get to use Model Magic! It’s soft and squishy, and we can make it into anything we imagine.”*
 - *“We’ll each get to pick the color we want. You might pick colors that feel like your feelings or just colors you like today. If you need to borrow a little of one color from another person, you can do that too—just be sure to ask!”*

- Encourage the children to use Model Magic to show how their HEARTS feel today.
 - *“What color feels like your HEART today?”*
 - *“If your HEART had a shape, what would it look like right now?”*
 - *“You can make it smooth or bumpy, twist it, or combine colors.”*
- As the children create their vision of what their HEARTS look like, ask them to explain the significance of how they are creating their HEART.
 - *“Tell me about the colors you chose.”*
 - *“What’s happening with your HEART in your creation here?”*
 - *“Does this part of your creation feel like a specific feeling to you?”*
 - *“I see you added [glitter/a bead/another color]. What does that represent for you?”*
 - *“Sometimes our HEART can feel like a tangled string, or a calm ocean. What’s your HEART like today?”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Encourage the group members to share their creations with each other (either the entire group or in pairs or small groups), noting the significance of the colors and pieces added to their creations.
 - *“Would anyone like to share their HEART and tell us a little bit about what they made and how it shows how their HEART feels today? It’s OK if you don’t want to, but if anyone would like to share, we would love to see them!”*
 - *“Wow, look at the colors you used! Do those mean anything in particular?”*
 - *“Can you tell us about the additions you made with the [glitter, eyeballs, pipe cleaners...]?”*
 - *“I noticed that yours looks like [another group member’s]—that’s neat to see that some look similar and some look different.”*
- Thank the group for sharing their creations and let them know that they can leave them here to dry or take them home. Remind them (and their adult) that it takes about 72 hours to dry.

Notes:

- For some younger children, or children for whom linking their feelings directly to a HEART is too abstract or difficult, give them permission to create whatever they wish with the Model Magic. The process of manipulating the clay itself can be expressive in itself.
 - *“It’s OK if you’re not sure what your HEART feels like today, or if that feels too tricky. You can also just make whatever feels good to make right now with the Model Magic, any shape, any creature, anything you like! Sometimes our hands just want to create something, and that’s perfectly fine.”*

For Ongoing Groups:

- Since how they’re feeling may change, no special adaptations are needed if using in an Ongoing Group. However, if they did this activity before, ask if they remember what their first HEART looked like before? How is it the same or different?

IF I COULD TELL YOU LETTERS

M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To provide an opportunity to express things that were not said before the person died and/or to continue the conversation by including things that are happening now

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Paper
- Pens or fine-tip markers
- Envelopes (*optional, for group members to keep their LETTERS private*)
- Companion Worksheets with prompts (*optional—see the end of this activity*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome group and note that today they will have opportunity for personal expression in the activity planned.
- Discuss that when someone dies there are often things that we would like to be able to say but have not because that person is no longer physically present. Perhaps there were things you wanted to say but didn't get the chance, questions you still have, memories you want to share, or even things happening now in your life that you'd wish to tell them.
- Facilitate a discussion about ideas related to what they would say.
 - *"Can anyone share not specifically what you might want to say, but generically what KINDS of things are often left unsaid when someone dies?"*
 - *"Even though our loved ones aren't physically with us, do you think there are ways we can still express those feelings, thoughts, or questions? How might that feel?"*

Activity Description:

- After discussion, allow group members to write LETTERS to the person who died, including things they would have liked to say or would like to say now.
 - *"You can write anything you wish—things you left unsaid, things you miss, memories, updates on your life now, hopes for the future, or even questions you hold."*

- *“This is not something we will read out loud or together. This is for you. If it’s hard to think about what you might write, we do have some Worksheets with prompts that you can fill out or to give you ideas.”*
- **Allow flexibility:** *“If writing isn’t comfortable, you can also draw, doodle, or make a list of things you want to say. We have some optional prompt sheets available if you’d like a little guidance to get started, or if the blank paper feels hard to start with.”*
- **Envelopes:** Have envelopes available so that group can put their LETTERS in them to keep them private if they’d like.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Process the experience and point out any common feelings.
 - *“As we come to the end of our writing time, let’s take a few moments to reflect on the experience of the activity, rather than the specifics of what you wrote.”*
 - *“What was it like for you to write your LETTERS? What feelings came up during the process?”*
 - *“Did you notice any common feelings or themes among those who shared their experience (for example, sadness, relief, connection, new insights)?”*
 - *“Was it easier or more difficult than you expected to put those thoughts onto paper?”*
- Offer for the group to share portions of their LETTERS if they like, without pressure. Remind them that the **I PASS RULE** applies.
- Ask group members what they want to do with the LETTERS:
 - Keep them, shred them, etc. per group members’ wishes.
- Acknowledge it could be hard to write the LETTERS. Offer the group support and validation and thank them for their courage.

Notes:

- Volunteers may be able to adapt the writing portion of this activity to drawing, list making or collage for younger children.
- This activity could be emotionally difficult for a group. Think about balancing any heaviness with the Activities Room or movement. You may even ask the group members a week ahead of time if this is something they would find helpful to do.

For Ongoing Groups:

- No specific modifications are necessary. Doing this activity in an Ongoing Group acknowledges that feelings and experiences may have changed since their previous session. This activity provides an opportunity for group members to share these changes or new experiences.

If I Could Tell You...

The person who died was my _____.

I feel _____ right now.

The thing I miss most about my person is

I feel most sad when I think about

The thing I loved the most about my person is

My favorite thing we used to do together was

If I could say one more thing to my person, it would be:

IMPACT OF LOSS SNOWFLAKES

Y—M—T

Suggested Groups: Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To encourage discussion of loss and change, especially during the holiday season. To have a chance to think about the death and subsequent losses and changes, as well as their size and intensity.

Task/Need:

- Telling their story
- Making meaning of the loss
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Paper
- Scissors
- Glue (*optional*)
- Glitter (*optional*)
- Decorative hole punches (*optional*)
- One or two completed SNOWFLAKES for demonstration

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Construct one to two SNOWFLAKES ahead of time to use in your introduction.
- Introduce the activity by talking about how SNOWFLAKES from a distance look alike, but each is different when looked at close up.
 - *“You know how when you look at SNOWFLAKES falling from the sky, they might all look similar from a distance? But if you catch one and look closely, every single SNOWFLAKE is completely unique—no two are ever exactly alike.”*
 - (Hold up pre-cut SNOWFLAKES.) *“See how unique these are, even though they started from the same kind of paper?”*
 - *“Grief can be a bit like that. On the surface, we might all share the experience of losing someone we love. But when we look closer, we find that each person’s grief journey, and how it impacts their life, is incredibly unique. It shapes each of us in different ways.”*
- For teens, another way to frame this activity is, *“When someone in our life dies, it can feel like a big cut has been made in our life. You are the only one who really knows how big this cut is or what shape it is. Also, after someone dies, other things can change or be different too. These can feel like ‘cuts’ or losses too. Only we can decide how big these cuts are or what their shapes are.”*

- *“Today, we’re going to create our own SNOWFLAKES to represent our grief journey—all the cuts and changes and unique shapes that loss has created in our lives.”*

Activity Description:

- Give each child a piece of square paper to use to create a SNOWFLAKE and then demonstrate how best to fold the paper to create a SNOWFLAKE that will stay intact.
- Give the direction to cut and/or punch (using optional hole punches) the SNOWFLAKE, thinking for each cut of the loss or a change in your life that it might represent.
 - *“As you cut or punch into the folded paper, think about the different ways your life has changed or how you feel since your special person died. Each cut, each little snip or hole, can symbolize one of those things. It could be big, difficult changes, or smaller but still important changes.”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Have group members share their SNOWFLAKES and the meanings of the cuts in their SNOWFLAKES.
 - *“When you feel like you’ve finished cutting, carefully unfold your SNOWFLAKE. Take a moment to look at your SNOWFLAKE. What do you notice about the unique pattern that emerged?”*
- Look for similarities and differences across all group members.
 - *“Now, let’s look around the table. What do you notice about everyone’s snowflakes? Do they all look the same, or are they different?”* (Expected answer: different).
 - *“That’s just like our grief. Everyone here has experienced loss, but each of our journeys is unique. Even if we’re all making SNOWFLAKES, yours will never be exactly like anyone else’s, just as your grief is uniquely yours.”*
- Allow time for open-ended sharing.
 - *“What was it like to make your snowflake? Did you find yourself thinking about anything specific as you cut?”*
 - *“Without needing to explain every cut, what does your SNOWFLAKE represent for you about your grief journey?”*
 - *“What common feelings or experiences, if any, do you see or hear shared among our SNOWFLAKES or our conversation today?”* (Facilitator can gently point out common themes like “missing holidays”—“things feeling different”—“still having good memories”.)

- *“Even with all these ‘cuts’ and changes, what does it mean to see your SNOWFLAKE still hold together as one whole piece?”* (Connects to resilience and continuing life..)
- Remember to thank the group for sharing and summarize similar themes.

Notes:

- Your role is to guide the activity and facilitate sharing *about the experience and the metaphor*, not to interpret specific cuts.
- When asking about cuts, frame it as *“What feelings or changes might these represent for you?”* or *“Without going into detail, what was it like to make those choices?”* This allows them to share without feeling like they must share details they might not be ready to share.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Focus on a theme of grief evolving and changing.
 - Ask the group to think back about their first time coming to the Caring Place.
 - When group members make their cuts or punch holes to create their SNOWFLAKES, have them reflect on how their grief has changed since the last time they came to the Caring Place.
 - What areas have bigger cuts or holes now? Which ones were smaller?
 - Encourage the group to share what has changed or stayed the same.
 - How does the new SNOWFLAKE represent their grief journey now?

IMPRINTS ON OUR HEARTS

P—Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: This activity offers a hands-on and heartfelt way to acknowledge the end of the group's time together, allowing each participant to leave a personal mark and a message for their peers. It creates a keepsake that symbolizes the unique contributions and interconnectedness of every group member that they can take with them.

Task/Need:

- Developing coping skills and supports
- Group closing

Materials:

- Fabric Markers (*permanent, multi-color*)
- One pre-washed plain light-colored T-SHIRT or CANVAS TOTE BAG or large CANVAS PANEL per group member
- Cardboard inserts (*to prevent bleed-through if using SHIRTS/TOTES*)
- Inkpads (*if doing thumbprints instead of handprints*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Lead discussion about group ending and any feelings related to that.
 - *“As we reach the conclusion of our time together, let’s create a special memory of the unique bond we’ve formed and the journey we’ve shared. Before we do, how is everyone feeling about group coming to an end?”*
 - Allow group to share feelings and validate those feelings.
- Explain the activity and how it will serve as a keepsake for them to remember the group's time together at the Caring Place.
 - *“Today, we’re going to create a lasting keepsake that literally holds a piece of each of you. You’ll have the chance to leave your personal ‘mark’ and a message for the others, capturing the support you all provided each other while here.”*
 - *“Everyone will receive a [T-SHIRT/CANVAS TOTE/CANVAS PANEL]. Please place the cardboard inside your SHIRT/TOTE to prevent markers from bleeding through.”*

Activity Description:

- Have the group members trace their hands on the SHIRT/TOTE/CANVAS for each group member. Provide support as needed for younger group members.
- Depending on the age of your group, you can have them write their name, or a comforting message for the group member.

- *“Inside or around your traced handprint, or perhaps somewhere else on your personal [SHIRT/TOTE/CANVAS], you can write a short message. This message can be for the group, for a specific person the [SHIRT/TOTE/CANVAS] belongs to, a favorite memory from our time together, something you learned, or even a single word that describes your experience with us.”*
- Ensure that everyone can trace their hand on the other group member’s item.
- Let them know that they will all be able to take them home once they are dry.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow time for reflection and sharing:
 - *“Take a moment to look at your [SHIRT/TOTE/CANVAS]. Notice how many unique hands and messages are there. Each one represents a person who was a part of our journey.”*
 - *“What does it feel like to see all these marks of presence and these messages from your peers?”*
 - *“Would anyone like to share a message they received or that they wrote?”*
- Thank them for sharing and wrap up the activity.
 - *“They remind us that even though our formal meetings conclude, the memories and connections we’ve built can continue to live on. We hope that these keepsakes will be helpful to you in remembering our time together.”*

Notes:

- **This can be done in different ways. See variations below:**
 - **Tree of Connection (Thumbprints):** The facilitator would pre-draw or pre-print the outline of a large tree trunk and branches on a CANVAS, large T-SHIRT, or BANNER. Each group participant then uses different colors of washable ink pads (or fabric paint on their fingertip) to add their thumbprint to the branches, creating “leaves” on the tree. Next to their thumbprint “leaf,” they can initial it, or write a single word that describes their greatest growth during the group, or what they’ll carry forward from the experience. The tree represents growth (like the TREE OF GROWTH at the Caring Place) and the interconnectedness of roots and branches, with each thumbprint symbolizing a unique group member contributing to the group.
 - **Butterflies of Hope (Thumbprints):** The facilitator would pre-draw or pre-print the outline of a large butterfly on a CANVAS or large T-SHIRT. Each group participant adds their thumbprint within the wings of the

butterfly, using various colors. Near their thumbprint, they can write a word representing a change, transformation, or new beginning they've experienced during the group, or a hope for their future journey. The butterfly represents hope and resilience—a fitting metaphor for personal growth often experienced at the Caring Place.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Consider using a variation as listed above.

INDIVIDUAL QUILT SQUARE OR PILLOW

P—Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To provide group members with a hands-on opportunity to create a personal, tangible item (a QUILT SQUARE or a PILLOW) that serves as a comfort object and a dedicated space for expressing memories and continuing connections with their person who died. This activity also serves to introduce the broader concept of a QUILT SQUARE in preparation for Quilt Night.

Task/Need:

- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- **For QUILT SQUARE:**
 - Pre-cut squares of plain, light-colored fabric (*muslin, cotton, canvas blend*) for each participant (*about 10" x 10" to 12" x 12"*)
 - Fabric markers (*permanent, non-toxic, in a variety of colors*)
 - Fabric paint (*optional*)
 - Fabric glue or iron-on adhesive if adding fabric pieces.
 - Stencils (*letters, shapes, nature designs*)
 - Small fabric scraps/patches (*an assortment of colors/patterns*)
 - Scissors
 - Photos (*printed on transfer paper for fabric or small, regular photos to be glued on and sealed—use with caution and provide clear guidance, especially for sensitive items*)
- **For MEMORY PILLOW:** Tied/No-Sew or Sew (*if you're doing this, it's helpful to have fringe already cut on SQUARE or holes to ensure group members don't decorate where fabric will be joined together*)
 - Two pieces of the decorated fabric SQUARE (*the decorated one plus a plain backing piece, slightly larger like 14"–16" for fringe*)
 - Fabric scissors (*for cutting fringe*)
 - Hole punch for pre-punching holes along the edge (*optional*)
 - Lengths of ribbon, yarn, or fabric strips for tying
 - Fiberfill/Pillow stuffing or pillow insert
 - Safety Needles for sewing
 - Optional Embellishments (*for inside or outside of pillow/square*):
 - Little fabric hearts, charms, or symbolic tokens (*similar to "Build-a-Bear" concept, for placing inside the pillow*)
 - Thin strips of fabric for writing special messages, placed inside the pillow

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Determine ahead if your group will do **PILLOW** or **QUILT SQUARES** to ensure you have supplies needed.
- Welcome group back and discuss activity.
 - *“Today, we’re going to create something truly special and comforting. We all carry so many precious memories of our loved ones. Even though they are no longer physically here with us, the love and connection we shared, and all those wonderful memories, stay with us always. These memories can be a source of great comfort.”*
- Encourage the children to “think back” to when their person who died was alive. Give a few prompts from below and give them a few moments to think about it and let them know that they will use those ideas for the activity. (As with any memory activity, it’s possible that the child has very few memories of their person and these prompts will need to be adjusted.)
 - *“What memories do you have of that time?”*
 - *“What did you like to do together?”*
 - *“What did your person like to do?”*
 - *“What makes you smile when you think of them?”*
 - *“What are some of their favorite things?”*
- Introduce the activity.
 - **For QUILT SQUARE:** *“We’re going to give you some fabric to decorate. This SQUARE will be like a little canvas for your memories. You can draw, write, or decorate it with things that remind you of your person, a special memory you shared, or even feelings you have for them. While you will work on a QUILT SQUARE as a family soon, this one will be for you and your own personal memories with your person.”*
 - **For MEMORY PILLOW:** *“Your special SQUARE can even become part of a soft MEMORY PILLOW, something you can hold close when you need comfort or want to feel connected to your loved one.”* (If a tied PILLOW, explain it as a self-made craft project.)
- If using photos, discuss with staff first to ensure that is an option. Then you can explain to the group the option:
 - *“If you’d like to include a photo, we can discuss how best to do that. Sometimes it’s a drawing of the memory in the photo, sometimes it’s printing it onto special fabric paper, or glueing it carefully. No pressure*

at all if you don't want to use photos—a drawing can hold just as much meaning.”

Activity Description:

- Encourage thinking about what they want to put on their QUILT SQUARE and allow discussion as group if they want. Let them know that they can sketch it out on paper first if they like.
 - *“Before we dive in, let’s take a moment. What kind of memory would you like to put on your SQUARE? Is there a favorite color of your person? A symbol that reminds you of them? A special message you want to draw or write?”*
- During the creation of the QUILT SQUARES, volunteers should ask curious questions and provide support.
 - *“Tell me about what you are drawing there.”*
 - *“What memories are coming to mind for you?”*
 - *“Do those colors mean anything special?”*
 - Help group members if needed for writing a message or spelling a word.
- Allow time for sharing (see wrap-up below).
- The SQUARES can be taped or tacked onto a large piece of material to replicate a QUILT and displayed in the room.
- At the end of the group meetings, the SQUARES can be removed from the “QUILT” and taken home.
- If making it into a PILLOW you will likely need two meetings:
 - *“Today, we’ve created these wonderful MEMORY SQUARES. They are so special. Next time, we’ll talk about how we can take your SQUARE and make it into something soft and comforting you can hug!”*
 - Allow the group to make things to put inside the PILLOW if they like.
 - *“Sometimes, when we make something like this, we want to put special ‘secret’ messages or small items inside. We have these little strips of fabric and soft hearts.”*
 - *“On these strips, you can write a message to your loved one, a wish you have for them, or even a message of strength you’d like to imagine they would send to you. No one has to see it unless you want to share.”*
 - *“The soft hearts can represent love, comfort, or anything soft and warm you want to hold close.”*

- Help children write messages and choose a heart or other small token to go inside their PILLOW.
- Allow time for PILLOW construction (will need volunteer assistance).
 - **TIED PILLOW**—this is easiest for group to do together.
 - Align the decorated fabric SQUARE with the plain backing SQUARE.
 - Assist children in cutting fringe evenly around the edges (or provide pre-cut fringes with clear tying instructions).
 - Guide children on how to tie the ribbon/yarn or fabric strips to connect the three sides, leaving one side open.
 - Once three sides are tied, demonstrate how to gently stuff the pillow with fiberfill (and add any secret messages/hearts).
 - Assist in tying off the final side.
 - **SEWN PILLOW**—this may take more time and be for older age groups.
 - Punch holes along the edges of the PILLOW and plain backing.
 - Provide group members with safety needles and assist them with sewing shut after stuffing.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow time for sharing.
 - *“You all did an awesome job creating your QUILT SQUARE (or MEMORY PILLOW). Would anyone like to share the QUILT SQUARE (or PILLOW) they made? You can share as little or as much as you like.”*
 - As they share, invite the group members to ask questions of each other: *“Thank you for sharing your creation—does anyone have questions for [group member] about their square?”*
- Process feelings related to making their QUILT SQUARE or MEMORY PILLOW.
 - *“As you were creating your pillow/square—choosing materials, drawing, or thinking about what to put inside—how did that feel for you? What kinds of feelings came up during the process of making it today?”*
 - *“Was there a part of the process that stood out to you, either as especially comforting, meaningful, or perhaps even difficult?”*
 - *“Was there anything that surprised you about making your SQUARE or PILLOW?”*

- Allow them to think about their QUILT SQUARE or PILLOW and how it might be used at home.
 - *“How might this PILLOW (or SQUARE) offer you comfort or help you remember your person when you’re at home?”*
 - *“Where do you imagine putting your MEMORY PILLOW at home? Perhaps on your bed, on a special chair, or somewhere you can easily reach for it when you need to feel close to your loved one.”*
- Thank the group for sharing.
 - *“Thank you all for bringing your memories, your creativity, and your feelings to this activity. We hope that these will be a piece of comfort for you while you remember your person.”*

Notes:

- If doing PILLOWS, this is a multi-meeting activity so be sure to plan ahead. Allow group members to work at their own pace and do not rush the process. Be flexible; if a child needs more time on drawing, prioritize that over moving quickly to assembly. The emotional process is more important than completing the craft. If needed, volunteers can complete assembly.
- If making SEWN PILLOWS, be sure to supervise use with needles and provide support for group members who may need assistance.
- If ironing items on, have one volunteer do this to ensure safety (not group members).
- Clearly differentiate that the individual item they make here is theirs to take home, versus any potential larger GROUP QUILT SQUARES that may become part of a COMMUNITY QUILT to remain at the Caring Place. This manages expectations and provides clear ownership of their personal project.

For Ongoing Groups:

- If group members have previously done this in an Introductory Group, consider doing whatever most of them didn’t do the first time. (For example, if most made individual QUILT SQUARES, consider MEMORY PILLOWS).
- They can also compare/contrast the one they made previously to the one they’re making now—how is it different or the same? What new messages might they include (if it’s a MEMORY PILLOW)? You can also offer them the option to make this QUILT SQUARE or PILLOW to give to someone else in their family if they like.

INSIDE/OUTSIDE FEELINGS MASKS

Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To begin sharing feelings and discussing the difference between feelings that are shared and those that are kept private.

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- **Part #1:**
 - MASK molds
 - Plaster fabric (*pre-cut into manageable sizes for easy dipping*)
 - Bowls of water (*enough for small groups/individual use*)
 - Lightweight paper
 - Pens/pencils
 - Table coverings (*plastic tablecloth to protect surface*)
 - Pre-made MASKS (*optional for younger aged groups*)
 - Color Guide Worksheet (*can be completed to show which color represents which feelings; group member can determine this—see end of this activity*)
- **Part #2:**
 - Completed dry MASK molds (*from meeting #1*)
 - Paint and paintbrushes of various sizes or sharpie markers
 - Glitter/glue
 - Arts and craft materials (*feathers, jewels, etc.*)
 - Table covering (*can use paper this time*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome group and let them know that they will be starting an activity that will take some time but will be a creative way to explore feelings.
- Start the discussion about feelings.
 - “Let’s talk about feelings for a moment. Can anyone give me an example of a feeling?” (Acknowledge responses—happy, sad, angry, confused, calm, etc.)
 - “Do you think it’s true that we show all our feelings to everyone we meet? Or are there some feelings we might keep to ourselves, or only show to certain people?”

- Encourage open discussion and don't rush this part. Facilitator can share a gentle, relatable example: *"Sometimes I might feel tired inside, but I try to look awake on the outside if I'm at work."*
 - *"We often have what we call 'outside feelings'—the ones we let others see—and 'inside feelings'—the ones we keep private or only share with a very trusted few."*
 - *"Since your person died, have any of you noticed yourselves having an 'outside' face that you show to the world, and then perhaps an 'inside' feeling or face that you keep more private?"* (Acknowledge and validate that this is a very common experience in grief.)
 - *"Sometimes, we might feel sad, but we might try to look 'OK' on the outside, so others don't worry, or because we don't feel ready to talk about it. Or maybe we feel angry inside, but we don't always show that on the outside."*
- Introduce the MASK activity.
 - *"Today and next week, we're going to be making a special kind of MASK that helps us think about these 'inside' and 'outside' feelings. Today, we'll be making the basic mold of our MASK. Next time, we'll decorate them."*
 - *"When we make the MASK mold, we'll be using plaster fabric. One side will be smooth, and the other will be a bit rougher. We can choose which side becomes the 'outside' of our MASK:"*
 - *"It could be the one that will be smooth, representing the feelings we show to the world. And the other side, the rougher side, would be the 'inside,' for those feelings we hold more privately."*
 - *"Or, some people choose the rough side for 'outside,' if they feel their outward expression is more raw right now. You get to decide which texture best represents your 'inside' and 'outside' feelings."*
 - Explain that it might get a little messy and offer plastic aprons. Show technique so they know how to do it—placing wet strips carefully, overlapping slightly to build strength.

Activity Description:

Because of the time required for the plaster to dry, this activity takes a minimum of two meetings to complete.

Meeting #1:

- Provide MASK molds, plaster strips, and water. Remind participants to choose which side of the plaster (rough or smooth) they want to represent their “inside” and “outside.”
- Allow the MASKS to dry until the next meeting. (Be sure to have the children put their names on their MASKS so that they can be identified at the next meeting.)
- Consider using the Color Guide worksheet to help group members visualize what colors will represent different feelings they want to paint on their MASK. This could be saved until the following meeting if there is not enough time after creating the MASK mold.

Meeting #2:

- Reintroduce the activity with another brief conversation about inside and outside feelings.
 - *“Last week, we talked about ‘inside’ feelings that we might keep private, and ‘outside’ feelings that we show to the world. We also decided which texture of our mask would represent ‘inside’ and ‘outside’.”*
 - *“Today, we get to use colors, glitter, feathers—anything you like—to decorate your masks. You’ll decorate the side that represents the feelings you typically show the world, and the side that represents the feelings you hold within.”*
 - *“We also have a ‘Color Guide’ available (if you want to use it), which might give you some ideas for associating colors with different emotions, but feel free to choose any colors that speak to you.”*
- Assist the group members in removing their MASKS from the molds.
- Have the group members decorate both the inside and outside of their MASKS as they wish to represent the feelings that they show to the world and those that they keep inside.
- As the painting happens, encourage discussion of general conversation, and ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ feelings and those in between.
 - *“Are you thinking about a specific feeling as you put on that color?”*
 - *“Are there some things that are shared with select people, but not most?”*
 - *“Who are the ‘safest’ people you share with?”*
 - *“What happens when you share some of the inside feelings with someone?”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Encourage the group members to share their MASKS and discuss the feelings represented if they like.
 - *“Would anyone like to share their MASK with the group and tell us a little bit about what their ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ feelings look like? What did you choose to put on each side, and what does it mean to you?”*
 - Remember to allow them to pass on sharing if they don’t want to.
- When group members share, ask if other group members have the same feelings on their MASK.
 - *“Did anyone else put a similar feeling or color on the ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ of their MASK? What does it mean to you to know that someone else here might share a similar ‘inside’ feeling?”*
 - *“What do we notice about everyone’s MASKS? Are there any patterns, or are they all unique?”*
 - Thank individual group members for sharing and acknowledge their hard work.
- Reflect on the process and feelings that they might have had during the making of MASKS.
 - *“What was it like to decorate your MASK? What parts felt easy, and what parts felt more challenging, especially when thinking about those different feelings?”*
 - *“What was it like to even just talk about those ‘inside’ feelings today, even if just by showing them on a MASK?”*
- Acknowledge the courage it takes to share their feelings with others.
- Thank the group for sharing and ask for any final thoughts.
 - *“Does anyone have any final thoughts or a word they’d like to share about what this activity meant to them today?”*

Notes:

- Be mindful of the time. The processing phase is critical and should not be rushed. You might need to adjust the decorating time if the group needs more time to share.
- It may work better for children to paint the inside of the MASK first to avoid smearing the wet paint on the outside of the MASK (although they may decide to start wherever they wish).
- One enhancement is to allow the group members to write messages on small pieces of paper to their family members and embed them in between the layers of

plaster cloth. They will know that they are there, but they never have to be shared with anyone else.

- When time is limited or the group chooses not to “get messy,” pre-made cardboard MASKS can be used as a starting point rather than making the plaster MASKS.
- For a younger group, or one in which there isn’t enough time for a multi-week project, the same concept can be expressed using paper plates with eye holes cut for the MASK. These ‘MASKS’ can be decorated with markers or crayons so that they can be completed and taken home the same week. The plaster layering does add another layer of depth for the project that may not be desired in all groups.
- Consider reading a feelings book to younger groups to help prompt a discussion on feelings.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This is an activity that is often done in Introductory Groups but can also be done in Ongoing Groups. It may be helpful to assess which group members have already completed this activity and determine the appropriateness of repeating or choosing another activity. If doing this in an Ongoing Group, consider these suggestions below:
 - If group members have done a MASK previously, ask them to bring in their other MASK.
 - Compare and contrast the feelings from the previous MASK and the current one.
 - Notice if there are different feelings on the inside of the MASK than on the previous MASK made.
 - What feelings have they added to the inside or outside of their current MASK?
 - Is a feeling that was once on the inside painted on the outside?
 - Ask how their inside and outside feelings merge at times—*“As you’ve continued your grief journey, have those lines started to blur? Are there times where your ‘outside’ more genuinely reflects your ‘inside’? On your MASK today, try to show areas where the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ blend or connect, as well as areas where they still feel distinct.”*

- **Variation: MESSAGE MASK—HIDDEN AFFIRMATIONS**
 - Use the interior of the MASK not just for *feelings*, but for *words or symbols*—affirmations, challenges, lessons learned, or hidden hopes/fears related to their grief journey.
 - **Set-up:** *“On the ‘outside’ of your MASK, show the feelings you typically present. On the ‘inside’, in addition to feelings, think about any messages, thoughts, or symbols you keep private—perhaps a quiet promise to yourself, a challenging thought you grapple with, or a strength nobody else sees.”*
 - **Wrap-up:** Focus on self-talk, inner resilience, and internal processing. *“What hidden messages did you embed in your MASK? How do these messages guide you?”*

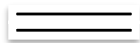
COLOR GUIDE FOR INSIDE/OUTSIDE FEELINGS MASKS













KALEIDOSCOPE OF FEELINGS

Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To explore and express feelings related to the loss, and to understand those feelings from different perspectives.

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Making meaning of the loss
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Empty cardboard paper towel roll
- Thin clear plastic scraps (*from packaging, plastic report covers etc.*)
 - Precut into circles slightly larger than the end of the paper towel roll
- Mirrored cardstock or aluminum foil glued to card stock made into a prism as described below:
 - Precut into 3 equal rectangles slightly shorter than the paper towel tube
 - Tape them together side-by-side (lengthwise)
 - Then fold into a triangular prism with the reflective sides facing inward; tape it securely
- Wax paper
 - Precut circles that are slightly larger than the end of the paper towel, with a “pre-poked” hole made with a pencil or pen
- Colorful beads, sequins, or translucent craft gems
- Double-sided tape or glue
- Clear tape
- Scissors
- Rubber bands
- Decorative paper (*12 x 12 scrapbook paper, wrapping paper, or plain colored paper*)
- Optional decorations: washi tape, gems, stickers
- **Note:** This activity has recommendations for volunteers to prepare ahead of time—please read through and make a KALEIDOSCOPE ahead of time to understand the process. This also may take 1–2 sessions to complete. Suggestions for prep are noted in the activity description.

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Introduction and discussing feelings of grief:
 - *“Today, we’re going to explore our feelings with our grief. We know that when someone important in our life dies, a lot of different emotions can come up, and sometimes they can feel jumbled or confusing.”*
 - Start by asking the group to name some feelings that might come up when someone in our family dies and write them on a whiteboard or paper for the group.
- Introducing the COLOR-FEELING CHART:
 - *“To help us understand and organize these many feelings, we’re going to create a FEELINGS CHART together using colors. Think about it: if sadness had a color, what color would it be? What about anger? What color represents peace or comfort for you?”*
 - As kids suggest colors for different emotions, write them down on a chart (perhaps Sadness = Blue, Anger = Red, Confusion = Grey/Purple, Hope = Yellow/Green, Love = Pink, Fear = Black, Peace = White/Light Blue). Emphasize there are no ‘correct’ associations—it’s personal.
- Introduce the activity.
 - *“Now, for the next part, we’ll be making something called a KALEIDOSCOPE. Has anyone ever seen or played with a KALEIDOSCOPE before? What does it do?”* (Allow for brief descriptions—*“It shows pretty patterns,”*—*“It changes colors.”*)
 - *“Today, we’re going to make our own KALEIDOSCOPE OF FEELINGS. Just like those little pieces, our feelings about grief can sometimes feel fragmented or messy. But like a KALEIDOSCOPE, when we look at them, acknowledge them, and let them shift, we can begin to see something new, perhaps even something beautiful or meaningful in the way these feelings shape us.”*

Activity Description:

- Provide materials for the group to wrap the outside of the cardboard tube with colorful construction paper, stickers, or washi tape for a fun, finished look.
 - **Note: It’s recommended that volunteers precut paper that fits around tubes or assist group members with cutting to size.**
 - *“First, we’re going to decorate the outside of your KALEIDOSCOPE. We have some paper ready for you, stickers, decorative tape, and gems that you can use. Volunteers can help you if you need help sticking it onto your tube.”*

- Prepare the reflective surface:
 - **Note: It's recommended that volunteers do this ahead and have the prisms ready for group members to put into their KALEIDOSCOPE.**
 - Cut the reflective paper into 3 equal rectangles that fit into the tube. Tape them together side-by-side (lengthwise), then fold into a triangular prism with the *reflective sides facing inward*. Tape it securely.
 - Check each participant's mirror assembly to ensure it's a tight triangle. This is a critical step for a good KALEIDOSCOPE effect.
- Make the viewing end:
 - *"Take the wax paper circle with the hole in the middle and apply to one end of your tube. It should be big enough to stretch over—then use a rubber band to secure it in place."*
 - *"You should be able to see through the hole out the other side. If you need help to make your hole bigger, a volunteer can help you do that, but you don't want it to be too large—just big enough to see into."*
- Once they have finished with outside decorations, they can move onto putting the prism into the tube:
 - Slide the reflective prism into the cardboard roll. It should fit snugly but not tightly.
 - *"Carefully insert your mirror triangle assembly into your KALEIDOSCOPE that you decorated. Push it gently until it touches the very bottom where you can see out. Don't push too hard so that it pokes through—just enough to have it sit snugly inside."*
 - *"You'll notice there's now an empty space at the top of the KALEIDOSCOPE. This is where all our 'FEELINGS' are going to go!"*
- Create the Color Chamber:
 - **Note: It's recommended that clear plastic circles be cut ahead by volunteers, but allow group members to place them on tube.**
 - *"You should have two clear plastic circles in front of you. We're going to place one on the tube and secure it there with tape. If you need help, volunteers can help you secure it in place."*
 - *"Next comes the unique part. Remember how we talked about feelings and colors? Look through the gems and beads on the table. Think about what feelings you have related to your person and your grief. You might have lots of feelings and that's OK—we have lots of beads. And the neat part is that we want to fill the space, so feel free to pick lots of beads and*

gems. Once everyone has a chance to pick theirs, we'll move onto the next step together."

- *"OK, looks like everyone has theirs. This part might be a little tricky, but we're here to help. You're going to place your beads and gems on top of the clear plastic that we just secured to the tube. Once you do that, let a volunteer know and we can help you put the other plastic circle on top of it and secure it in place."*
- Cover with another clear plastic circle and tape the edges shut with clear tape, creating a sealed window that traps the light-catching items inside.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Have the group look through the view end and share what they see.
 - *"Everyone has their finished KALEIDOSCOPE, or at least a work-in-progress. Take a moment to look through the little hole you punched and turn your KALEIDOSCOPE. What do you see?"*
 - *"Notice how the beads, sequins—your 'FEELINGS'—create these changing patterns. Does anyone want to describe what they see?"*
- Encouraging sharing:
 - *"Would anyone like to share what colors they chose the most of, and why? Or how their KALEIDOSCOPE reflects their current 'mix' of feelings?"*
 - *"Has creating this KALEIDOSCOPE given you a new way to think about your feelings, or about how your loss is shaping you?"*
 - *"What might your KALEIDOSCOPE 'look like' a year from now, if your feelings might have changed?"*
 - *"This activity shows us that grief is a mix of many feelings, not just one. It's OK for these feelings to shift and change, just like the patterns in your KALEIDOSCOPE."*
- Final thoughts:
 - *"Thank you all for bringing your thoughts and creativity to this activity. These KALEIDOSCOPES are special creations, reflecting your unique journeys. You can take them home as a reminder of how all your feelings, even the challenging ones, are a part of your strength."*
 - *"Keep your KALEIDOSCOPES, and feel free to bring them back if you want to share how looking through them has made you feel differently in the coming days."*

Notes:

- To assist with time—volunteers should cut and prepare what they can prior to the group arriving. See notes in the materials and directions to prep ahead of time.
- This project will likely require more than one meeting to fully introduce, discuss, and process. Do not rush the introduction or wrap up to finish in one session.
- Remember to focus on the process of exploring and discussing feelings rather than making a ‘pretty’ product.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This is appropriate for Introductory or Ongoing Groups but may be better suited for Ongoing as it may take 2 meetings to complete and is often not done in Introductory Groups.
 - If they have made a KALEIDOSCOPE in a previous group, you can ask the group member to share if they still have their KALEIDOSCOPE and what they remember from making it the first time. You can also ask them to bring it in to show the previous KALEIDOSCOPE and compare it with their new KALEIDOSCOPE.

KINDNESS ROCKS

P—Y—M—T—A

Suggested Age Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To demonstrate that kindness comes in many forms and to give the gift of hope and inspiration to others.

Task/Need:

- Making meaning of the loss
- Developing coping skills and supports
- Group closure

Materials:

- 1–3 inch beach rocks/pebbles
- Paint
- Spray sealant (*Mod Podge Super Hi-Shine Sealant*)
- Examples of rocks (*pictures or rocks*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Talk to the group about things that were comforting to them after their loss.
 - *“Before we start our creative activity today, I’d like us to take a moment to reflect. We all experience loss differently, and we find comfort in various ways. Thinking back to when you were navigating your loss, what are some of the things—whether it was a person, a memory, a song, a quiet moment, or an object—that brought you a sense of comfort or peace, even for a short while? It doesn’t have to be a big thing; sometimes the smallest gestures or memories can be profoundly comforting.”*
 - *“Would anyone like to share something that brought them comfort?”*
- Ask what may be helpful or hopeful for others in the same situation.
 - *“Building on that thought, now that you’ve experienced your own journey with grief, what words, thoughts, or small acts of kindness do you think might be particularly helpful or hopeful for someone else who is just starting out in their grief, or perhaps is struggling today?”*
 - *“These could be single words like ‘Hope’—‘Breathe’—‘Courage’—‘Remember’—or short sayings such as ‘You are not alone’—‘One day at a time’—‘Find your light’. This list will serve as inspiration for our project today, but please feel free to use your own ideas as well.”*

Activity Description:

- Speak about kindness, empathy, and caring about others, as well as ourselves.
 - *“Today, we’re going to engage in a project called KINDNESS ROCKS—we’re going to be using some of the ideas that we just talked about and creating*

some ROCKS with some of those ideas. As we work on our ROCKS, let's reflect on some of those things we would want to share with others to help them feel less alone; or creating a message that you keep yourself as a personal reminder or comfort."

- Have group members decide what messages to paint on their ROCKS and let them know that they can keep it for themselves as a source of comfort or leave it for someone else to pass on the kindness.
- Make a list of places where they can leave the ROCKS if you like—or they can keep the ROCK for themselves or give it to someone else.
 - *"For those of you creating ROCKS to share, let's brainstorm some ideas for places where your ROCK might brighten someone's day. These should be public spots where they're easily discoverable but won't cause disruption. Think of parks, walking paths, libraries, benches, common areas, or outside community centers."*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Ask group members to share their ROCK and explain the reason they chose their inspirational message.
 - *"As we finish up, I invite each of you to share the ROCK you created, if you feel comfortable. More importantly, could you tell us a little bit about the message you chose? What significance does that word or phrase hold for you, and why do you think it might be impactful for someone else to find if you choose to place it somewhere?"*
 - *"Also, if you're comfortable, could you share whether you plan to keep this ROCK for yourself as a personal touchstone, or if you intend to place it out in the world for someone else to discover? There's no right or wrong choice, and both are equally powerful."*
- Ask where they decided to leave it (if sharing), or where they plan to keep it (if personal).
 - **For those sharing:** *"For those planning to leave your ROCK for someone else, have you thought about a specific spot? What made that place feel right for your message?"*
 - **For those keeping:** *"For those keeping your ROCK, where do you think you'll place it? Perhaps on a nightstand, a windowsill, a special shelf, or even carry it with you? What's the significance of having it in that particular space?"*

Notes:

- As a variation, use this activity as a closing ritual on the last night of group. Have group members paint kind or inspirational words/phrases about their group experience or personal grief journey. Group members can then choose to take a ROCK home with them as a reminder of their time spent at the Caring Place or contribute one to a group collection if a communal KINDNESS ROCK GARDEN is set up at the site.

For Ongoing Groups:

- If any group members have made ROCKS before, ask them to share what they made before and how it is different from the ROCK they made today. Ask if they kept their last ROCK or put it somewhere—if so, where did they put it? If they kept it, do they still have their ROCK, and where do they keep it?

HIGHMARK.

CARING PLACE 

finding hope in grief

COMPASSION IN ACTION

Activities for Finding Hope in Grief

