

HIGHMARK

CARING PLACE 

finding hope in grief

COMPASSION IN ACTION

Activities for Finding Hope in Grief

L-M





LAST WORD

Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To transition from group time to group closing and allow participants to offer a final reflection on their group experience prior to leaving.

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Group closure

Materials:

- None, but facilitators might consider paper/pen if planning for the Word Cloud adaptation in Notes section.

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Have the group form a circle and think of their LAST WORD for the evening. Below are some statements you can use to start the activity.
 - *“As we prepare to transition out of our time together this evening, I’d like to introduce a quiet activity called LAST WORD. We’ve shared a lot and listened to each other, and this is a nice way to close out the night.”*
 - *“The idea behind LAST WORD is simple: it gives each of us an opportunity to offer one final WORD, or perhaps a VERY SHORT PHRASE, that encapsulates how you’re feeling right now, something you want to leave with the group, or something that resonated with you from our meeting. There’s absolutely no pressure to find the ‘right’ word. It can be something profound, something light, something that sums up your evening, or even just a sound or a word from another language that holds meaning for you. Your WORD is yours alone, and it’s complete in itself.”*
 - *“After you share your WORD, there will be **no explanation needed, and no one will ask you to say more or question your choice.** Your WORD will simply sit with us, held gently by the group, as we move around the circle. This space is about offering your final contribution, without any expectation for elaboration or immediate reaction. It allows us all to absorb and respect each other’s individual ending thought for the night.”*
 - *“Take a moment to reflect and see what WORD, SOUND, or SHORT PHRASE might be sitting with you as we prepare to close.”*

Activity Description:

- Before the sharing starts, take a moment of quiet reflection for everyone to consider their WORD and prepare to listen attentively. This pause will give group members time to think of a WORD and prepare to focus on the WORDS being shared by others. Ask everyone to share one at a time. Remind group members of the **I PASS RULE**. Then invite anyone who feels ready to share their WORD.
- Volunteers may participate. As a volunteer, don't feel like you have to fill the quiet moments with your own WORDS. Allow for gaps of silence while group members may still be thinking.
- Give every member a chance to participate. Respect if someone chooses not to share.
- Allow the activity to unfold at its own pace. Sometimes a WORD may not come to mind immediately, and that's perfectly OK; thoughts often emerge as we listen to others.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow group members to reflect on the WORDS shared in the group.
- Thank the group for participating in the activity.
- Volunteers may offer a summary or reflection of the WORDS that were shared. For example, you might say, *"It was truly moving to hear such heartfelt WORDS,"* or *"Thank you for sharing; it was very meaningful to hear your WORDS."*
- This activity can be very emotional. End with a closing like the Caring Place Pledge to offer familiarity and comfort.

Notes:

- This activity is excellent as a regular weekly closing ritual. Its brevity and power help reinforce consistency and a safe ending.
- When conducting this activity in a circle, the volunteer facilitator can strategically stand in the center. This position helps effectively manage the flow of the activity, ensuring that every participant has an opportunity to be heard. This central presence can help ground the activity for those involved, which is particularly beneficial in children's groups where a stable presence can aid focus and participation.
- **WORD CLOUD—for Last Night:** For groups that meet regularly, group leaders can keep a simple, private record of all the LAST WORDS shared each week, with the group's permission. If you plan to do so, let them know that you'll simply jot them down as they mention them, so they know what you're doing.

- Prior to the final night of the group, these words can be compiled into a WORD CLOUD. This WORD CLOUD can then be printed and given to group members as a tangible keepsake—a visual representation of their collective journey and the shared wisdom and feelings expressed throughout their time together at the Caring Place.
 - Ask staff if you need assistance creating the WORD CLOUD.
- **Visual LAST WORD—for younger groups:** For younger children, or if someone in the group struggles with verbal expression, they could be offered the option to quietly draw a simple symbol or an abstract shape that represents their LAST WORD or FEELING for the evening, holding it up for a moment to share visually. Alternatively, having a VISUAL FEELINGS CHART and having them point to their FEELINGS at the end of the evening is an option.
- **Mindful Moment:** Instead of WORDS, the facilitator could ask for a sound or a gentle movement, emphasizing listening and observation that the group receives or echoes back (leave it up to the group, but some examples could be—Hand Over Heart—Open Hand—Hands Folded—Making a Heart with Their Hands—Thumbs Up—Giving Self a Hug—etc.). You can have the group echo back, which can be fun for younger groups.
- **Animal of the Night:** Instead of a WORD, have them choose an ANIMAL that resonates with them in the moment.
 - *“For example, a Bear might represent strength or comfort—a Bird might symbolize freedom or perspective—an Owl might mean wisdom or observation—a Butterfly, transformation or lightness—a Wolf, connection or solitude—a Mouse, quiet reflection. But your ANIMAL can be anything—real or mythical! The important thing is what it means to you.”*
 - Remind them that they don’t have to share why, just the ANIMAL. For a young group, you can write them down and see if their ANIMAL changes from week to week.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This is appropriate for Introductory or Ongoing Groups to close out each evening. Each time provides a new opportunity for group members to focus and share their experiences in a group meeting or session.
- Consider using the WORD CLOUD or other variations in Notes for an Ongoing Group.

LETTERS TO CARING OTHERS

M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To express their perceived needs and ways that they would like to be supported by people in their lives.

Task/Need:

- 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:

- Paper
- Pens, pencils, or fine-tip markers

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Discuss the uniqueness of each person's grief journey and the unique needs each of us have while grieving.
 - *"Today, we're going to talk about something really important: how we get support when we're going through something tough, like grief. We often hear that grief is different for everyone, and that's absolutely true. Your journey is unique, and what helps one person might not help another."*
- Facilitate a discussion around the influence of significant others—such as parents, family, friends, teachers, or coaches—on one's grief journey. Explore how the statements, questions, and actions of these important individuals can profoundly shape their feelings and overall grief experience.
 - *"We all have special people in our lives—parents, other family members, friends, teachers, coaches—people who really care about us. And these people can have a big influence on how we experience our grief. Think about it: what people say to us, the questions they ask, or the things they do (or don't do) can really impact how we feel when we're missing someone."*
- Discuss the challenge significant people in our lives sometimes face in knowing how to offer support. It's important to acknowledge that even with the best intentions, their efforts may not always feel helpful.
 - *"Sometimes, these caring people in our lives want to help, but they might not always know how to best support us. They might try their best, and sometimes it really helps. Other times, even if their intentions might be good, what they say or do may miss the mark and feel unhelpful. It's not because they don't care; it's often because they don't fully understand your unique needs, or what you're experiencing inside."*

- *“Knowing that, today we’re going to try something that can help bridge that gap. You will have the opportunity to write a LETTER or draw something to reflect your feelings and your grief journey.”*

Activity Description:

- Inform the group members that they will be writing a LETTER about their grief.
 - *“This LETTER won’t necessarily be sent, though you’ll have the choice. It’s a way for you to put down on paper what it’s truly like for you right now, and how others could best support you. It’s about you becoming clearer about what you need and helping others understand your world after your loss. Think of it as a GUIDE, or even a heartfelt explanation, To SOMEONE WHO TRULY CARES but might need a little help knowing what to do or say.”*
- Have the group members write their LETTERS TO THE PEOPLE IN THEIR LIVES who they feel can be supportive of them.
 - *“You can write to one specific person, or even a few people. Or, if it feels better, you can write a LETTER TO A ‘CARING OTHER’ in general, even if you don’t have a specific person in mind right now. Just focus on putting your thoughts down.”*
- Ask group members to write what would be helpful in supporting them in their grief or what they wished others understood about them.
- Allow a generous amount of time for writing, observing group dynamics. Once most seem done, bring the group back together for processing.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Prompt the group to discuss any feelings that came up for them as they wrote their LETTERS.
 - *“As you were writing, what feelings came up for you?”*
 - *“Were there any surprises, or did something feel really important to put down on paper?”*
 - *“Was writing the LETTER easy or difficult for you today?”*
 - Remember to validate all feelings and ask the group if others had the same feelings. Allow time to discuss commonalities or differences.
- Invite group members to share examples of individuals they consider to be significant sources of support.
 - *“You wrote your LETTER TO ‘CARING OTHERS.’ As you think about people in your life, are there any individuals that came to mind who you truly see*

as potential sources of support you would consider sharing something like this with?”

- Ask what their plans are for the LETTER once they finish writing it.
 - *“Now that you’ve written this LETTER, what are your thoughts about it? Do you have a plan for it? Some people might decide to keep it private; others might want to share it. There’s no pressure at all to do anything with it that doesn’t feel right to you.”*
- Encourage a discussion about support strategies included in the letters.
 - *“If you’re comfortable, would you like to share some of the strategies you came up with? You don’t have to reveal any personal details you’d prefer to keep private. For example, do you find it helpful to have space when you’re upset, or would you prefer someone to sit with you and listen? Is talking about your person supportive, or do you prefer to be distracted?”* Listen for any common themes or shared insights that emerge from the conversation about what truly helps.
- Give group members the opportunity to share their letter in the group meeting, or seal it and take it home to share with somebody in their lives.

Notes:

- Similar to the poster activities that focus on identifying changes in different environments (such as home, school, or self), the format of this exercise can be adapted. Depending on the group’s observed willingness to share openly and their preference for writing, the facilitator can choose to implement it as either a larger GROUP POSTER ACTIVITY or an INDIVIDUAL LETTER-WRITING session.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity is great for Ongoing Groups as Group participants may have discovered additional supports since their last Session. If they have done this in an Introductory Group as well, facilitate a discussion about the previous LETTER they wrote using the following prompts:
 - *“Did anyone choose to share their LETTER with anyone? If so, how was the letter received by the individual(s) who you shared it with?”*
 - *“Did sharing the LETTER lead to a better understanding or enhanced support from those people?”*
 - *“For those who kept it to themselves, did writing down your feelings and thoughts help? Did you have a conversation about it without sharing the LETTER?”*
 - *“Was there anything different you put in your LETTER today from the last LETTER? Anything different or the same you would want to share?”*

LETTERS TO THE FUTURE YOU

M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To project oneself into the future and imagine possibilities, while keeping in mind how their grief journey may shape them in the future.

Task/Need:

- Helping them understand who they are after their loss
- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Paper
- Pens, pencils, or fine-tip markers

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Explain to the group that they're going to write a LETTER to themselves in the future.
 - *"Today, we're going to try something a little different, something that asks us to look both backward and forward at the same time. We've been together in this space, supporting each other as we navigate the really tough and sometimes confusing paths of grief."*
- To begin, invite the group to imagine themselves 10 years in the future. For adult groups, especially those with older members, consider adjusting to a shorter timeframe or simply referring to "the future" to maintain relevance and engagement.
 - *"Grief often makes us feel stuck, or like our whole world has changed in ways we never expected. It can sometimes make it hard to even imagine tomorrow, let alone far into the future. But even amidst pain, we continue to grow and evolve."*
 - *"I'm going to invite you to take a moment and imagine yourself some years from now. Think about where you'll be, who you'll be, and how your life might have shifted. When we experience loss, it changes us, sometimes in ways we don't fully understand yet. This activity is a chance to acknowledge that process, and to connect with the person you're becoming."*
- For Middle and Teen groups, brainstorm what they expect to be doing, what they will have learned, and what accomplishments they will achieve as adults.
 - *"Let's imagine it's [for example, 5] years from now. You're a bit older; you've experienced more things. What do you think you'll be doing?"*

Maybe you're in high school, or starting college, or maybe you've discovered a new hobby or a new passion. How do you think you'll be spending your time? What do you hope you will have learned about yourself, especially in how you've continued to live with your grief?"

- *"What job or path might you be exploring?"*
- *"What new adventures will you have had?"*
- *"What places will you have visited or traveled to?"*
- *"Where do you think you'll live?"*
- *"What challenges will you have overcome?"*
- *"What wisdom will you have gathered along the way?"*
- For Adult groups, discuss how and where they see themselves in the future.
 - *"Let's envision FUTURE YOU—perhaps [for example, 5] years from now. Imagine yourself integrating your grief into your life story. What does that look like? What have you learned? How have you continued to honor the person you lost, even as your life has moved forward?"*
 - *"Are there places you hope to travel or experiences you want to have?"*
 - *"What does 'Making Meaning' of your loss look like for your future self? How has it impacted your perspective on life, relationships, or purpose?"*
 - *"What hopes do you hold for yourself, your children, or grandchildren, shaped by the depth of your own journey?"*

Activity Description:

- Have group members write a LETTER TO THEIR FUTURE SELVES (1, 5, 10, or 15 years in the future).
- Include types of things discussed in the activity set-up. Have them explain to their future selves how it feels to be them today and what they hope it will be like to be them as older individuals.
- Point out any observations as the group writes. For example, *"You all seemed very focused."* Or, *"It seems hard to imagine yourself in the future."*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Discuss the activity and the thoughts and feelings it evoked.
 - *"What were some initial thoughts or feelings that came up for you as you began to imagine your future self and write your LETTER?"*
 - *"Did it feel hopeful, challenging, maybe a bit sad, or even surprising?"*

- *“What was it like to write a LETTER to yourself? What was hard or easy about it?”*
- *“How has your experience with grief shaped your future self?”*
- Remember to validate all feelings and observe any commonalities or themes that emerge from the conversation.
- Be curious if the activity led to any new perspectives for the group members, especially related to their grief journey.
 - *“This activity intentionally asks us to look ahead, but we do so through the lens of our grief journey. How did your experience with grief—your loss, your feelings today, what you’ve learned—shape what you wrote to your future self? Did you notice your grief showing up in your hopes, your questions, or even your advice to yourself?”*
 - *“Did imagining yourself in the future, with this experience of grief integrated into who you are, give you any new perspectives today? Perhaps about what matters, or what you want to carry forward?”*
 - *“If there’s one thing you’re leaving with from this activity today—maybe a thought, a feeling, or a sense of peace—what would that key takeaway be for you?”*
- Ask the group what they will do with their LETTER.
 - Some may want to seal it and open it later, or keep it somewhere safe to revisit, or some may choose to shred it once they have captured their thoughts.

Notes:

- Adjust the time frame (for example, 1–3 years), and the depth of the questions, to be age appropriate. For example, it might be overwhelming or too abstract for younger children to visualize 10 years into the future.
- Adults might also prefer shorter timeframes if 10 years feels too distant.
- Assess the group’s readiness for this type of activity—this may not be a good option for those whose death occurred recently. Additionally, this would not be an activity to do early on in a group—it would be an activity for later on in the group progression after strong group connections are made.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity may be better suited for Ongoing Groups as those in Introductory Groups may have difficulty projecting into the future due to the raw nature of their grief. Ensure there is a strong group connection prior to considering this, as it might increase group members’ comfortability in sharing their LETTER within the group.

LIFE BEFORE AND AFTER

M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To encourage the group members to talk about the many different areas of their lives that have changed since the death of their person.

Task/Need:

- Helping them understand who they are after their loss
- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Markers
 - Choose two colors—one color to use for BEFORE THE PERSON DIED and one to use for AFTER THE PERSON DIED.
- Easel, whiteboard, or anything with a flat surface
- Prepare large Post-it sheets with distinct headings representing various facets of the children/teen/adult's lives (for example, *Family—Friends—School—Home—Holidays—Spirituality—Beliefs/Values*)
 - Each sheet should feature two columns: one for BEFORE THEIR PERSON DIED and another for AFTER THEIR PERSON DIED
 - Ensure ample space is left between each entry to allow for additional contributions and thoughts

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin with acknowledging that when someone important dies, it changes many things, not just how we feel.
 - *“When a family member dies, it’s not just our hearts that change, but other parts of our lives also. Things that felt normal or familiar can suddenly feel very different. Today, we’re going to think about those changes together.”*
- Let them know this activity is about noticing and sharing those changes.
 - *“Today we’re going to look at different areas of our lives and talk about how they were BEFORE THE DEATH, and how they feel AFTER THE DEATH. This helps us understand all the big and small ways grief has impacted our life.”*
- Point to the easel sheets and explain the categories.
 - *“You’ll see we have headings for different parts of life like Family—Friends—School—Holidays. Under each one, there’s a space to write BEFORE and AFTER. We might even add new headings if you think of other important areas.”*

- *“There are no right or wrong answers here. Your experiences are yours, and they’re important. Some changes might feel very hard, some might be small shifts, and some might even feel OK. We just want to explore them.”*
- Let them know it’s a shared activity, but they only need to share what feels comfortable.
 - *“We’ll work together, and I’ll invite you to share your ideas or write them down. You can always pass if you’re not ready to share something. Sometimes it can just be helpful to reflect on them yourselves.”*

Activity Description:

- Take each major heading (*Family—Friends—School—etc.*) one at a time.
 - *“Let’s start with Family. BEFORE THE DEATH, how might Family have looked or felt? What might have been different? And now, AFTER THE DEATH, how might Family look or feel? What has changed?”*
 - As group members offer ideas (verbally or by inviting them to write on the paper), jot them down in the appropriate BEFORE or AFTER column for that category.
 - Encourage quiet reflection and be comfortable with silence: If there’s silence, simply invite them to think quietly for a moment. Not everyone needs to speak for every category.
- Once a few ideas are up for a category, use their responses to start a conversation.
 - *“I see someone mentioned ‘Family Dinners’ BEFORE, and ‘Fewer People at the Table’ AFTER. Can anyone relate to that? What does that feel like?”*
 - *“It looks like ‘Spending Time with Friends’ might be different for a few of you. What are some of those differences?”*
- Identify common themes: Look for things that several group members mention and point out those connections.
 - *“It seems like a lot of us noticed changes in ‘Holidays’. That’s a very common experience. What makes those changes particularly hard, or sometimes, surprisingly OK?”*
- If the conversation deepens and feels comfortable, gently guide it towards feelings and how they’re managing. *Do not force this if the group is hesitant.*
 - *“When you think about these changes in ‘Home’, what feelings come up for you? And have any of you found ways to help yourselves when those changes feel overwhelming?”*
 - *“Are there any new ways you’ve found to deal with these changes, big or small?”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Acknowledge similarities: Quickly review the easel sheets, highlighting any common responses or shared changes.
 - *“Look at how many of us have experienced similar changes in areas like ‘Holidays’ or ‘Family Time’. It shows that you’re not alone in these shifts that grief brings.”*
- Emphasize that acknowledging these changes is a significant step.
 - *“It takes a lot of courage to talk about all these BEFORE and AFTER moments. It’s OK for things to be different, and it’s brave to recognize that.”*
- Offer the option for continued reflection.
 - *“Thank you all for sharing your thoughts and helping create these important lists. Would everyone be comfortable with us keeping these up throughout our Session? This way, you’ll have the opportunity to add any new thoughts that come to mind.”*
 - Remove Post-it sheets and keep in a safe place if other group meetings will be occurring before your group’s next meeting.
 - Remember to put Post-it sheets back out before group members enter the room for the next meeting
 - If the group is OK with this, revisit after check-ins in upcoming weeks.

Notes:

- **Past—Present—Future Variation:** To further explore the meaning of the loss, this activity can be expanded to include a reflection on the Past, Present and Future.
 - Divide the paper into three columns labeled as such and encourage group members to share their thoughts and feelings about each time.
- Add or remove categories depending on the age group (for adults, remove school and perhaps replace with work or job).

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity is valuable for both Introductory and Ongoing Sessions. Repeating it acknowledges that individuals’ lives and circumstances are constantly evolving, and these consistent changes impact their grief journey. Examples include transitioning to a new school, engaging in a different sport, or experiencing bullying related to the death of their person.
 - In an Ongoing Group, you can ask if they remembered doing the activity before, and if so, what is different this time from last time.
 - In an Ongoing Group, you can use the variation above of the Past, Present and Future.

LIFE CERTIFICATE—HONORING THEIR LEGACY

M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To provide a structured and supportive way for group members to reflect on and share about the person who died, focusing on positive memories, attributes, and their ongoing impact. To create a safe space for remembrance and personal expression, fostering connection within the group.

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:

- Printed copies of the LIFE CERTIFICATE document (*one per group member*) and additional paper if they need more space (*see end of this activity*)
- Pencils, pens, or markers
- Colored pencils or crayons (*optional, for personalizing the certificates*)
- Clipboards or sturdy surfaces for writing (*optional*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin by explaining that this activity is an opportunity to thoughtfully remember and honor the special person in their lives who has died.
- Introduce the LIFE CERTIFICATE to capture and celebrate different aspects of that person's life and the ongoing connection they share. Emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers, and the goal is personal reflection.
- Reiterate that sharing is optional and at their comfort level, reinforcing the **I PASS RULE**.
- Explain that the questions on the CERTIFICATE encourage looking at the person's unique qualities, their relationship with them, and how they carry their person's memory forward.

Activity Description:

- Distribute a LIFE CERTIFICATE worksheet to each group member along with writing materials.
- Instruct the group members to take their time reading each section of the CERTIFICATE.
- Ask them to reflect on the prompts and fill in the blanks/boxes with their thoughts, memories, and feelings about the person they are honoring. Encourage them to be as detailed or brief as they feel comfortable.

- Allow for a dedicated amount of time for individual reflection and writing (for example, 15–20 minutes, adjusting based on the group’s age and engagement). Volunteers should circulate to offer gentle encouragement or clarify instructions if needed.
 - Provide additional paper if needed; also note that if they would like to draw their response instead of writing, that is an option.
- Once participants have had sufficient time, invite those who wish to share part or all of their completed LIFE CERTIFICATE with the group.
- During sharing, volunteers can offer brief, supportive acknowledgements, such as *“Thank you for sharing that”* or *“It sounds like they were a very special person.”* Allow other group participants to ask questions and encourage comments to and from each other.
- Make connections when possible.
 - *“Wow, I noticed several of you described your person as...”*
 - *“It seems like a lot of your special people enjoyed the same hobby.”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- After the sharing portion (or if some choose not to share, acknowledge their choice), guide a gentle discussion:
 - *“What was it like to fill out this LIFE CERTIFICATE?”*
 - *“Were there any parts that felt especially meaningful to you?”*
 - *“Did reflecting on these prompts bring up any new thoughts or feelings about your special person?”*
 - *“Is there anything that someone shared today that resonated with you or reminded you of your own person?”*
- Reinforce that grief is a process, and activities like this can be a helpful way to keep their loved one’s memory alive and acknowledge their lasting impact.

Notes:

- For younger children or those who struggle with writing, volunteers can act as scribes, carefully recording what the child says onto their CERTIFICATE.
- Emphasize that the LIFE CERTIFICATE is a personal document and group members can keep it as a memento if they wish.
- Encourage group members that it’s OK if they don’t have an answer for every single box on the CERTIFICATE; the focus is on what feels true and meaningful to them at this moment.

For Ongoing Groups:

- No additional adaptation is needed, as different group members bring their own experiences and backgrounds, which can change the nature of the activity.

LIFE CERTIFICATE

(Name of Person)

How I would describe them:

Gifts I received from them:
(can be values, skills or life lessons)

What I appreciate or love about them:

Their favorite hobby/song/place:

If I had one more day with them,
we would:

What they appreciated about me:

A special time with them was:

How I take care of myself
when I miss them:

LIGHTHOUSE

M—T

Suggested Age Group(s): Middle, Teen

Purpose: To have the group members think about the people and things that make up their support system.

Task/Need:

- Helping them understand who they are after their loss
- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Paper
- Crayons, markers, colored pencils, or paint
- Magazine images, glue sticks (*optional*)
- Pictures of lighthouses for reference (*optional*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin by talking generally about help and guidance.
 - *“When things are difficult, or you’re feeling lost, it’s really helpful to know who or what guides you. These are the people or things that offer you support, comfort, or just help you feel less alone. Sometimes it’s a person, sometimes it’s an idea or a feeling.”*
- Introduce the LIGHTHOUSE metaphor through a visualization.
 - *“I want you to imagine for a moment... You’re out at sea, and it’s a stormy, dark night. The waves are big, and you might feel a little lost and scared. Then, far off in the distance, you see a powerful, steady beam of light that’s coming from a LIGHTHOUSE. That light shows you the way to safety, guides you through the storm, and promises that if you keep going, there’s a warm, safe place waiting for you on land.”*
 - *“In our lives, especially when we’re grieving, we also have our own LIGHTHOUSES. These are the people, the strengths, the memories, or the beliefs that help guide us, comfort us, and remind us that we’re not truly lost. They are our sources of light when things feel dark.”*
- Clearly state what they’ll be creating during the activity today. Below is some language you may use.
 - *“Today, we’re going to create our own personal LIGHTHOUSE OF SUPPORT. You’ll use art supplies to draw, color, or collage your LIGHTHOUSE. Then, you’ll think about the people, qualities, or ideas that are your LIGHTS—your sources of support—and add those words or pictures to your artwork.”*

- *“You can draw, or you can look through these magazines for pictures or words that represent your LIGHTS and glue them onto your LIGHTHOUSE.”*

Activity Description:

- Start drawing/creating the LIGHTHOUSE:
 - *“Begin by drawing, coloring, or making a collage of your LIGHTHOUSE on your paper. Think about what your LIGHTHOUSE looks like. Is it tall and strong? Does it have a bright, welcoming light?”*
- Once the basic LIGHTHOUSE shape is taking form, guide them to add their sources of support.
 - *“Now, think about those people, feelings, or beliefs that are your LIGHTS. Who are the people who help you, comfort you, or just make you feel safe? What are some words or ideas that guide you, like ‘Hope’—‘Love’—‘Memories’—‘Strength’—‘Pets’ or even ‘Music’ or ‘Nature’?”*
 - *“Write or draw those names, words, or images on or around your LIGHTHOUSE. Maybe each window of your LIGHTHOUSE is a different support, or the LIGHT coming from the top is made of different guiding words.”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Gently invite participants to share their creations if they like.
 - *“OK everyone, put your supplies down for a moment. We’re now going to take some time to look at each other’s amazing LIGHTHOUSES OF SUPPORT. If you’d like to, you’re welcome to share your picture and tell us a little bit about who or what your LIGHTHOUSE represents for you.”*
- When someone shares, focus the discussion on identifying and appreciating their support system, while also making connections when possible. Prompt them to also discuss how it felt to make their LIGHTHOUSE.
 - *“Thank you for sharing your beautiful LIGHTHOUSE. Could you tell us about one or two of the LIGHTS you included—who helps guide you, or what ideas bring you comfort when you’re in a ‘STORM’?”*
 - *“As you were thinking about these important people and ideas, and putting them onto your paper, how did that feel? Was it easy, or was it hard? Did you learn anything new about your own support system?”*
 - *“Did anything surprise you as you were drawing or thinking about your LIGHTHOUSE?”*
 - *“It’s interesting, [group member], that you mentioned your grandparent, and [another group member] also mentioned their grandparent. It shows how important family can be as a LIGHT.”*

- Thank the group for sharing their Lighthouses.
 - *“Thank you to everyone who shared their LIGHTHOUSES and their stories. It takes courage to create and to share. I hope seeing all these LIGHTHOUSES reminds you that you’re not alone, and that there are many sources of LIGHT for all of us.”*

Notes:

- This activity allows group members to visualize and identify their support systems in a creative and metaphorical way, so consider whether your group is developmentally able to grasp that concept.
- Remember that “guidance” and “support” can come from unexpected places for children (for example, a pet, a special song, a beloved cartoon character). Acknowledge all forms of support.
- Some children may not draw a traditional LIGHTHOUSE; their interpretation might be more abstract. Encourage their unique vision!

For Ongoing Groups:

- If the group has done this activity previously, encourage them to compare and contrast their current LIGHTHOUSE creation with their past one. This can spark discussion about personal growth, changes in perspective, or evolving understanding. You may also incorporate ideas like the ones below:
 - *“Today, we’re going to think about how our LIGHTHOUSES might have changed over time. Your LIGHTHOUSE OF SUPPORT might look different now than it did a few weeks or months ago. Have some new LIGHTS appeared? Have some grown brighter, or maybe dimmed? We can also think about how you have become a stronger LIGHTHOUSE for yourself.”*
 - *“Even when our LIGHTHOUSES stay the same, our ability to see and use their light can change. Maybe you’ve learned to lean on some of your supports more, or you’ve found new ways to get strength from them.”*
 - *“Have any new people, hobbies, or beliefs become a LIGHT for you recently?”*
 - *“How has your relationship with the people in your LIGHTHOUSE changed? Are you able to ask for help differently now?”*
 - *“Are you becoming more of a LIGHTHOUSE for yourself? What inner strengths help guide you now?”*

MEMORIAL CANDLE

Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To create a special, personalized candle as a memorial for their loved one, helping them feel connected to their memory.

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- For Design:
 - Plain white copy paper (*for drawing on first*)
 - White tissue paper (*pre-cut into pieces slightly smaller than the CANDLE's circumference, or easy for volunteers to cut*)
 - Markers or Sharpies (*colorful!*)
 - Tape (*masking tape is good, or artist tape*)
- For CANDLE Transfer (*Volunteer-Assisted*):
 - White pillar CANDLE (*smooth surface works best*)
 - Wax paper (*pre-cut into rectangles larger than the candle height and circumference*)
 - Embossing craft gun (*often called a "heat tool"*)
 - Safe, heat-resistant surface for working (*a ceramic tile, cutting board, etc.*)
 - Scissors for trimming tissue paper designs (*optional*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin the group session by talking with members about memories they have of their loved one.
 - *"Today, we're going to create something very special: a MEMORIAL CANDLE in honor of the person we miss. CANDLES can bring light, warmth, and peace, and they're a lovely way to remember someone important to us."*
 - *"To start, let's take a few moments to think about some of the good memories we have of our loved ones. What was their favorite color? What did they love to do? Is there a special symbol, an image, or a short phrase that reminds you of them?"* Allow time for the group to share.
- Introduce the design process.
 - *"You'll be designing your CANDLE WRAP on a special, thin tissue paper. This is your chance to use colors, drawings, and words to create something unique that reminds you of your loved one or honors their memory. There's no right or wrong way to do this. It's your MEMORIAL CANDLE."*

Activity Description:

- Explain creating their design:
 - *“First, we’re going to create our design. To make sure your markers don’t bleed through and are easy to use, take a piece of white copy paper and carefully tape your tissue paper onto it.”* (Demonstrate this, using a few small pieces of masking tape at the corners.) *“Make sure the tissue paper lies flat.”*
 - *“Now, using the markers and your memories, design your tissue paper. You can draw pictures, write words, their name, important dates, symbols that remind you of them—anything that you like. Remember to leave space if you’re writing their name, or anything else, as the design will wrap around the CANDLE.”*
- As they’re creating, take notice and ask open-ended questions about what they’re adding. When they’re done, let them know that a volunteer can help them with the next step.
- Volunteers should assist them with the steps below:
 - **Position Tissue Paper:** Carefully place the designed tissue paper around the white pillar candle, design facing outwards. Smooth it gently. Use a tiny bit of tape on the back seam of the tissue paper to hold it temporarily in place if needed or simply hold it securely.
 - **Wrap with Wax Paper:** Take a piece of wax paper (it should be larger than the CANDLE and tissue paper design). Wrap it tightly around the CANDLE, covering the tissue paper design completely. Pull it taut and hold it firmly.
- **Heat Transfer—VOLUNTEERS COMPLETE THIS STEP FOR SAFETY**
 - Hold the embossing gun about an inch or two away from the wax paper.
 - SLOWLY and steadily move the heat gun over the wax paper where the tissue paper design is underneath. You’ll see the colors from the tissue paper design appear brighter and more vibrant through the wax paper, and the wax paper will look like it’s becoming translucent/melding into the candle wax.
 - Work in small sections for 20–30 seconds each, moving the gun continuously to prevent scorching. *The goal is for the heat to melt the candle wax just enough so that it absorbs the ink from the tissue paper.*
 - **Volunteer Tip:** If the design looks dull, you need more heat. If it looks shiny/scorch-y, you’ve used too much heat. Practice once before the activity!

- **Check and Remove Wax Paper:** Once the entire design looks absorbed/vibrant and smooth, *carefully and slowly* peel back the wax paper.
 - ***If parts of the design are not fully adhered or are dull:*** Replace the wax paper and apply more heat to those specific spots.
- Once it looks good (have the group member approve), hand it back to them once it has cooled down.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Once all CANDLES are made, bring the group back together with their finished creations.
 - *“Now you all have your beautiful, personalized MEMORIAL CANDLES. They are a special symbol of your love and memory for your person. Would anyone like to share their CANDLE and tell us what you put on it, or a memory that came to mind while you were making it?”*
 - *“How did it feel to create this special CANDLE? Was it a peaceful feeling, or did it bring up lots of emotions?”*
- Offer suggestions on *when* and *how* they might use their CANDLE, with permission from their caring adult. Thank the group for sharing.
 - *“Maybe you can light your CANDLE at home on special occasions like holidays, birthdays, or anniversaries that were important to your loved one. Or you can light it whenever you are thinking of them, whenever you feel a little sad and want some comfort, or simply when you want to feel their memory near.”*
 - *“These CANDLES are a beautiful way to show that even though someone isn’t physically here, they continue to be a special part of our lives, and their memory shines brightly through us.”*
 - *“Thank you all for sharing your creativity and your memories today. These CANDLES are a wonderful testament to the lasting love you carry.”*

Notes:

- Make a TEST CANDLE so you have an example to show, as well as ensure you know how to use the embossing/heat gun.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This is appropriate for Introductory Sessions or Ongoing Sessions.
 - For Ongoing Groups, you can adapt it with the following suggestions:
 - If they have made a MEMORIAL CANDLE before, ask if they still have it and if so, when they use it, and how the one they made today is different from or the same as the CANDLE they made before.
 - Use different materials to make a MEMORIAL CANDLE.

MEMORIAL MARKERS

Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To memorialize the family member with a grave/memorial marker or another meaningful way of their choice.

Task/Need:

- Telling their story
- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died
- Making meaning of the loss
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Construction paper
- Scissors
- Markers
- Glue

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin by acknowledging that people remember their loved ones in many ways.
- Ask the group how they memorialize, remember, or honor their person who died. Where do they go to honor their person? What special places do they have at home or somewhere else to remember their person?
- Explain to the group that they are going to create their own personal MEMORIAL MARKER or TRIBUTE for their person who died. The MEMORIAL MARKER or TRIBUTE can include what they love about their person, what they want people to know about them, and how they want to keep their memory alive.

Activity Description:

- Tell the group that they can create whatever they want, like a GRAVE MARKER, or it could be a symbol, a picture, words, or anything else that represents their loved one and how they want to remember them.
- Suggest that they use words, pictures, etc., to decorate their MEMORIAL MARKERS.
- Have the group think about these questions to help them start their MARKERS:
 - What shapes can be used for their MEMORIAL MARKERS?
 - How would we know that the MARKER was for your family member?
 - What would you like people to know about the person who died?

- What was unique about your person?
- What was their favorite color, hobby, or song?
- What words or pictures help you remember them best?
- What color seems most appropriate?

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Offer group members the opportunity to share the MEMORIAL MARKER or other TRIBUTE they created with the rest of the group.
- Remember to use the Listening/Facilitation Statements. For example, *“Tell me more about your MEMORIAL and what it reminds you of about your special person?”*
- Other questions to consider:
 - *“What did you choose to put on it, and why was that important to you?”*
 - *“What feelings come up for you when you look at your MEMORIAL?”*
- Validate all forms of memorialization. Not all group members may have a grave site based on their personal beliefs. Perhaps they have a special place in their home, an urn, or place they go in the community. It’s OK if a group member shares that they look at photos, plant flowers, etc. to remember their person.
- How is this MARKER/TRIBUTE similar to or different than their special person’s other MARKER or TRIBUTE?
- Point out commonalities or themes.
- Talk about what they will do with their MEMORIAL MARKERS or TRIBUTES or where they will keep them.
- What do they think about having their own PERSONAL MARKER for their person who died?
- Thank the group for sharing their creations.

Notes:

- Keep in mind that not all cultures or religions use grave markers, and not all families use burial sites. Be mindful of using inclusive language like MEMORIALS, TRIBUTES, SPECIAL PLACES, etc.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This can be done in either an Introductory or Ongoing Group; if using in an Ongoing Group, consider these suggestions:
 - Ask the group how their understanding or remembrance of their person has changed since they first came to the Caring Place.
 - Be curious if the group members visit their person's SPECIAL PLACE more, less, or the same amount of time.
 - How is the MEMORIAL MARKER they made this time the same or different than one they made before?
 - Have their thoughts or feelings about memorializing their person changed since the last time they did this activity?

MEMORIAL STONE JAR

Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To build a sense of community within the group, to help members feel they are not alone in their grief, and to collectively honor their loved ones in a visible, shared way.

Task/Need:

- Telling their story
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died
- Helping them understand who they are after the loss
- Developing coping skills and supports
- Group closure

Materials:

- Clear glass JAR (*large enough to hold all the STONES from the group*)
- Smooth STONES (*one per participant, plus a few extras*)
- Sharpies or acrylic markers
- Mod Podge Hi-Shine Spray Sealant (*optional*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Start by acknowledging that grief can be lonely, but you don't have to experience it alone. You might consider using the statement below:
 - *"Grief can sometimes feel like a very lonely road. We all miss someone special, and sometimes it feels like nobody else understands exactly how we feel. But in this group, we come together because we share a similar journey, even though each of our paths is unique."*
- Introduce the symbolism of the STONES and JARS.
 - *"Today, we're going to create something together called a MEMORIAL STONE JAR. This JAR will become a visual reminder that we're not alone. Each ROCK represents a person we love and miss, and together in this JAR, they create a symbol of our shared journey and the community we're building here."*
- Explain the process.
 - *"Each of you will get a smooth STONE and some colorful Sharpies. On your STONE, you can write the name of your loved one or draw a small symbol that reminds you of them, or a single word that describes how you remember them. It's entirely up to you what you put on your STONE. Then, we'll gently place all our STONES into this special JAR, creating our collective MEMORIAL STONE JAR."*

- *“What you put on your STONE is very personal. You only need to share if you feel comfortable. The most important thing is the feeling of creating something together that acknowledges our losses and builds our community.”*

Activity Description:

- Give each group member a STONE. Have materials available on the table so that all group members can access them.
- Let them know that they can make their STONE whatever they like it to be.
 - *“Take a moment to think about your loved one. What would you like to put on your STONE? You could write their name, or a nickname, or maybe just one word that reminds you of them (like ‘Love’—‘Joy’—‘Strong’), or a simple symbol like a heart or a star. Take your time and feel free to decorate it however you like.”*
- As they’re creating, ask open-ended questions about what they are putting on their STONE.
- Once most people have finished their STONE, hold up the large JAR or Container.
 - *“When you’re ready, we’re going to place our STONES into the JAR. When it’s your turn, you can briefly say what you wrote or drew on your STONE, or you can simply place your STONE quietly into the JAR. Both ways are perfectly OK.”*
 - If they show their STONE before placing it in the JAR, ask open-ended questions:
 - *“Can you tell us about your STONE?”*
 - *“How does what you drew remind you of your person?”*
- Make connections when possible and allow other group members to ask questions about each other’s STONES.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Once all the STONES are in, hold up the JAR (or point to it if it’s too heavy to lift safely).
 - *“Look at our MEMORIAL STONE JAR now! Each one of these STONES represents someone incredibly important, and it reminds us that while our grief is personal, we are also part of a larger community here, united by love and loss.”*

- Reinforce the idea that they're not alone in their grief.
 - “Seeing all these STONES together helps us remember that even when we feel alone, there are others around us who understand and are on a similar journey. You are not alone in your grief.”
 - “This JAR now belongs to our group. We will keep it here in our room as a reminder of our time together and the special bond we share.”
 - “We as a group can either leave the JAR here, for other groups to add to it, or decide to take home our individual STONES on the last night—as a reminder of what we all did here together.”
 - If they decide to leave it, you can share: *“This JAR is just starting its journey! We’re going to leave this JAR right here in this room. That way, future groups of grieving kids will add their STONES, and our JAR will continue to grow, showing just how big and supportive our caring community really is. It’s a way of saying, ‘We’ve been here, we understand, and you’re part of this too.’ If you come back for an Ongoing Group, you can check to see if it has grown!”*
 - *“It also means that even when we leave this room, our connections and memories are still part of this bigger story of support.”*

Notes:

- Although you may ask the entire group to make a collective decision; allowing individual choice is important as well. If someone truly wishes to take their STONE home immediately, allow it. It's their MEMORIAL. You can then reiterate that the communal JAR serves a different purpose.
- If they're taking it home, it may be helpful to coat or spray the STONE with a sealant (Mod Podge Hi-Shine Spray Sealant works well).

For Ongoing Groups:

- This is appropriate for Introductory Sessions or Ongoing Sessions.
- For Ongoing Sessions:
 - Ask if they have the STONE they made before. If participants still have their previous STONE, invite them to bring it in. If not, simply encourage them to remember the STONE they made and what they put on it.
 - Give alternative options—
 - **New Perspective/Memory:** Instead of another MEMORIAL to the same person, have them create a second STONE that represents a new feeling, a deeper memory, a lesson learned, or even a different aspect of their loved one's personality they want to honor.

- *“Last time, we honored our loved one with one STONE. This time, as we’ve journeyed further in our grief, let’s create a second STONE for them. This one can represent something new you’ve realized about your connection, a strength you’ve found because of them, or perhaps a different special memory you now carry. Think of it as adding a new layer to our MEMORIAL JAR, showing how our understanding of our loved ones and our grief grows.”*
- **Gratitude/Support Stone:** Shift the focus slightly.
 - *“This time, let’s make a STONE that honors something specific you’re grateful for in your loved one’s life or in your memory of them. Or perhaps, create a STONE to honor someone or something that has been a new source of support for you in your grief journey (a friend, a hobby, a special place).”*

MEMORY & CELEBRATION TABLE

P—Y—M

Suggested Groups: Preschool, Young, Middle

Purpose: To offer children a safe space to acknowledge changes related to significant dates and reflect on cherished memories of loved ones, while also creating new, comforting traditions within the group.

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:

- Wooden blocks
- PAPER PLATES (*to be decorated*)
- Large roll of paper (*butcher paper, plain craft paper, or newspaper works well for covering the TABLE*)
- Crayons/markers
- Scissors
- Old magazines or printed pictures of food, objects, or CELEBRATION items
- Glue sticks or tape

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Before leading this activity, consider the time of year and any widely recognized holidays, cultural festivals, or significant personal CELEBRATION days (*birthdays, anniversaries, special cultural events, etc.*) that might be approaching or recently passed.
- Emphasize that a “special occasion” can be anything significant to their particular family—not just traditional holidays. This immediately opens the door for inclusiveness for diverse cultural, religious, and family backgrounds.
- Introduce the activity by talking about CELEBRATIONS:
 - “As we know, sometimes there are special times of year—like holidays, birthdays, or unique family traditions—that can bring up lots of different feelings for us, especially when someone important isn’t here anymore. Today, we’re going to create something special together: our very own MEMORY & CELEBRATION TABLE.”
 - “We know that every family celebrates in their own special way, or has their own special traditions, or even their own ‘Special Days.’ Some of us might think of big holidays like Thanksgiving, Hannukah, Christmas, or

Diwali. Others might think of family birthdays, cultural festivals, or even a Family Game Night that was super special.”

- Ask the children about their CELEBRATIONS and traditions.
 - *“Let’s talk a little bit about traditions. Does anyone have a family tradition they’d like to share, big or small? Maybe a special meal, a particular song, a game you play, or even something unique your family always does on a special day?”*
- Acknowledge that the holidays have likely changed since their family member died and talk about the new CELEBRATION that they as a group will put together.
 - *“Sometimes, when someone we love dies, these special occasions can feel really different. Things might not be the same, and that’s OK. It’s normal for things to change. Today, we’re going to build a TABLE where we can put all our MEMORIES, our feelings about what’s changed, and even dream up some new ways to honor those we miss and celebrate special times.”*
- Let them know that they’re going to work together in different ways to help build the TABLE and create the special CELEBRATION.
 - *“For our MEMORY & CELEBRATION TABLE, we’re going to work in teams, like different chefs preparing a special meal! You can choose which ‘job’ sounds most interesting to you today.”*
 - Clearly outline the options and help children decide based on their stated interest. (*“Who likes building? Who likes drawing and being creative with colors? Who likes cutting or finding pictures?”*)
 - Let them know that they can also take turns doing things if the group isn’t sure. They can help build the TABLE, and then also help decorate or find the foods they want to put on the TABLE.

Activity Description:

- A small group builds the TABLE structure using blocks. Encourage them to think about how tall or wide they want their TABLE to be, and how it needs to be big and strong enough to hold all their MEMORIES.
- Another group uses PAPER PLATES, crayons, markers, and (optionally) magazines/pictures to create items that represent favorite foods, decorations, or symbols of special occasions. *“This group is going to fill our TABLE with PLATES of all the special foods and decorations! Think about what you or your loved one enjoyed—it could be anything!”*
- A third group (or everyone if the group is small) works on the large roll of paper, which will become the MEMORY CLOTH or CELEBRATION RUNNER.

- *“This will be like a special placemat for our whole TABLE. We can draw pictures, write words, or just put colors that remind us of our loved ones, favorite foods they liked, traditions, or anything special we want to remember about them or our family’s celebrations.”*
- During the tasks, the volunteers can help and ask questions like:
 - *“What colors make you think of [the loved one’s name]?”*
 - *“What food did they really enjoy on a special day?”*
 - *“What’s one memory you have of them during a celebration?”*
- Once elements are ready, gather the whole group around the TABLE. Help them spread the MEMORY CLOTH over the blocks and arrange the PAPER PLATES of “food” and “decorations.”

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow time for sharing.
 - *“Thank you so much for all your hard work and amazing creativity today! Our MEMORY & CELEBRATION TABLE is truly special because each of you added something important to it. What was your favorite part about creating our TABLE, or something new you learned or remembered?”*
- Encourage reflection on feelings.
 - *“As we look at our TABLE, what was your favorite part about creating it?”*
 - *“How did it feel for you today to create something that honored your MEMORIES and special times? Was there a feeling that came up for you as we were working or talking—maybe happiness, a little sadness, calm, or something else?”*
 - *“Did building our TABLE and thinking about special occasions make you remember anything new, or see something a little differently?”*
 - *“What might you take with you from today’s activity? Maybe a memory, a feeling, or even an idea for a special occasion at home?”*
- Let them know that they can each take home a MEMORY PAPER PLATE if they’d like to remember the experience.

Notes:

- Be sure to use neutral language. Consistently use terms like “Special Occasions”, “Celebrations”, “Special Days” or “Family Traditions” to ensure inclusiveness for all cultural, religious, and secular backgrounds.

For Ongoing Groups:

- No additional adaptation is needed, as different group members bring their own experiences and backgrounds, which can change the nature of the activity.

MEMORY BEADS

Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To offer a gentle and creative opportunity for group members to reflect on their loved ones, acknowledge various feelings, and transform these reflections into a tangible, personal keepsake that can be held, worn, or kept close as a continuing bond. This activity fosters individual expression within a shared supportive space.

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died

Materials:

- For Night 1:
 - A diverse selection of colored and patterned paper (*scrapbook paper, construction paper, old magazines with pleasing colors/textures*)—offer a wide variety to suit different tastes and moods
 - Pens/markers
 - Elmer's Glue (*enough so each person has one, or pour into small cups and provide Q-tips*)
 - Scissors
 - Rulers
 - Paper bead rollers (*a dowel rod, chopstick or bamboo skewer also work well*)
 - Mod Podge
 - Styrofoam blocks or cups with toothpicks (*to make bead drying rack*)
 - Paintbrushes
- For Night 2:
 - String for bracelets, necklace, or keychain (*if keychains, ensure you have keychain rings*)
 - Spacer beads, letter beads, or other decorative beads

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Project preparation:
 - Set toothpicks up in Styrofoam spaced far enough apart to fit beads to dry.
 - Each person should have an item to roll their beads on (*dowel rod, chopsticks, bamboo skewer or bead roller*)—scissors—glue (*Elmer's glue for each person, or cups of glue with q tips for easy application*)—Mod Podge (*in small cup*)—and foam brush to apply.
 - Set out paper and magazines so they're easy to sort through.

- Welcome the group and explain the activity is a creative way to think about their MEMORIES, thoughts and feelings while creating something that they can keep.
- Explain the purpose and invite reflection.
 - *“Think about MEMORIES, thoughts, feelings, or even short messages you have for your loved one. You can write these down on paper strips and then roll them into unique, wearable BEADS. It’s a way to create something tangible that you can keep with you, a physical reminder of the connection that continues. It can also be something you wish you could’ve done together or wished you could say to them.”*
- Emphasize choice and the **I PASS RULE**.
 - *“You have the option to share any of the messages or MEMORIES you’ve put into your BEADS during our wrap-up, or you can keep your memories to yourself. Once rolled, the words become part of your personal keepsake, a hidden message known only to you. Both choices are absolutely fine and respected here.”*

Activity Description:

- Outline the process and show them how to make a BEAD. Provide a few examples.
- **Step 1:** Choosing paper and writing a message.
 - *“Please choose some paper that appeals to you. Sometimes the color or pattern itself can connect to a MEMORY or feeling. Once you have your paper, you can begin to think about what you’d like to write. It could be a name, a special word, a quote, a short phrase, a color that reminds you of them, or even just scribbles that express a feeling. Remember, it can be private.”*
- **Step 2:** Cutting and rolling the paper.
 - *“Now we’ll cut the paper into strips. Thicker strips will make larger BEADS, and thinner ones will make smaller ones. You can use a ruler to help guide your cuts if you like—cut it into a long triangle. The words don’t have to be perfectly straight; they will disappear inside the BEAD as we roll it.”*
 - *“Next, we use these PAPER BEAD ROLLERS. We’ll show you how to securely tuck the end of the paper into the ROLLER and begin to wind it tightly.”*
 - *“Once you’ve rolled some of the strip, use a tiny dot of Elmer’s glue to secure as you go. This keeps your BEAD from unraveling. Less is more with the glue here!”*
 - This step often requires direct demonstration and hands-on help, especially with the rolling technique. Model it clearly. Provide one-on-one

assistance as needed. Encourage patience and reassure that practice makes it easier.

- **Step 3:** Drying and sealing:
 - Once the BEAD is formed and glued, carefully slide it off the PAPER ROLLER and onto a toothpick, which is then stuck into the Styrofoam to dry. Allow them to make as many beads as they like.
 - After they have finished making their BEADS, help them coat the BEADS with Mod Podge with a thin even layer. Ensure they cover the entire BEAD and apply a second layer once the first dries.
- **Step 4** (*on next night, after BEADS have dried*): making Bracelet, Necklace or Keychain
 - When they return, have them finish the activity by stringing them on a Bracelet, Necklace, or String for Keychain. Allow them to use the optional spacer BEADS, letter BEADS, or decorative BEADS as well.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- At the end of Night 1, allow for some reflection on making the BEADS.
 - *“Wow these all look great! For those who feel comfortable, we’d like to invite you to share one or two things about your MEMORY BEADS, or perhaps a feeling or MEMORY that came up for you during the activity.”*
- Ask open-ended questions.
 - *“What was it like to turn your thoughts or MEMORIES into a physical object?”*
 - *“How did it feel to make these BEADS?”*
 - *“Did a particular MEMORY or feeling come to mind while you were working?”*
 - *“How does it feel to have this keepsake, knowing what it represents for you?”*
 - *“Was there anything surprising about this activity for you?”*
 - *“If you chose a particular color or pattern for your paper, did that choice have meaning for you today?”*
- On Night 2, the group members assemble their Bracelet, Necklace, or Keychains. After they’re able to finish them, allow time for them to share their finished product (if they like) and share any final thoughts, feelings, or ideas.

Notes:

- You will need two meetings to complete this activity so plan accordingly.
- This activity provides a tangible, personal keepsake for participants, representing their MEMORIES and feelings.
- Be patient, especially with the rolling process. Demonstrate steps clearly and be prepared to assist frequently. This activity involves fine motor skills that can be challenging for some.
- **Variation—Use as a closing activity:** The adaptation for group members writing messages to one another on strips is excellent for a Closing Meeting (but remember that it takes two meetings to complete). In that case, the framing would shift to MESSAGES OF SUPPORT BEADS or CONNECTION BEADS, where the focus is on appreciating and remembering each other within the group. The option to read the messages on their BEADS or keep them private would still be important.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Use the above variation to have them write messages to each other for Group Closing. Additionally, you can have them make different BEADS with different themes—suggestions below:
 - LEGACY BEADS: Focus on the lessons learned from the loved one, their positive impact, or values they instilled.
 - GROWTH BEADS: Focus on reflections of personal growth—how they have grown, changed, or found comfort since their loss, perhaps in a way their loved one would appreciate.
 - MOMENTS OF JOY BEADS: Specifically write down happy, funny, or particularly joyful memories that always make them smile or laugh.
 - WISH BEADS: Write down a wish for their loved one, a wish for themselves, or a hope for the future.

MEMORY BOXES

P—Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To explore memories evoked by personal items and establish a safe space for these cherished belongings and recollections, while providing a means of accessing memories when desired.

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:

- BOXES (*cardboard or wooden*)
- Paint
- Glue
- Glitter
- Embellishments
- Magazines
- Memory Prompts (*see pages at end of this activity*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome group and explain that they are going to do an activity today that will focus on MEMORIES.
- Ask the group to define a MEMORY and prompt for examples. Discuss MEMORIES the group members may have of the person who died. Allow time for discussion and do not rush this part.
 - *“Before we start, let’s think a little about what MEMORIES are. Can anyone tell me what a MEMORY is? (Allow for responses.) Yes, it’s like a picture or a story in our minds from something that happened in the past. We all have so many MEMORIES. Now, I wonder, what are some of the MEMORIES you have of the person you are missing?”*
 - Ask open-ended questions to guide discussion:
 - *“What are some things—maybe smells, songs, tastes, or even places—that remind you of the person who died?”*
 - *“Have you saved things that belonged to the person and remind you of the person? Or maybe something that reminds you of them that you wish you had?”*
 - *“Do you have photographs of your person, or of you and your person together? Or just a photo of them that you really like?”*

- Explain that we will be creating a special place to hold some of those things and the MEMORIES that go with them.
 - *“Today, we’re going to create a special container—a MEMORY BOX. This BOX will be a dedicated, safe place for those precious items and MEMORIES. You can also put drawings of the special items in the BOX if they’re too large to fit, or other things you create to help you remember your person.”*

Activity Description:

- Giving the group wide latitude, allow each group member to decorate a BOX in which they can store memorabilia related to the person who died.
- If the children need ideas, have them think of the hobbies and interests of the person, their favorite color(s), and other things that bring their person who died to mind. Sometimes it is helpful to put the person’s name or nickname on the BOX.
- Allow sufficient time for creation, and circulate to offer help or observe. Do not rush this process and if it takes more than one meeting, allow that time.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow the group members to share their BOXES and why they designed them the way that they did, if they wish.
- Ask group members how they were feeling as they decorated their BOXES.
 - *“Was it hard or easy to create your MEMORY BOX today?”*
 - *“When you chose your materials—the colors, the pictures, the embellishments—what thoughts or feelings were guiding those choices?”*
 - *“Was there any particular part of decorating your BOX that brought up strong feelings—maybe joy, sadness, frustration, or even surprise?”*
 - Remember to validate all feelings shared.
- Highlight commonalities among the group. (for example—*“A lot of you used your person’s favorite color”*—*“Many of you drew a memory you had with your person”*—etc.)
- Discuss the meaning of the BOX and talk about the questions in the Framing and Activity Set-up section, if not already discussed.
- Talk about the fact that the BOX has a lid, which the participants can open and close when they want, remembering when they want.
 - *“Remember that your MEMORY BOX has a lid. And just like we can decide when to open it and when to close it, we can also decide when we want to bring out our MEMORIES and when we want to hold them gently inside,*

safe for another time. This BOX gives you control over accessing your MEMORIES—you can reach for it when you're longing for them, and you can keep them tucked away when you need a break."

- *"What does it mean to you, knowing that you now have this dedicated, safe, and beautiful place to store your MEMORIES and reminders of your person?"*
- Thank them for creating and sharing their MEMORY BOXES.

Notes:

- Since there are a wide variety of materials that can be incorporated into a MEMORY BOX, pay special attention to the management of those materials (*especially things like paint, glue & glitter*).
- For Younger Children and Preschool Groups, use materials that are easier to manage, such as smaller BOXES, marker daubers, stickers, and foam letters/shapes.
- Consider reading a story, like *THE MEMORY BOX*, to help explain the activity with Younger Age Groups.
- Plan ahead to leave a week between creating the BOX and taking it home to allow for drying time.
- Suggest that children bring in a memento to put in their BOX during the second week after the BOXES are dry and there is less risk of getting paint on the memento.
 - Additionally, you can use the MEMORY PROMPT CARDS (*see attached*) to include in the BOX if they like.
- Keep in mind that some group members may have few or no MEMORIES.
 - Incorporate language like "Wishes"—"Treasures"—"Reminders."
- Avoid value judgments like, "favorite" or "best" MEMORIES.
 - Some group members may not have pleasant MEMORIES of their person.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity is often done in Introductory Groups, so determine whether repeating this in an Ongoing Group is beneficial or if another MEMORY activity may be more appropriate, especially for those who recently did this in an Introductory Group. If using in an Ongoing Group, consider these suggestions below:

- If they still have it, ask group members to bring back their previous MEMORY BOX to share with one another. Some leading questions for the conversation could include:
 - What would you like to add to your MEMORY BOX?
 - Where do you keep your MEMORY BOX?
 - Who have you shared your MEMORY BOX with?
 - What decorations would you add now to your BOX?
 - What has changed about you or your MEMORIES of the person since you created your MEMORY BOX?
- Remember that a group participant's perspective and understanding of the death changes as they grow. It could be beneficial for a group member to create a new BOX and provide that option if they like.
- Consider the variation of MEMORY KEEPSAKE BOX, inspired by *Tanya's Healing Gardens* to focus on one specific MEMORY such as a vacation, event or special time they shared:
 - Begin by having them share the special MEMORY that they want to commemorate on their BOX.
 - Invite them to include special treasures from nature such as leaves, small smooth stones, dried flowers, small twigs, shells, or feathers that might be related to the special time; and use them to put on the outside or inside of the BOX.
 - Ask them to bring things that remind them of a special MEMORY—photos, ticket stubs, small toys, drawings, etc.—to put inside the BOX.
 - Have them write their story of the special experience, event, vacation, etc., and what they remember most about it to put inside the BOX.

*This activity variation was created by Geralyn Desmuke as part of her personal grief journey for her daughter, Tanya Lynn Amstutz. Tanya, a nature-loving artist who created jewelry despite having Ankylosing Spondylitis, died in 2016. In her daughter's honor, and inspired by a dream, Geralyn founded **Tanya's Healing Garden**, crafting MEMORY BOXES inspired by nature to bring healing and hope to others. She dropped some of these BOXES at the Pittsburgh Caring Place for the children to use.*

The color of my loved one's eyes:

My loved one's favorite sport:

My loved one's hair color:

**My loved one's favorite
snack/food:**

My loved one's birthday:

My loved one's favorite season:

My loved one was born in (place):

My loved one went to school at:

My loved one's favorite music:	My loved one's favorite ice cream:
My loved one's favorite hobby:	One of my favorite memories:
One of the best gifts from my loved one:	One of my favorite things to do with my loved one:
A vacation or trip I took with my loved one:	A time when my loved one made me laugh:

My loved one's favorite holiday:	My loved one's favorite color:
If I had one more day to spend with my loved one, I would want to:	A special talent my loved one had:
3 words to describe my loved one:	A trait that I have that is similar to my loved one:
One question I would like to ask my loved one is:	Something I wish I knew about my loved one:

I wish that...	I hope that...
A gift I gave my loved one is:	What I would want my loved one to know about me now:
My loved one taught me...	One thing that I wish I would have been able to do before my loved one died is...

MEMORY CAPSULES

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To address the fear of forgetting details about the person who died and make a resource for remembering

Task/Need:

- Sharing MEMORIES and continuing bonds with the person who died

Materials:

- Containers/Jars
- Paper
- Paints
- Glitter
- Pre-printed cards with suggested MEMORY prompts (*see description for list*)
- Blank cards

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Ask, “Has anybody ever made a TIME CAPSULE?” or “Do you know what a TIME CAPSULE is?”
- Discuss the concept of a TIME CAPSULE—*“It is like a special treasure box filled with things you love or things that are important to you right now, that you hide away. Then, in the future, you open it up to remember what life was like when you were younger!”*
- Tell the group that they will be making their own CAPSULES which will focus on our MEMORIES of special people in our lives who have died.
 - *“Today, we’re going to create our own MEMORY CAPSULES for the special person we miss. These won’t be buried, but they’ll hold treasures: your written MEMORIES. You can open it anytime you want to revisit those MEMORIES, helping you feel close and remember everything that matters.”*

Activity Description:

- Lead the group in a discussion about the fear of forgetting and normalize this worry.
 - *“While we’re making these, let’s talk about a big worry we often hear from grieving kids—the worry they’ll forget things about their person. Forgetting their voice, what they looked like, a favorite joke. It’s a natural and common feeling. Does anyone feel that way? What are some things about your person you worry about forgetting? Or maybe, what’s one thing you know you’ll never forget?”*

- Create a list of items as suggestions of things one might fear forgetting about the person who died and print each on cards. Have blank cards too and place them out of the way while they move on to creating their MEMORY CAPSULES—let them know that you’ll return to the cards after.
- Guide the group in moving on to decorating the containers/jars to be their MEMORY CAPSULES. Let them know that they can make it however they want, but also suggest that maybe when designing, they want to consider MEMORIES of their person—such as choosing their favorite color, drawing things they liked, or a MEMORY together.
- While their containers are drying, have the group fill out the cards with the topics they wrote. See list below for ideas. It can be helpful to have blank cards and some with information already on them that they can complete.

Sample List of Items for Cards:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • Favorite color | • Favorite music |
| • Eye color | • Favorite movie |
| • Hair color | • Favorite singer |
| • Date of birth | • Favorite flower |
| • Where they were born | • Favorite saying |
| • Date of death | • Quirks about them |
| • Favorite ice cream flavor | • Special memory shared |
| • Favorite hobby | • How they made you feel |
| • Favorite sport | • Their smell |
| • Favorite snack and/or meal | • Recall a memory of vacation |
| • Favorite season | • Favorite fragrance |
| • Favorite actor | • Recall non-material gifts given |
| • Where they attended school | • A lesson they taught you |
| • A memory of laughter shared | |

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow time for sharing with other members the information they have written on the cards and some of the stories that might go with the information; what they most fear forgetting and what they will never forget, perhaps in different areas. Make connections when possible—point out similarities or differences when appropriate.
- Ask the group if they think that the CAPSULE will help them keep their treasured MEMORIES alive and when they might pull it out to revisit.
 - *“When do you think would be a good time to open your MEMORY CAPSULE and look at all your special things you put in it? There’s no wrong answer! You could open it on your birthday, a holiday, or any day you’re missing your person.”*

- Let them know that they can add to this as they go and provide a few blank cards to work on at home.
- Note that if they want to share it with their family, they can ask others to add to the CAPSULE if they like.
- As always, thank the group for their courage in talking about their grief and sharing things about their special person with the group.

Notes:

- **Important note for inclusivity:** Be mindful of your group and if you have group members who don't have a lot of personal MEMORIES or direct information about the person who died. If you have a few in your group who have that experience, perhaps consider a different activity, or ensure that you shift your language and questions:
 - *"What have you been told about your person."*
 - *"Stories others have shared about your person."*
 - *"What you imagine or wish your person was like."*
 - *"What you know about your person through pictures or other family members."*
 - *"What you know about the time they were alive or the things they were part of."*
 - *"What do you wonder about your person?"*
 - *"What story have you heard about them?"*
 - *"What do you wish someone would tell you about them?"*

For Ongoing Groups:

- If anyone in an Ongoing Group has done this activity, you can ask them to bring in their MEMORY CAPSULE if they still have it and add to it with new cards, add decorations to their existing box; or create a whole new one. You can also add new types of cards, such as:
 - *"A new thing I've learned about my loved one."*
 - *"How my feelings have changed about my loved one or the loss."*
 - *"A memory I shared with someone else about my loved one."*
 - *"Something I do now because of my loved one."*
 - *"A dream I had about my loved one."*
 - *"A new way I keep their memory alive."*
 - *"A wish I have now."*
 - *"One thing that brings me comfort."*
 - *"A moment I felt close to them."*
 - *"A time I wish they were here."*

MEMORY CARDS

Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To give group members the opportunity to preserve memories of their loved one. It also serves as a foundational step for a future Memory Quilt project.

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
- Pens
- Envelopes
- Clipboards (optional)
- Decorating Supplies: Colored pencils, crayons, stickers, glitter pens, small magazine cut-outs (*pictures of landscapes, abstract shapes, animals, etc.*), stencils, glue sticks (*optional, especially for later steps*)
- Pre-made CARD Templates: Printed CARDS (*or paper with printed lines*) clearly showing:
 - **Inside Left:** *“I remember you as...”* (with space to write)
 - **Inside Right:** *“I remember when we...”* (with space to write)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Open the conversation about MEMORIES.
 - *“Today we’re going to spend some time exploring and honoring our memories. It’s often really comforting to think about the people we miss, and remembering them keeps them close to us.”*
 - *“Sometimes, when we’re missing someone, we might find ourselves thinking about all the things they were, or all the times we shared together. How do you keep those MEMORIES close? What are some ways we can make sure those moments and who they were stay alive in our hearts? Would anyone like to share their ideas about MEMORIES?”*
 - If needed, give examples like looking at photos, telling stories, visiting places they liked to go, listening to music that reminds you of them, etc.

- Introduce the Activity:
 - *“Today we’re going to create special MEMORY CARDS. These CARDS will be a space for us to capture some of our thoughts, stories, and MEMORIES about our loved one. Think of it as creating a personalized MEMORY SNAPSHOT you can keep and cherish.”*
 - *“On the left side, you’ll write: ‘I remember you as...’ and think—What were their best qualities or personality traits? Were they funny, kind, strong, silly, or a good listener? What words would you use to describe them? You can also add something unique about them, like how they looked, or a special saying they had.”*
 - *“On the right side, you can write ‘I remember when we...’ and think—What are some of the times you remember with them? Or stories people told you about them? What are some memories shared?”*
- Let them know that they can decorate their CARD any way they would like, and if those prompts don’t fit, they can do something else like:
 - *“What I miss most about you is...”*
 - *“Some things you taught me.”*
 - *“You always used to say...”*
 - *“What I’ve heard or been told about you is...”*
 - *“What I imagine you to be like is...”*
 - *“What I wish I knew or could ask you is...”*

Activity Description:

- If the group doesn’t have premade CARD templates, have them fold the paper in half like a greeting CARD and decorate the front how they like (you can suggest putting their person’s name or draw a picture of them).
- Let them know that the inside of the CARD will be the space to record MEMORIES regarding their person.
- If they’re a younger group, remind them that they can draw instead of write if that’s more comfortable, or that volunteers can help them write in the CARD if they have a lot to say.
- Let group know that they can put their CARDS in an envelope after they finish, if they would like.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Give each group member the opportunity to share their MEMORIES from this Activity if they like.
 - *“Would anyone like to share a MEMORY from the ‘I remember you as...’ side, or ‘I remember when we...’ side? Hearing each other’s MEMORIES can often help us remember our own.”*
 - *“How did it feel to think about these two prompts? What feelings are coming up for you as you’re thinking about your person?”*
 - Remember to acknowledge the prompts if group members choose something different.
 - Point out similarities between CARDS or feelings to help group members make connections.
 - Ask if they would like an envelope to keep their CARD.
- **Optional—Quilt Square Prep** *(on the back of the CARD)*
 - *“For our final step with these CARDS, we’re going to imagine the back of your CARD is a Quilt Square since we have quilt night coming up soon. Think about something visually that represents your loved one or the enduring MEMORY you’ve created today. This is your space to create your version of the quilt square and give ideas for the quilt square you might make with your family.”*
 - *“You can use magazine pictures, draw a scene, use stickers, stencils, or make an abstract design. This is your visual representation—something that expresses how you remember your person.”*
 - If this part is done, allow time for sharing and processing the quilt squares they designed. Encourage them to share with other members of their family if they like.
- **Final Processing:**
 - *“How does having these MEMORIES written down, and creating this visual representation, help you feel connected to your loved one?”*
 - *“What are some other ways, big or small, that you feel connected to the person who died even though they’re not here? (for example, seeing things that remind you of them, traditions, feeling their presence).”*
 - Thank them for their hard work and sharing with the group.

Notes:

- This can be done over multiple group nights if needed.
- Group members can keep the completed MEMORY CARD in a MEMORY BOX—which can be a helpful precursor activity.

For Ongoing Groups:

- If using in an Ongoing Group, you can have an alternate activity on the back or let them know that this is the space to create their own personal quilt square.
 - Additionally, if they made a MEMORY CARD before, ask them if they still have it. If so, encourage them to bring it in, or talk about the similarities or differences from the first CARD they made.

MEMORY LANE

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To explore, share, and honor individual and collective memories of a loved one, fostering connection, validating experiences, and reinforcing continuing bonds within a supportive environment.

Task/Need:

- Telling their story
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died

Materials:

- Butcher paper roll
- Markers, crayons, colored pencils
- Small pieces (approx. 3x5) of various colors of construction paper (the BRICKS)
- Glue sticks or tape

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Start the discussion with the group about MEMORIES:
 - *“Before we start our activity, let’s just talk a little about what a MEMORY is. (Allow for brief responses and encourage basic definitions—for example, ‘a picture in your mind from the past,’—‘something you remember doing or seeing’). Yes, exactly! MEMORIES are like treasures from our past that we carry with us.”*
 - Discuss the idea of a MEMORY LANE. *“LANE is another name for PATH. There is an expression, ‘Walking down MEMORY LANE’ which means we allow MEMORIES to flow through our minds, sort of like if we’re walking down a PATH and see MEMORIES along the way as we walk.”*
 - *“We’re going to create our own MEMORY LANE today!”*
- Guide the discussion to sharing about the MEMORIES of their person.
 - *“Now, let’s think about the person you’re missing. What comes to mind when you think of them? You don’t have to share anything out loud if you don’t want to, just let the thoughts float into your mind.”*
 - *“When you think about your person, maybe MEMORIES like these pop up?”*
 - *“A favorite place to go or a place that makes you think of them.”*
 - *“Something you enjoyed doing with them or you wish you did with them.”*
 - *“What you miss about them, or what others miss about them.”*

- Talk about all kinds of MEMORIES—funny ones, sad ones, happy ones, angry ones, etc. Remind the group members that all MEMORIES and feelings are OK. Some MEMORIES might be clear, while others might be more of a feeling or a vague thought in your mind.
- Show the group the small pieces of paper.
 - *“We’re going to call these our MEMORY BRICKS. Each one of these BRICKS is a space for one MEMORY, thought, feeling, or picture about the person you’re remembering today. You can take as many of these BRICKS as you need. These BRICKS will be make up the ROAD or LANE for our MEMORY LANE.”*
- Ask the group to draw a picture of a MEMORY, write a few words, a sentence, or even just a feeling on the BRICKS that they take. They can take as many pieces of construction paper as they need.

Activity Description:

- Draw a PATH on the butcher paper prior to the group starting and point that out to them.
 - *“Over here, on this big paper, I’ve drawn a PATH. This PATH will be our collective MEMORY LANE. Once you’ve created your MEMORY BRICKS, we’ll place them on this PATH. This LANE will become a collage, a collection of all our cherished MEMORIES, showing how the people we love walk alongside us.”*
- Remind them it’s OK to have all types of MEMORIES. Circulate and offer encouragement. *“Remember, this is your MEMORY, and whatever comes to mind is perfect.”*
 - For those who seem stuck, you can offer gentle prompts like: *“What was a favorite thing you two used to do?”* or *“What do you remember about how they used to make you laugh/feel?”*
 - For those who have limited MEMORIES, offer prompts like *“What have others told you about them?”* or *“What is a MEMORY you wish you had together?”* or *“What do you imagine they were like?”*
- Have the group aim to fill the entire PATH with their MEMORIES, feelings, or drawings that they put on their BRICKS.
- Once group members have created their individual MEMORY BRICKS, invite them to use glue sticks or tape to place their MEMORIES on the drawn PATH, aiming to fill the entire LANE with their collective contributions.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Bring the group back together to review their work and share their MEMORIES.

- Ask the group what they notice and point out commonalities.
 - *“As we look at our MEMORY LANE, can anyone point out something they notice? Perhaps a common theme, or something that reminds you of your own person, even if the MEMORY itself is different?”*
 - Examples: *“It sounds like many of us loved [doing an activity] with our person.”—“I hear a lot of laughter and joy in these MEMORIES.”—“It seems like a lot of us really miss the comfort of their presence.”*
- Invite the group to share what it was like to hear everyone’s MEMORIES.
 - *“Looking at the MEMORIES you’ve put on the LANE, or hearing about others’ MEMORIES, what feelings come up for you right now?”*
 - *“How did it feel to share a piece of your MEMORY here today, either by putting it on the PATH or by talking about it? What was it like to hear everyone’s MEMORIES?”*
- Acknowledge that all MEMORIES are OK. Ask the group to share their feelings about the MEMORIES they wrote/drew on the BRICKS.
 - *“This MEMORY LANE shows us something really important: even though our special people are no longer here with us physically, their MEMORIES live on. And just like we filled this PATH, we fill our lives with reminders of them.”*
- Ask the group what other reminders they have about their people who died.
 - *“Besides the MEMORIES on our LANE, what other things in your daily life remind you of your people who died?”* (for example, *“A song on the radio,”—“A certain smell”—“Seeing something they loved”*)
- Thank the group for sharing their MEMORIES with one another.

Notes:

- The placement of the MEMORIES can be random or if the group wishes, they can be arranged chronologically or thematically, but do not impose this on the group. The act of sharing and placing is more important than order.
- Always maintain the option for participants to not share their specific MEMORY verbally, even if they place it on the LANE. The act of creation and placement is a form of sharing itself.
- For group members who may have very few, vague, or no direct personal MEMORIES (very young children, early loss, estrangement, etc.), adapt the prompts to emphasize other forms of connection:
 - *“What have you been told or what stories have you heard about your person?”*

- *“What do you imagine they were like or what you wish you could have done with them?”*
- *“What feelings come up when you see pictures of them or hear their name?”*
- *“If you don’t remember them, what kind of person do you think they would have been to you?”*
- Encourage drawing a symbol of a feeling related to their person, a picture of their name, or a symbol representing the love felt by others towards that person. The goal is connection, not necessarily perfect recall.
- Some sites might have THE MEMORY LANE GAME available, which is a structured game format designed to elicit similar MEMORIES and stories. This could be an alternative or complementary activity depending on group needs and resources.

For Ongoing Groups:

- No modifications needed for this Activity, as group members can share the same MEMORIES, different MEMORIES than the last time, evolving feelings, or may remember other things sparked by what other group members share.

MEMORY LUMINARIES

T—A

Suggested Group(s): Teen, Adult

Purpose: To invite active participation in sharing memories and creating a group ceremony or ritual as a way of memorializing the person who died

Task/Need:

- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died
- Making meaning of the loss
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Plain white or light-colored paper BAGS (*lunch BAG or small gift BAG size*)
- Markers, colored pencils, or crayons
- Scissors (*various sizes for comfort*)
- Hole punches (*single hole, shape punches such as heart/butterflies*)
- Tea light candles (*battery-operated LED preferred for safety*)
- Stickers, glitter, small adhesive gems, tissue paper to create a stained-glass look if they cut holes in their BAG (*optional*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin by talking about different ways people memorialize or remember family members who have died.
 - *“What are some ways that you are familiar with that people memorialize or remember the special people in their lives that die?”*
 - Allow for a few responses—examples might be planting a tree or flowers, holding a remembrance service, creating a photo album, etc.
- If it doesn’t come up in the discussion, mention that some people find comfort in lighting CANDLES to remember their loved ones.
 - *“Often, people find comfort in light—whether it’s from a CANDLE, a special lamp, or even a star. Light can symbolize love, remembrance, or guidance. It can remind us that even in darkness, there can be a light that remains.”*
- Let the group know that they will be creating their own CANDLE LUMINARIES today and holding a CANDLE Lighting Ceremony together in which they will be able to share MEMORIES about their person.
 - *“Tonight we will be making special MEMORY LUMINARIES. The light from your LUMINARY can represent what you like—maybe it’s your love for them that continues, their continued presence in your heart, or maybe memories you have of them.”*

Activity Description:

- Explain that the group will be making the LUMINARIES out of the paper BAGS and a variety of materials so that they can customize it.
 - Let them know that they can draw pictures, write words, add stickers, gems, and use the hole punches on the BAGS to create space for the light to come out of the BAG.
 - *“Think about your person, a favorite MEMORY, something that reminds you of them, or even how you feel today.”*
 - *“You can use colors that remind you of them or feelings you have.”*
 - *“If you’d like the light to shine through your design, you can use the scissors or hole punches. Be sure to cut carefully and make sure the BAG is still strong enough to stand up. We can help if needed.”*
- Once the designs are complete, ask group members to gently open their BAGS and place their chosen TEA LIGHT CANDLE inside, but not to light it just yet.
- Gather the group together and let them know that you will be going around in a circle to allow them to light their CANDLE and share their LUMINARY with everyone if they like.
 - *“We’re going to take a few minutes for each of you to share your LUMINARY if you like. When it’s your turn, you can light your TEA LIGHT and tell us about your LUMINARY that you made.”*
 - Ask curious questions while they’re sharing—*“Tell us about the color you used...”*—*“Can you tell us about the stickers on your bag?”*
 - If someone does not want to share, let them know that they can still light their TEA LIGHT and move to the next person.
- Once all the LUMINARIES are lit, ask the group if they would like to turn out the lights briefly to see how they look in the dim lighting. If some group members prefer to keep lights on, respect that and thank them all for sharing.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Provide the group with the opportunity to share their feelings or thoughts about creating the LUMINARIES.
 - *“What was it like for you to create your LUMINARY today?”*
 - *“How did it feel to choose your design, your colors, or the words/symbols you used?”*
 - *“Was there anything about making it that felt surprising, comforting, or challenging?”*

- *“As you look at your lit LUMINARY now, what thoughts or feelings come up for you?”*
- Guide the group in a discussion about how they might use these at home.
 - *“If you take your LUMINARY home, how might you use it to continue remembering your loved one?”*
 - *“Is there a special place you might put it?”*
 - *“Could it be something you light when you’re missing them, or when you want to feel connected?”*
 - *“Is there anything else you might do with it that would bring you comfort?”*
 - Quietly allow the group time to admire the CANDLES and, in their own time, “blow” out their CANDLES or allow them to glow if they like.

Notes:

- Keep in mind that some group members may not have any MEMORIES, or may not have positive MEMORIES. Allow them choice to make a LUMINARY, with the idea that the activity can focus more about their feelings, what their grief feels like, and what they find support in; or, for those who had a contentious relationship, maybe the LUMINARY focuses on how grief shaped who they are today, difficult feelings they would want to release, or hopes for themselves.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity can be duplicated in an Ongoing Group, as they may want to make a second LUMINARY for another space in their home, or to share with a family member. In addition, you can also do a variation of the original idea:
 - **Messages of Hope/Resilience:** *“What helps you through a tough day now? What small joys or new connections have you found? What have you learned about your own strength? You might draw symbols of hope, strength, or growth (for example, a sturdy tree, a growing plant, a path forward, a shining star).”*
 - **Continued Presence:** *“How does your loved one’s presence show up in your life today? Is it through a new hobby you’ve picked up, a lesson they taught you that guides you, or how you’ve continued a tradition? You could write qualities they instilled in you that you now embody, or ways their MEMORY inspires your future.”*
 - **Symbols of Support:** *“Who are the people in your life who have offered you comfort, understanding, or a listening ear? This could be a friend, a family member, a pet, or even a specific group like this one. You might draw small stars, connect dots, or write their initials. You could even draw symbols of your own inner strength.”*

MEMORY MAGNETS/ALL ABOUT MY PERSON MAGNETS

P—Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To provide group members with an opportunity to share memories of their loved ones with the group through stories and the creation of a take-home keepsake memorial.

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- Model Magic
- Tools for shaping the Model Magic (*popsicle sticks, cookie cutters, plastic knives, etc.*)
- Markers
- Magnets
- Super Glue, or hot glue gun and glue
- Decorations Embeddable/Textural: Small sequins, beads, glitter (*for embedding*), natural objects like tiny smooth pebbles, shells, pressed flowers—ensure these adhere well or are sealed in (*optional*)
- Paint (*optional—will need 3 nights to finish*)
- Acrylic varnish (*optional—will need 3 nights to finish*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Let the group know that they will be given an opportunity to share more about their person who has died and are going to be able to make something unique for them to keep that reminds them of their person.
 - *“Let’s start by thinking together. What are some things that really remind you of your person? It could be something they liked to do, their job, a special interest or hobby, or even something you always saw them with or shared with them. Like, if they always drank a certain type of soda, or loved a particular sports team.”*
 - Have a volunteer jot down ideas that the group shares.
- Let them know what they will be gathering ideas of what they might want to individually make.
 - *“Today, we’re going to create MEMORY MAGNETS. These MAGNETS will be a special way to capture one of those reminders—something that really represents your loved one. They will be a keepsake you can take home and keep in a special place, like on your refrigerator, to remember them by.”*

- Provide examples: *“For instance, if your mom was a doctor, maybe you’d make a little doctor’s jacket. If your dad loved soda, maybe a little can. Or a shape for their favorite hobby.”*
- For those who have limited MEMORIES or ideas, suggest they focus on something someone told them about them, or maybe the first letter of their name, or a color that makes them think of them. Give other suggestions as well (for example, did they like cats or dogs? gardening or flowers?) Remind them that there are no wrong ways to do this. They can also use the **I PASS RULE** or make something else with the Model Magic.

Activity Description:

- Pass out Model Magic to the group and explain that they will create their MAGNET today, and that they’ll leave it to dry and be able to take them home next week.
- Let them know that they can sketch their ideas ahead if they like, and that you have multiple decorations and colors available. Encourage sharing of colors if they don’t use the whole piece.
 - For younger groups, it can be helpful to have small cookie cutters for them to use.
- Ask questions of the group while they’re working, like, *“What are you making?”–“Tell me more about this color here...”*
- If someone is struggling, offer support and be curious. *“I wonder if we tried this...”* or *“Hmm, maybe this color? What do you think?”*
- Encourage them to share MEMORIES while they work—*“What’s a story that goes with that MEMORY you’re making?”–“What was it like doing that activity with them?”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow the group members the opportunity to share their MAGNETS with one another when they are finished and encourage questions amongst the group.
 - *“Thanks for sharing that—it sounds like your person really liked [whatever is related to MAGNET]. Did anyone else’s person like that too?”*
 - *“That is a really neat MAGNET—thank you for sharing with us. Does anyone have questions for [group member] about what they made?”*
- Ask them what it was like to do the activity.
 - *“How did it feel to make this? Was it hard or easy to decide what to make?”*
 - *“Did anyone have any feelings about their person while making their MAGNET?”*

- Share what you may have noticed while they were working on their MAGNETS and point out similarities if any.
- Remind them that they have to dry and the MAGNET will be ready to take home at the next meeting.

Notes:

- For Preschool or Younger Children:
 - Be cautious about the MAGNET or other embellishments as they could be a choking hazard—be sure to give it to their caring adult once it's done; or consider just allowing it to dry and not making it into a MAGNET.
 - This age group may also want to take theirs home without having it dry—that's OK.
 - Use direct and clear language. For Preschoolers, MEMORY isn't always about a narrative. It's often sensory (*smells, sounds, textures*) or an emotional impression. Frame prompts to include: *"What color reminds you of them?"*—*"What shape reminds you of something they liked?"*—*"Does this make you feel cozy or warm inside when you think of them?"*
- This is a two-meeting activity to allow time to dry. Volunteers should glue the MAGNET on to the back—kids should not use the hot glue gun or super glue.
- Model Magic takes 72 hours to dry. If the group wants to paint on top of the dry Model Magic, it will have to dry and won't be ready until the third night.
- If acrylic varnish is used on top of the dry Model Magic to make it have a shiny finish, it will have to dry and won't be ready until the third night.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity is not often done in Introductory Groups and is a great activity for Ongoing Groups. If they have already made a Memory Magnet in another group, here are some variations:
 - **Initial:** Shape the Model Magic into the first initial of their person's name or sculpt their full name in a simple style.
 - **A Different Favorite of the Person:** For example, if they made something related to their profession the first time, this time do a favorite food, hobby, sports team, etc.
 - **Frame and Picture:** Ask them to bring in a picture. Staff can make a color copy that they can embed on the Model Magic and build a small FRAME around it. This might require more than one bag of Model Magic (and two MAGNETS on the back) which is OK!

MEMORY MASH UP

P—Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To help group members identify, express, and explore feelings related to grief in a safe and creative way, and to acknowledge the continuing bonds with the person who died.

Task/Need:

- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died

Materials:

- Model Magic (*two colors per participant*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome the group and introduce the idea of continuing bonds with the person that has died.
 - *“Today we’re going to explore how we keep the people we miss close to us. Sometimes, even when someone is no longer physically here, we still feel connected to them through MEMORIES, feelings, or things we do. This is often called a Continuing Bond—it’s a way of holding them in our hearts.”*
 - Help the group think about this with some suggestions:
 - *“Sometimes people find ways to keep the person they lost close to them. Has anyone found something meaningful that they do to feel close to their person who died?”*
 - *“Are there particular MEMORIES or traditions that help you feel connected to your person?”*
 - *“How are you finding ways to remember and honor the person that died?”*
 - *“Have you found any comfort in thinking about the impact your person had on your life, or the lessons they taught you?”*
 - *“Do you find yourself talking to them, even if it’s just in your thoughts? Or maybe wondering what they would say or do in a certain situation?”*
 - *“Are there any objects, places, or activities that help you feel connected to them?”*
 - *“As time passes, how do you see your person’s memory continuing to be a part of your life?”*
- Thank the group for any meaningful conversation and explain that they will be doing something creative next with the Model Magic.

Activity Description:

- Have each group member choose two different colors of Model Magic. One color to represent themselves and one to represent a special person they're missing.
- Ask them to use only one color and make something that represents themselves. Leave the other color set aside for now. If they need ideas of what to make, give suggestions like a sport they play or a hobby they enjoy, a favorite animal, etc.
- Once they made something representing themselves, ask them to use the other color to represent the person that died. Maybe something that reminds them of their person, something the person loved, or maybe a face to represent how they made them feel.
- When they're done, ask if anyone would like to share what they made:
 - *"Once you've made your two pieces, if you feel comfortable, would anyone like to share what you made—either about yourself, your loved one, or both? You can share as much or as little as you like, or you don't have to share at all."* (Allow time for sharing)
- After everyone has the opportunity to share, explain that in the next step, they can put the two pieces together, pressing them together so they become one.
- After they put them together, explain that you want them to try to separate them again, putting them back as they were before—give them a little bit of time to try.
- When someone makes an observation (or a volunteer observes) that pieces are stuck together or there are remnants of one on the other, move into the activity processing and wrap up to discuss the purpose of the activity.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow time to discuss what happened when they joined the pieces together.
 - *"Let's talk about what just happened with our Model Magic."*
 - *"How did it feel when you tried to separate the two pieces and put them back to exactly how they were?"* (Listen for responses about difficulty, impossibility, remnants, etc.)
 - *"Why do you think we did this part of the activity?"* (Encourage participants to connect the difficulty of separating the colors to the lasting impact of a relationship.)
 - *"What did you notice about the colors after you tried to pull them apart?"* (Guide them to observe how traces of each color often remain on the other.)

- *“Even when we pull them apart, some of the color from your special person might stay on your piece, and some of your color might stay on their piece. Or, even if they separate cleanly, you know they were together, and that MEMORY is still there. This can remind us that even when our special person isn’t with us in person, they’re still a part of us, and we’re a part of them. Their love, their MEMORIES, they are always with us, just like a little bit of their color stays on our heart.”*
- Move into the last part of the activity of making something out of the combined colors.
 - *“Now, using the combined Model Magic—with both colors together—create something new that represents the unique relationship you have or had with the person who died. It could be a symbol, an object, or anything that feels right to you about your continuing connection.”*
 - *“Once everyone is done, if you feel comfortable, would anyone like to share what they made and tell us a little bit about how it represents your relationship with the person who died? There’s no pressure to share, but we’d love to hear if you’re willing.”*
- Make connections and allow time for final thoughts.
 - *“Wow look at the colors you used! Do those mean anything in particular?”*
 - *“I noticed that yours looks like [another group member]—that’s neat to see that some look similar and some look different.”*
 - *“How did you like this Activity we did today? Was anything hard to do?”*
 - *“Was there anything that surprised you about doing this activity?”*
- 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:

- If they are resistant to pushing the two colors/things they made together, do not force them to do so. You can instead take small pieces of two other colors and let them push those together so they can see what it looks like without potentially “messing up” their creations.

For Ongoing Groups:

- No special modifications are needed as our thoughts about our person and our relationship with them continue and evolve over time. The things they make to represent themselves and their person may be the same or different; the transformational shape may also take the same or different form.

MEMORY TREE

P—Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To assist the group in remembering and preserving memories.

Task/Need:

- Telling their story
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died

Materials:

- Small TREE BRANCH
- Bucket of sand
 - *Alternatively, some sites may have small TABLETOP TREES that can be used instead of needing to make one with the bucket and TREE BRANCH—check with staff.*
- Wide smooth ribbon
- Small pieces of paper and hole punch
 - *Sites may have small BUTTERFLIES that can be used—check with staff.*
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin by acknowledging that it's common for children to worry about forgetting precious MEMORIES of their family member who died.
 - *"Sometimes, when someone important in our lives dies, a big worry we can have is that we'll forget things about them. Forget their laugh, a special time, or even what they liked. Has anyone ever felt that worry?"*
 - Allow group to discuss and validate the feelings.
 - *"That's a very natural feeling. Our MEMORIES are precious, and we want to keep them safe. Today, our MEMORY TREE will help us capture some of those precious MEMORIES, so they won't be lost."*
- Ask the children to think about the special MEMORIES they have with their loved one. Remind them that MEMORIES can be happy, sad, funny, or anything in between. They can be MEMORIES that directly include their family member or MEMORIES that are influenced by their presence in their lives.
- Introduce the idea of putting those MEMORIES on ribbons, or on the pieces of paper that then can be hung on the TREE with the ribbons.
 - *"Each of these beautiful ribbons will become a MEMORY KEEPER. We'll write or draw a MEMORY on a ribbon, and then we'll tie it onto our MEMORY TREE. Every ribbon will represent one special MEMORY. If you need a bigger space to write or draw, you can also use a piece of paper and then we can make a small hole to hang it from the TREE with a ribbon."*

Activity Description:

- Before starting the activity, bring a small TREE BRANCH and a bucket filled with sand to create a TREE. Alternatively, use the small TABLETOP TREE provided by staff.
- Use ribbons to represent MEMORIES, or papers with hole punches that can be hung with ribbons to allow the children to represent their MEMORIES. Prompt them with ideas as needed:
 - *“Maybe a favorite story, a special game you played, something funny they said, or how they used to make you feel.”*
 - Emphasize that MEMORIES can be short phrases, single words, or even a simple drawing or symbol for younger children.
- Explain that they write or draw MEMORIES on the ribbons or papers to then be tied to the branches of the TREE.
- When group members finish, help them tie them to the TREE. Allow them to choose the spot they want to place it. Encourage them to add more if they like—they can do as many as they want.
- **For a variation**—note that you can keep the TREE up during the remainder of the Group Session and can add more MEMORIES each week if they like.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Stand back and admire all the MEMORIES that it took to make the TREE complete.
 - *“Wow! Look at how beautiful it is! Every single ribbon on this TREE is a precious MEMORY. What does it feel like to see all these MEMORIES together?”*
 - *“Now, if you feel comfortable, this is a time for us to share some of the MEMORIES we put on our ribbons or just talk about how it felt to create them. Does anyone want to share?”*
 - If children share MEMORIES, acknowledge and thank them for sharing; as well as make connections with others in the group. (For example—*“Wow, I hear a lot of great times you all shared with your person”—“Wow, I see a lot of blue ribbons on the TREE—was that their favorite color?”*)
- Thank the group for adding their MEMORIES to make it a SPECIAL TREE, and if you continue to display it, let them know that they can continue to add each week if they like.

Notes:

- **Preschool**—keep it shorter and more simple with less processing. Have them choose a color that reminds them of their person (each child chooses a different one) or one word that the volunteer can write on the ribbon to hang on the TREE. If they want to add each week, they can share a MEMORY, and another ribbon of the same color can be added on to represent another shared MEMORY.
- **Adults**—this can be a great activity to start at the beginning of the Session and note that they can add on each week with or without sharing, as a moment of quiet reflection to start or end the evening. Allow them to share as they like.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Because Ongoing Sessions have a different group makeup and different MEMORIES shared, this is appropriate for an Ongoing Group without any adaptation needed. However, you can also slightly adapt it each week, with each new ribbon reflecting one of these options:
 - What you miss about them (*their humor, their insights, etc.*)
 - What you want to tell them (*something new in your life, something that happened since they died, etc.*)
 - Gifts they have given you (*what they taught you; lessons you learned from them, etc.*)
 - Reminders of them (*sunsets, a smell, a color, etc.*)
 - Their favorite things (*songs, hobbies, sports, etc.*)
 - Their qualities (*strong, kind, brave, etc.*)
 - How they still influence you (*cooking more, visiting the park where you used to walk together, thinking of them when you see birds, etc.*)
 - Hopes for them (*hope they're at peace, hope they know they were loved, etc.*)
 - Comforts when grief is hard (*snuggling a pet, holding something of your person's, taking a bath, etc.*)

MESSAGES TO NEW KIDS/ADULTS COMING TO THE CARING PLACE P—Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To allow the group to reflect on what they have gained from their experiences at the Caring Place and honor group members' growth. To see themselves as 'Experts' offering helpful experience to others.

Task/Need:

- Making meaning of the loss
- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the grief spiral
- Group Closure

Materials:

- A piece of poster board or large paper
- Markers

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Let the Group know that they will be working on something together to leave behind for those who come to the Caring Place after them.
- Encourage the Group to compare their feelings from the first meeting/orientation to the last meeting.
 - *"How did you feel when you first came to the Caring Place?"—"How do you feel now?"*
 - *"What feelings are the same?"—"Which ones are different?"*
- Introduce the Activity with a discussion of their experiences during the Group and how the Caring Place impacted them. Using focused questions for brainstorming may be helpful, especially for Younger Group members:
 - What have they learned?
 - What did they like about coming to the Caring Place?
 - What would they like to tell the NEXT GROUP about the Caring Place?
 - What would they have liked to have heard from children before them?

Activity Description:

- This activity is best used during the last week of a Session to wrap up the Group's activities.
- Allow the Group to reflect on their progress. Based on their observations, have them create MESSAGES for the NEXT GROUP attending the Caring Place. MESSAGES

can include words of support and suggestions for others experiencing similar losses.

- Allow them to add pictures to the poster if desired.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Review the messages drafted by the Group.
- Reinforce the gains the Group and individuals made during the Session and point out any commonalities.
- Recognize the courage they demonstrated by taking risks and sharing openly with the Group. Acknowledge the helpful and powerful contributions they can offer INCOMING GROUPS.
- Ask each Group member to share one thing they will remember most about their time at the Caring Place.
- Thank the Group for all their hard work during the Group Session.

Notes:

- If using with a **Preschool-Age Group**, make sure your prompting questions are concrete. Volunteers may need to write for the kids or allow Group members to draw on their poster.
- Some **Adult Groups** title their poster: ***“We Sat in These Chairs”*** and write advice for INCOMING GROUP MEMBERS about their time at the Caring Place or the grief journey.
- **Variation: Video Version**—For this, you will need to check with staff that all Group Members have signed the photo release. Although the video won’t be shared, we need to ensure it’s signed before considering this variation. You will need an iPad and the iMovie app. Ask a few focused questions and have them interview each other on video:
 - What have they learned at the Caring Place?
 - What has been difficult about coming to the Caring Place? Easy?
 - Have they done anything while at the Caring Place that they think will help them in their grief journey?
 - Any insights or advice to share with NEW KIDS or ADULTS coming to the Caring Place?
 - Once the video is made, they can watch it back together and discuss if there is anything else they would add.

For Ongoing Groups:

- For use in an Ongoing Group, consider posing these questions:
 - *“You are all now ‘Experts’ in continuing to navigate grief. What would you tell someone who is new or still feeling very lost?”*
 - Focusing Questions for Brainstorming (choose a few that fit your group’s current stage):
 - *“What do you wish you had known early on in your grief journey?”*
 - *“What has helped you the most during your time at the Caring Place?”*
 - *“What unexpected comfort or strength have you found that you want to share?”*
 - *“What does ‘continuing’ to live with grief look like for you, that you might share with someone just beginning?”*
 - *“If you could offer just one piece of advice for finding support or understanding, what would it be?”*
 - *“What have you learned about yourself since you started coming here?”*

MIND-BODY-SPIRIT SELF-CARE PLAN

M—T—A

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

Purpose: To empower group members to proactively identify personalized, positive coping strategies that support their overall well-being while navigating grief. This activity helps them build resilience, foster self-compassion, and recognize how self-care evolves as they continue “living on the Grief Spiral.”

Task/Need:

- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the Grief Spiral

Materials:

- SELF-CARE PLAN Worksheets (*found at the end of this activity*)
- Colored pencils
- Crayons
- Pencils
- Large whiteboard or flip chart
- Sticky Notes (*optional, for anonymous brainstorming for teens/adults*)
- “MY SELF-CARE PLAN” example (*pre-filled by a volunteer, or fictional*), to demonstrate completion without taking away from their own creativity

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Acknowledge the challenge of taking care of themselves while grieving.
 - *“Grief is incredibly demanding. It asks a lot of us—of our MINDS, our BODIES, and sometimes even challenges what we believe or how we feel deep inside. It’s easy to get so caught up in our feelings of loss that we forget to take care of ourselves.”*
- Note that SELF-CARE can be challenging when you are navigating grief.
 - *“Sometimes SELF-CARE sounds like fancy spa days or expensive trips. While those can be nice, true SELF-CARE, especially in grief, is often simpler. It’s about consciously nurturing ourselves across all parts of who we are—our MIND, BODY, AND SPIRIT—to help us cope and build strength during this really tough time.”*
- Acknowledge that they can share ideas and learn from each other, while focusing on creating a plan to take CARE of themselves.
 - *“Today, we’re going to create a personalized MIND-BODY-SPIRIT SELF-CARE PLAN. We’ll look at each of these areas:”*

- **MIND:** *“How do we take care of our thoughts, our feelings, our need for learning or calm? This might be something fun, creative, or connecting with friends.”*
- **BODY:** *“How do we nurture our physical self? Our energy, our sleep, what we eat, how we move. Our BODIES carry so much of our grief.”*
- **SPIRIT:** *“How do we nourish our deepest self, our sense of purpose, meaning, or connection to something bigger than ourselves? This doesn’t have to be religious; it could be spending time in nature, helping others, listening to music, or quiet reflection.”*
- Note that they can brainstorm together and create a list of SELF-CARE ideas that describe each of the topics on the Worksheet.
- Below are some examples (*see full list at the end*):
 - **MIND:** Fun/leisure activities, friendships, reading a book, doing a puzzle, talking to a friend, journaling
 - **BODY:** Exercise, plenty of sleep, healthy eating, walking, taking a bath
 - **SPIRIT:** Helping a friend, meditation, prayer, spending time in nature
- **Optional for Teens/Adults:** Allow them to write ideas anonymously on sticky notes or scraps of paper and place them in a basket at the end. Volunteers can then add them to the chart and continue to add on each week. This can reduce self-consciousness.
- **Worksheet:** Provide them with the Worksheet. Encourage them to add to their list as they get ideas from others or think of additional things. Note that this is theirs to keep and does not have to be shared.

Activity Description:

- Allow the group time to create their own SELF-CARE PLAN based on some of the ideas the group brainstormed.
- Encourage them to add to their list as things resonate with them.
- Reassure them that simple actions are often the most powerful. *“Even just five minutes of quiet can make a difference.”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Invite the group members to share their PLANS if they like and encourage other group members to add to their own PLAN if they learn ideas from others.
- Talk about how and when they might incorporate these ideas into their day. Remind them to give themselves grace and space—no need to commit to all the

ideas on their page—think of this as suggestions they can return to.

- Remember to remind them that what helps us one day might not help the next. And what helps us now might change a few months from now. Let them know that their SELF-CARE PLAN isn't set in stone; it's a living document. They can always add to it or change it as they need to.
- **Alternate Option:** This activity can be done as a Group on a large piece of paper or whiteboard.

Notes:

- Emphasize that what works for one person might not work for another. Personal choice is paramount.
- Consider if any participants have physical limitations when suggesting BODY activities. Adapt ideas or offer alternative “rest” suggestions.
- Normalize feelings of frustration that can come with this. Participants may be exhausted as grief is a drain on the BODY. Acknowledge this. Simply thinking about SELF-CARE can be draining initially.
- **Resources:** If the group identifies significant unmet needs, note these down discretely to mention to staff.

For Ongoing Groups:

- As the Group makeup is different in an Ongoing Group, no specific adaptation is needed; however, if many have already done this in an Introductory Group and do not show interest, consider an alternative activity. If done in an Ongoing Group, have them revisit their previous PLAN and see if a new PLAN is needed, or if they want to add to their list.
- See lists below for examples of each category that can help if the group needs suggestions:

MIND SELF-CARE EXAMPLES:

- Reading a book, article, or magazine (*fiction or non-fiction*)
- Listening to an interesting podcast or documentary
- Learning a new skill (*online course, puzzle, instrument*)
- Watching a documentary or educational video
- Visiting a museum or art gallery
- Solving puzzles (*crosswords, Sudoku, jigsaw puzzles*)
- Journaling (*free-writing, gratitude list, stream of consciousness*)
- Writing (*poems, stories, letters you don't send*)
- Drawing, painting, coloring, or doodling
- Engaging in crafts (*knitting, crocheting, pottery*)
- Playing a musical instrument
- Singing along to favorite songs
- Trying a new recipe
- Calling a supportive friend or family member
- Connecting with online support groups (*reputable ones*)
- Playing a board game or card game with others
- Telling a joke or sharing a funny story
- Joining a book club or casual interest group
- Listening to favorite music
- Watching a comforting TV show or movie
- Practicing mindful observation (*noticing details around you*)
- Working on a favorite hobby
- Doodling or sketching
- Playing video games (*in moderation if a preferred activity*)
- Engaging in “thought experiments” or light philosophical discussions

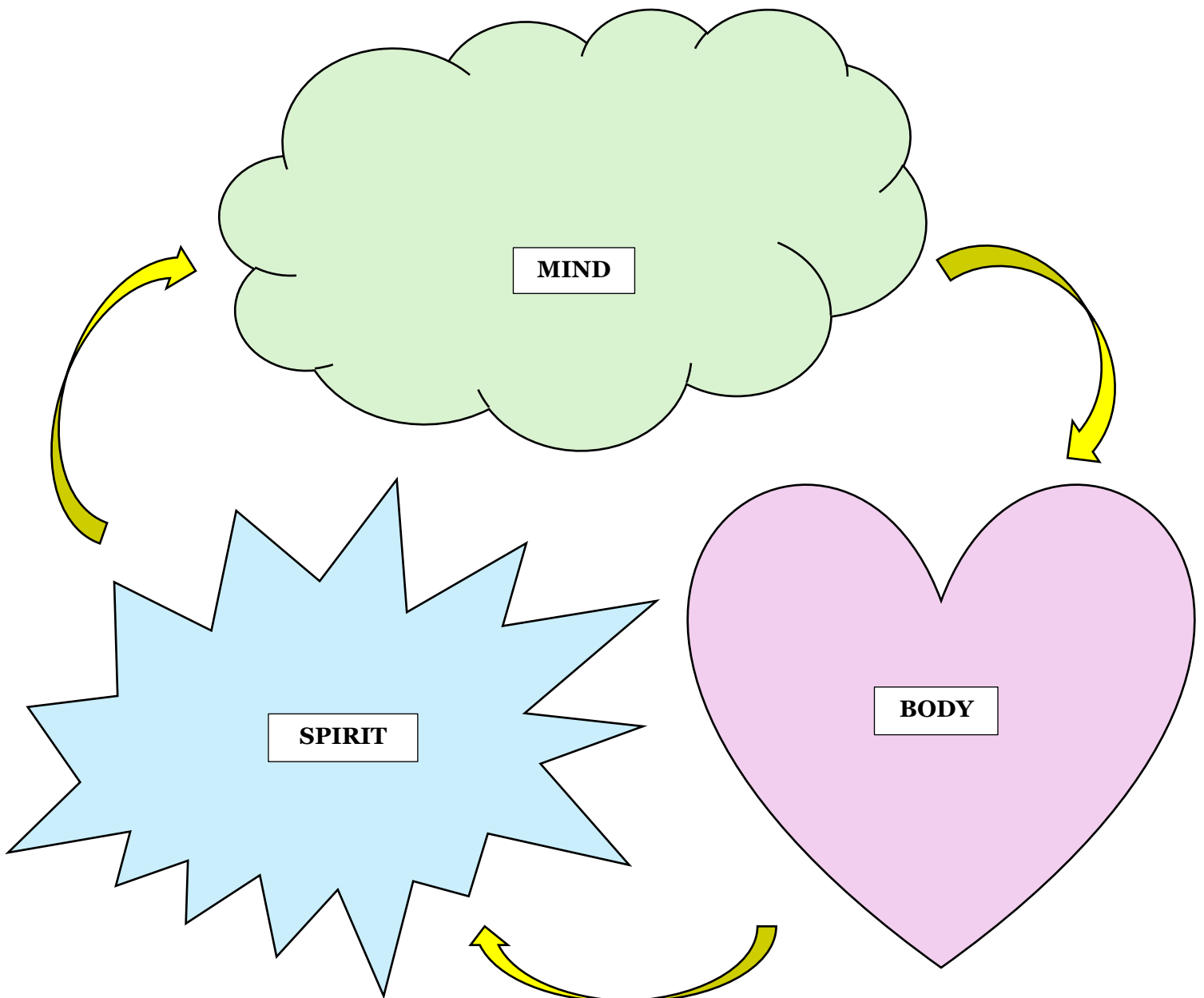
BODY SELF-CARE EXAMPLES:

- Going for a walk outside (*in nature if possible*)
- Gentle stretching or yoga
- Dancing to music
- Riding a bike (*if able*)
- Playing a sport or throwing a ball
- Gardening or light yard work
- Walking a pet
- Cleaning or organizing a small space (*can also be in the MIND category*)
- Doing a specific, planned chore
- Taking a warm bath or shower
- Getting enough sleep (*aiming for consistent bedtime/wake-up*)
- Taking a power nap (*if it doesn't disrupt nighttime sleep*)
- Resting with eyes closed, listening to calming sounds
- Receiving a gentle massage (*hand, foot, or professional*)
- Lying down comfortably, even without sleeping
- Eating a healthy, balanced meal
- Drinking enough water throughout the day
- Enjoying a comforting warm drink (*tea, cocoa*)
- Having a favorite healthy snack
- Mindfully enjoying a favorite treat (*in moderation*)
- Wrapping in a soft blanket
- Listening to calming sounds (*nature sounds, soft music*)
- Lighting a scented candle or using an Essential Oil Diffuser
- Petting an animal
- Sitting in the sunshine or by a window
- Feeling the textures of nature (*tree bark, grass*)
- Taking a deep breath of fresh air

SPIRIT SELF-CARE EXAMPLES:

- Spending time in nature (*parks, hiking, quiet garden*)
- Engaging in prayer or meditation (*if meaningful*)
- Reflecting on personal values or what matters most
- Volunteering or helping someone else (*small acts of kindness*)
- Practicing gratitude (*thinking of things you're thankful for*)
- Reflecting on your connection to the person who died (*how their values live on in you*)
- Being kind to yourself and others
- Creating a space for quiet reflection or prayer at home
- Watching a sunrise or sunset
- Stargazing
- Sitting by a body of water (*ocean, lake, stream*)
- Tending to plants or a small garden
- Observing animals or wildlife
- Simply being present in a natural setting
- Practicing deep breathing exercises
- Engaging in mindful meditation or guided imagery
- Focusing on one single task completely (*mindful dishwashing, mindful eating*)
- Slowing down and noticing details
- Writing in a gratitude journal
- Creating art that expresses feelings or connection
- Listening to music that moves your soul
- Singing or chanting (*if it brings a sense of spiritual connection*)
- Having a deeply meaningful conversation with a trusted person
- Spending time with people who uplift and understand you
- Participating in a spiritual community (*if applicable and desired*)

Self-Care Plan



Supportive People, Places or Things in my Life

MINI-ME ANIMAL Y—M—T

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

Purpose: To normalize feelings of sadness, regret, anger, and physical discomfort in grief. The activity also guides group members in externalizing these feelings, exploring their own inner state, and proactively identifying physical or emotional “Safe Places” and coping strategies for nurturing their inner emotional ANIMAL.

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Developing coping skills and supports

Materials:

- Model Magic
- Small box (4–6 inches)
- Markers
- Yarn
- Beads
- Decorations: beads, feathers, pipe cleaners, googly eyes, fabric scraps (*optional*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Set the stage and acknowledge difficult feelings in grief.
 - *“Grief is a powerful and often confusing journey. It can bring up so many different feelings inside us—sometimes all at once! Feelings like sadness, anger, frustration, even sometimes feeling ‘numb’ or physically uncomfortable. And it’s important to remember that all these feelings are normal and OK to have.”*
- Introduce the ANIMAL Analogy:
 - *“Sometimes, when we have these big, confusing feelings, it can feel a bit like there’s a little ANIMAL living inside us, carrying all those emotions. It’s unique to each of us. Today, we’re going to create a MINI-ME ANIMAL to represent how we’re feeling on the inside right now.”*
- Ask the group members to think of an ANIMAL that represents how they’re feeling today.
 - *“Think about how you feel right now. If your feelings today were an ANIMAL, what kind of ANIMAL would it be? Does it move slowly or quickly? Is it big or small? Does it want to hide, or run, or rest? What colors would it be?”*
 - As this is abstract and may be a challenge for some, give examples:

- **A fast, darting Rabbit or Bird:** Maybe your feelings are quick, jumpy, or full of a lot of nervous energy, making you feel anxious or restless.
- **A slow, tired Sloth or Turtle:** Perhaps you're feeling very heavy, sad, tired, or want to hide away right now.
- **A quiet, watchful Owl or Fox:** Maybe you're feeling very thoughtful, observing things around you, or keeping your feelings close.
- **A strong, determined Bear or Lion:** Perhaps you're feeling protective, brave, or even a little bit angry or frustrated today, wanting to roar about something.
- **A soft, cuddly Cat or Puppy:** Maybe you're feeling like you want to be close to someone or just want comfort and gentle calm.
- **A busy Ant or Beaver:** Perhaps you have a lot of energy or feel like you need to keep moving and doing things to feel better.
- **A scared Deer or Squirrel:** Maybe you're feeling a little jumpy, easily startled, or a bit worried or frightened.
- **A playful Dolphin or Monkey:** Maybe, even in grief, you have moments of feeling silly, playful, or light today.
- **A Porcupine or a Prickly Bush:** Maybe you're feeling a little grumpy, protective, or want people to keep their distance.
- Introduce the SAFE PLACE concept:
 - *"Now, think about that ANIMAL you imagined. When you (or that ANIMAL) have those big, hard feelings, what kind of PLACE helps you (or that ANIMAL) feel SAFE and a little better? It could be a real PLACE, a PLACE in your imagination, or even a feeling of being SAFE."*
 - Ask them what PLACES make them feel SAFE when they have those hard feelings, or when their ANIMAL does, and give suggestions or ideas if needed:
 - A cozy warm burrow or nest
 - A quiet shady cave or den
 - Under a strong tree that provides comfort
 - In a sunny open field surrounded by flowers
 - By a calm pond or stream
 - In the sky on a soft fluffy cloud

- Now that they have given it some thought, let the group know that they will be creating a MINI-ME ANIMAL and a SAFE PLACE for their ANIMAL today with lots of fun materials.

Activity Description:

- Ask the group to create an ANIMAL that represents them and how they're feeling today using Model Magic, markers, beads, feathers, and any other materials provided.
- Be curious about their creation while they're making them by asking questions like:
 - *"What kind of ANIMAL did you choose? What about this ANIMAL felt right for you today?"*
 - *"What does this ANIMAL mean to you?"*
 - *"What is important to you about this ANIMAL?"*
 - *"What does it say about you?"*
 - *"If your ANIMAL could talk, what would it say?"*
 - *"Is there anything your ANIMAL needs, or that you wish you could change about it?"*
 - *"Does your ANIMAL show everything about how you feel today, or does it also keep some feelings hidden?"*
- Afterwards, ask the group to create a SAFE AND STRONG PLACE for their ANIMAL. Process as they create their SAFE PLACE by asking:
 - *"What makes this PLACE SAFE for your ANIMAL?"*
 - *"What does your ANIMAL need in this PLACE to feel better when it has hard feelings?"* (For example, quiet, darkness, light, a soft bed.)
 - *"What is missing from their SAFE PLACE that it wishes it had? What would you add if you could?"*
 - *"What kind of feelings can your ANIMAL have in its SAFE PLACE?"*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Have the group share their ANIMALS and SAFE PLACES with the group if they like.
- Ask questions when they share (*see those above*). Let them know they can pass on any of the questions if they like. Have them expand on the FEELINGS/SAFE SPACE if they feel comfortable:
 - *"When your ANIMAL has feelings like anger or sadness, what does it do inside its SAFE PLACE?"*

- “What does your *ANIMAL* tell you about how you’re feeling right now?”
- “Tell us about the *SAFE PLACE*—what makes it feel *SAFE* for your *ANIMAL*?”
- Connecting to personal feelings and coping:
 - “These *ANIMALS* and their *SAFE PLACES* are wonderful reminders. Your *ANIMAL* helps you understand your feelings, and its *SAFE PLACE* reminds you of what you need to do or where you can go to feel a little bit safer or a little bit better when those big feelings come.”
 - Process any feelings or thoughts related to creating their *ANIMALS* or *SPACES*—how did it feel to create these? Did they like making them? Was anything about it hard or challenging?
 - Thank the group for sharing their *ANIMALS* and *SAFE PLACES*.

Notes:

- Encourage creativity and emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers.
- Avoid interpreting: Your role is to be curious about their creation and their meaning, not to impose your own interpretations. Ask—“What does it mean to you?” rather than “Is that an angry wolf?”

For Ongoing Groups:

- As they’re asked to make an *ANIMAL* and *SAFE PLACE* based on how they’re feeling *in the moment*, this can be used as an activity for Ongoing Groups and would work even if they already created a *MINI-ME ANIMAL* before.
 - If feelings are the same, ask them to create a new creature, or they can make a second *ANIMAL* to be a “buddy” for their first one. Have them think about the *SAFE PLACE* they made the last time and how they want to change it this time.

MORSE CODE BRACELETS

Y—M—T—A

Suggested Groups: Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To offer group members a unique and personalized way to honor and carry the memory of their loved one who has died. This activity facilitates storytelling, strengthens continuing bonds through a tangible and discreet keepsake, and fosters a sense of privacy around their grief while allowing for optional sharing within the supportive group setting.

Task/Need:

- Telling their story
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died

Materials:

- **Beads:** Variety in color, size, or shape—ensure there are at least **three distinct types/sizes** for participants to clearly differentiate Dots, Dashes, and Letter Spaces
- **String or Elastic:** Appropriate for bracelet making)
- **Morse Code Alphabet Chart** (*see end of this activity for chart*)
- **Scissors**

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome the group and set the context for remembrance:
 - *“Today we’re going to create something very special to help us remember and keep close the people we miss. It’s often really comforting to carry a part of them with us, even if no one else knows what it means.”*
- Invite the group members to share who in their life has died if they haven’t already.
 - *“Before we start, let’s take a quiet moment to remember the special person (or people) who have died. If you feel comfortable, you can simply share their name, or a very brief memory that comes to mind when you think of them. There’s no pressure to share more than you’d like.”*
- Discuss ways in which continued bonds may play an important role in their grief journey.
 - *“When someone dies, our love for them doesn’t disappear. It often changes shape, but we can continue to feel connected to them in many ways. This idea of ‘continuing bonds’ is important for our grief journey. Today, we’re making a BRACELET that can be a subtle, personal reminder of that connection—a way to always ‘carry’ your special person with you.”*

- Explain that they are going to create a special BRACELET with their loved one's name written in MORSE CODE—to make a 'Secret Message.'
 - *"Have you ever heard of MORSE CODE? It's like a secret language that uses Dots and Dashes to spell out words! Today, we're going to become 'Secret Message Makers' and create a BRACELET that spells out your loved one's name, or a special word or message, using this unique CODE."*
 - *"While many of us might choose to spell out a loved one's name, you can also use this SECRET CODE for a special message, like 'Love'—'Hope,'—'Breathe'—'Courage'—or any word that's important to you right now. You could also do a short saying that they always told you, or something else that is significant to you."*

Activity Description:

- Using beads to symbolize the Dots and Dashes of the MORSE CODE alphabet, participants will make a BRACELET to spell out their loved one's name (or other symbolic word or message).
 - *"Pick a distinct type of bead to represent **DOTS**."*
 - *"Pick a distinct type of bead to represent **DASHES**."*
 - *"Pick a distinct type of bead to represent the **SPACES** in between letters."*
 - *"Map out your piece of jewelry using the MORSE CODE ALPHABET CHART for the chosen name/word/message."*
 - *"Use the elastic or string to thread your beads according to your mapped MORSE CODE design. It can be helpful to cut the string extra long, and tape one end to the table. This ensures that you have plenty of space to tie it at the end."*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow group members to share the name or message encrypted in their BRACELETS.
 - *"Wow, everyone has created such unique and beautiful MORSE CODE BRACELETS! Hold yours up so we can all see them. Would anyone like to share what message they put on their BRACELET?"*
 - *"These BRACELETS are so special because they hold a secret. It's a way for you to carry your loved one or a powerful message close to you, always, and only you know the full meaning of what you're wearing. It can be a very private and comforting way to remember."*

- Ask them to reflect on how it felt to make the BRACELET.
 - *“Was it hard for anyone to choose what you wanted to put on your BRACELET?”*
 - *“How did it feel to remember your person and think of them while you made it?”*
 - *“How does having this BRACELET make you feel connected to your loved one or to that special message? Does it feel like a subtle reminder you can carry with you?”*

Notes:

- While suitable for Young to Teen, Younger children (7–9) may require more one-on-one assistance with decoding and stringing, especially with longer names.
- It can be helpful to have the group members lay out their beads first and double-check them to make sure it looks right. If a participant makes a mistake, reassure them. *“It’s part of the process! We can take it apart and try again.”*
- The use of MORSE CODE adds a unique and personal touch, as the message is not immediately obvious to everyone.
- Ensure that clear MORSE CODE CHARTS are provided and volunteers are available to assist younger participants or those who may find it challenging.
- Have some pre-printed cards with popular meaningful words (HOPE—LOVE—PEACE—BREATHE) already decoded into MORSE CODE as a quick alternative for those struggling or feeling overwhelmed by choice.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity is rarely done in Introductory Groups, so it is suitable for Ongoing Groups. If they did make one in an Introductory Group, you can ask them to bring in their first BRACELET they made. In making a second one, they can choose a comforting word or phrase instead of their person’s name or make a second one with different beads—perhaps to give to their adult or another member of their family.

Morse Code Alphabet:

A	• —	U	• • —
B	— • • •	V	• • • —
C	— • — •	W	• — —
D	— • •	X	— • • —
E	•	Y	— • — —
F	• • — •	Z	— — • •
G	— — •		
H	• • • •		
I	• •		
J	• — — —		
K	— • —	1	• — — — —
L	• — • •	2	• • — — —
M	— —	3	• • • — —
N	— •	4	• • • • —
O	— — —	5	• • • • •
P	• — — •	6	— • • • •
Q	— — • —	7	— — • • •
R	• — • •	8	— — — • •
S	• • •	9	— — — — •
T	—	0	— — — — —



MY FEELINGS, MY ART

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To help group members explore feelings and ideas about grief through art. It provides a way to share without having to talk a lot, which can be helpful if they are struggling with ways to express themselves.

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Identifying and expressing feelings

Materials:

- Construction paper
- Markers
- Colored pencils
- Scissors
- Glue

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Introduce the topic:
 - Explain that group members will be doing a DRAWING activity. The group will decide on the topic.
 - Before handing out ART supplies, have the group come to a consensus on a topic for the DRAWINGS (*see Notes section*). Explain each topic clearly. Narrow down more concrete examples like MY FAMILY or ONE MORE DAY for younger group members.
 - Alternatively, group members can choose their own topic if they like.
- Discuss ideas of what they can DRAW.
 - Once a topic is chosen, ask the group what they could DRAW related to that topic. Get their ideas flowing!
 - Have group members identify places, an activity, a laugh, a certain color, or a smell, etc.
- After the group brainstormed various ideas, present/describe available ART supplies and encourage them to begin their ART.

Activity Description:

- Let the group members be creative by giving everyone the ART supplies and allowing them to start DRAWING!
- Offer support as they DRAW. Ask simple questions about their DRAWINGS like:

- *“Tell me about what you’re DRAWING.”*
- *“What’s happening in this part?”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Invite the kids to share their DRAWINGS with the group, only if they want to. It’s OK if they just want to show it instead of explaining it.
- If they share, ask questions to help them talk about the DRAWING and how it made them feel. For example:
 - *“How did it feel to DRAW this?”*
 - *“What’s the most important part of this PICTURE?”*
 - *“What’s most important to you in your DRAWING?”*
- Summarize any common themes or similar experiences for the group.
- Ask them what they would like to do with their ARTWORK.
 - All options, including leaving it at the Caring Place, are OK.
- Thank group members for sharing their ART.

Notes:

- **Suggested topics below:**
 - **Regrets:** DRAW things they regret about the person who died.
 - **Favorite Day:** DRAW their favorite day with the person who died.
 - **Wished For Day:** If they could have one more day with that person, what would it be like?
 - **Gifts (Not Things):** What special gifts (*like love, memories, or lessons*) did they get or learn from the person who died?
 - **What I Remember Most:** DRAW memories of the person who died.
 - **Funeral/Memorial:** DRAW the funeral—how it was, or how they wish it had been.
 - **My Family:** DRAW their family, with or without the person who died.
 - **Places for Support:** DRAW things that represent places or people who help them.
- Resist the urge to interpret or offer solutions.
 - Try to incorporate the Listening and Facilitating Statements:
 - *“That sounds like a really meaningful memory.”*
 - *“It sounds like you put a lot of emotion into this.”*

- *“Thank you for being brave enough to share that with us. It sounds like a difficult feeling/memory.”*

For Ongoing Groups:

- As different topics can be chosen by the Group, replicating this in an Ongoing Group has value even if a group member has done this before. However, you can consider these suggestions:
 - Think about new ART MEDIUM the Group can use:
 - Instead of markers and colored pencils, introduce watercolors, pastels, clay, collage materials (magazines, fabric scraps), or even digital art tools. This changes the sensory experience and opens up new avenues for expression.
 - Combine different materials (for example, adding cutouts to a drawing).
 - Add 3-dimensional materials like pipe cleaners or clay.
 - Other options can include:
 - **ABSTRACT ART:** Encourage them to create an ABSTRACT PIECE that represents their feelings about a topic, rather than a literal DRAWING. For example, *“DRAW the color of your sadness”* or *“Create a shape that feels like hope.”*
 - **STORYBOARDING/COMIC STRIPS:** If the topic is “One More Day” or “Favorite Day,” suggest they tell a story through a sequence of drawings like a COMIC STRIP.
 - **MANDALAS/PATTERNS:** Offer stencils or explain how to create repetitive patterns that represent calm, peace, or the cyclical nature of grief.
 - They could create a SERIES OF DRAWINGS or a SINGLE LARGE PIECE that maps out their grief journey.
 - New topics:
 - **Hopes for the Future:** Shift the focus from the past to the future, allowing them to explore growth and moving forward while still acknowledging their grief.
 - **What I Carry with Me Now:** This could be a symbol, a feeling, a lesson, or a memory that they actively carry from the person who died.

- **My Changing Feelings:** Instead of one feeling, they could create a piece that shows how their feelings about the loss have evolved over time.
- **A Letter/Message Through Art:** They could create a visual “Letter” or Message to the person who died, or to themselves in the future.
- **My Support System:** Broaden “Places for Support” to include actions, hobbies, or inner strengths that help them.

MY GRIEF CALENDAR

Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To recognize dates on the calendar that may bring grief to the front of the Spiral and be challenging

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Developing coping skills and supports
- Helping them understand who they are after their loss
- Living on the Grief Spiral

Materials:

- Individual CALENDARS (*one for each group member, preferably with ample writing space*)—OR large paper divided into 12 “months” (*one set for each group member*)
- Pens, markers, colored pencils
- Stickers, glitter glue, or other embellishments for personalizing; privacy folders or dividers for personal CALENDARS, especially for teens (*optional*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Introduce the activity by discussing the significance of certain dates (birthdays, holidays, anniversaries of events, etc.) in the children’s lives, especially those related to their loss.
 - *“Today we’re going to talk about something important that can sometimes bring grief right to the front: special dates on the calendar. Does anyone have an idea of what kind of dates I might be talking about?”* (Allow a few responses like birthdays and holidays.)
- Discuss how these days are different from others and encourage group members to share their own thoughts and feelings about them.
 - *“Dates like birthdays, holidays, the anniversary of someone’s death, or even everyday family traditions can be super significant. Before our person died, these dates might have felt joyful or just normal. Now, they can feel very different—sometimes sadder, sometimes complicated, and sometimes we might even feel nervous or dread them approaching.”*
 - *“It’s really normal to notice these dates. It’s not a sign that you’re ‘not getting over it,’ but a sign that you remember and you care deeply about your person and the memories you shared. These feelings are a very real part of grief.”*

Activity Description:

- Once the topic has been introduced, ask each child to identify their own important dates and note them on the CALENDARS provided.
 - *“Everyone’s experience with dates is unique. Today, we’re going to make our own personal GRIEF CALENDAR to think about these dates and find ways to support ourselves and each other when they come around.”*
- Hand out CALENDARS and let them know that they can work where they are or move to find a comfy spot to work if they want more privacy. If you have folders for them, pass them out or make them available.
- Encourage discussion in the group to help add dates to their CALENDARS:
 - *“Maybe it’s your loved one’s birthday?”*
 - *“Maybe it’s the day they died, sometimes called an Anniversary of the Death?”*
 - *“Are there specific holidays that feel different now?”*
 - *“What about your birthday, or the birthdays of other family members?”*
 - *“Are there other special events or family traditions—maybe a yearly trip, a family reunion, or even the first day of school—that feel different because your person isn’t there?”*
- After they have added dates to their CALENDAR, lead discussion on feelings/changes/rituals/coping skills.
 - *“How were these dates (holidays, birthdays, etc.) before the loss, and after?”*
 - *“Have the feelings about these dates changed since the loss?”*
 - *“Are there dates that are difficult that you would not have expected to be difficult? Are there dates that were easier than you thought they would be?”*
- Lead discussion on coping strategy ideas:
 - *“What rituals or special activities have you done (or could you try) to remember your loved one on these dates or make it feel more manageable? (For example: Lighting a Candle—Looking at Photos—Visiting a Special Place—Making Their Favorite Meal—Writing a Letter.)”*
 - *“Who are some of the people in your life who you could talk to or lean on for support when these dates come around?”*

- *“Are there specific activities that help you feel calm or bring you a little bit of comfort? (For example: Listening to Music—Reading—Spending Time Outside—Drawing—Playing Video Games.)”*
- *“Sometimes, we might want to change a tradition, and sometimes we might want to keep one. What are your thoughts about that for specific dates?”*
- *“Would it help to plan something gentle and low-key on those days, or something active to keep your mind busy?”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Encourage sharing and connection, if they’re willing.
 - *“Would anyone like to share one thing they’ve noticed or written on their CALENDAR today?”*
 - *“Would anyone like to share some of the rituals or coping strategies they use that help them on these dates?”*
 - Point out similarities or differences.
- Process their feelings related to the activity.
 - *“How did it feel to look at the CALENDAR and think of dates that might be hard?”*
 - Be curious if it was an easy or challenging activity.
 - *“How difficult or easy was it for you to think about ways that you can cope on these days?”*
 - *“Do you think this CALENDAR will be helpful for you?”*

Notes:

- Remember to listen to what group members are saying and don’t project your own feelings or experiences onto the group.
- The goal is to empower them with awareness and coping strategies, not to “fix” their grief or make the pain disappear.
- Especially for teens, respect the privacy of their CALENDARS and choices.

For Ongoing Groups:

- If group members have done this before, they can add additional dates or think about what has changed since the last time they made a CALENDAR. They can also do a deeper dive on a few different things they can do on those dates:
 - An act of remembrance to honor their person.
 - Something they could do for fun or comfort that day.
 - Someone they can reach out to for support on that day.

- Another variation could be to talk about memories from those dates in the past:
 - One memory from that date in the past.
 - One way they want to honor or remember them.
 - A message that they want to send to them on that day.
- For younger children, it may work best to make a GROUP CALENDAR and work on adding major holidays and birthdays before adding other dates that children may not know (for example, the anniversary of the death dates).
- Adults may be able to add dates they have discovered are difficult for their children/teens

MY GRIEF IS....

T—A

Suggested Group(s): Teen, Adult

Purpose: To create a brave and safe space for group members to articulate and share their personal experiences and perceptions of grief. This activity aims to normalize the wide range of feelings associated with grief, foster empathy and mutual understanding among participants, and reinforce group cohesion by demonstrating shared experiences (both similar and diverse) within their grief journey.

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- **Strips of Paper**, approximately 2 inches wide and 8–10 inches long (*one initial strip per group member, plus extras for additional thoughts*); using different colored strips can add a visual element, or plain white/light-colored strips work fine
- **Markers/Pens** (*variety of colors and types*)
- **Large Piece of Flip Chart Paper or Whiteboard** (*to display the collected strips*)
- **Painter's Tape** (*for attaching strips to the flip chart/whiteboard, especially for the "GRIEF POEM" alternative*)
- **A MY GRIEF IS... Header Strip:** Prepared by the volunteer in advance, to start the display

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Introduce that today's group will center on feelings.
 - *"Welcome everyone. Today, we're going to dive into what GRIEF feels like to each of us. GRIEF is deeply personal, and it can show up in so many different ways—sometimes surprising ways. We're going to create a safe space here where all those experiences are heard and valued."*
 - *"Today's Activity centers around a very simple phrase: MY GRIEF IS... Your task is to complete that sentence with whatever comes to mind for you. There are absolutely no right or wrong answers. This isn't about being poetic; it's about being honest about your experience."*
- Brainstorm as a group how to describe GRIEF:
 - *"When we say, MY GRIEF IS..., what kind of things can we think about? It could be:"*

- *“How your feelings about grief show up (for example, MY GRIEF IS... ‘...heavy’—‘...a rollercoaster’).”*
 - *“Your reactions to your GRIEF (‘...exhausting’—‘...loud silence’).”*
 - *“A color, a sound, a season, an object, an animal (‘...a grey fog’—‘...a sudden downpour’—‘...a quiet whisper’).”*
 - *“Something specific about what you’re noticing or experiencing right now.”*
- Explain that they will all get a strip of paper and can choose a pen/marker to complete the prompt MY GRIEF IS... Let them know that they can use different colors, write more than one thing, or use extra strips of paper if they like.
 - Let them know that what they write can be kept to themselves, or they can share during wrap up if they choose to do so.

Activity Description:

- Give them time to complete the prompt on the strip(s) of paper.
- Once most seem to be done, let them know that you will be collecting those who are willing to share. If they want to keep it, they can do so.
- Let them know that once you collect them, you will hang them up under the main header strip that has MY GRIEF IS... written on it—to create a mosaic of the different ideas.
- Provide the alternative of doing a GRIEF POEM as a group:
 - *“As an alternative, we can collectively create a GRIEF POEM. Once you’ve written your statements, we’ll take turns, and each of you can place your strip onto the display board in an order that feels right to you. There’s no set sequence; it’s about what flows and connects for the group.”*
 - Guide the order: *“Who feels drawn to start our POEM today?”* Then *“Who would like to add the next line that connects to that thought, or feels like a new verse?”* Facilitate organically, observing connections.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Once they’re all on the board, or the POEM is complete, take a moment to allow group members to reflect.
 - *“What are your first thoughts or feelings seeing all these descriptions of GRIEF?”*

- *“As you read through, what similarities do you notice in these statements? Are there any that make you feel like ‘Yes! That’s exactly it for me too?’”*
- *“Did any particular statement, either yours or someone else’s, resonate deeply with you? What does it feel like to see your experience mirrored by another, or to understand someone else’s pain in a new way?”*
- *“What does it mean to have all these experiences shared in one space? How does it feel to see that your GRIEF, in all its uniqueness, is part of a larger conversation here?”*
- *“This display reminds us that GRIEF isn’t just one thing. It’s many things, often changing, evolving, spiraling. Your descriptions today capture a moment, but that moment is real and valid.”*
- Thank the group for their contributions and bravery to share what they did.
- Optional: Depending on the space, the display can remain for future sessions as a visual reminder of the shared experience.

Notes:

- This activity can be profoundly emotional. Be prepared for silence, tears, and strong reactions. Your compassionate presence and ability to hold space are very important.
- Your role is to facilitate expression and shared understanding, not to offer clinical interpretation. Trust the group members to make their own connections and find validation.
- Allow ample time for writing and reflection, and then for reading the assembled thoughts. Rushing diminishes the impact.
- If someone can’t or doesn’t want to write, offer to scribe for them, or allow them to draw something. A drawing can be just as powerful.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This is not often done in Introductory Groups and is appropriate for Ongoing Groups. The beauty of this activity is how it evolves with each Group and their individual stories. Even if someone has participated in this activity in an Introductory Group, repeating it offers a powerful new perspective with different people and ideas. For those who remember doing it, invite them to compare their earlier reflections with today’s to deepen their experience.

MY STORY

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To provide a structured and creative opportunity for group members to explore and reaffirm their sense of self-identity in the context of their loss. This activity helps them investigate their feelings and experiences, begin “Making Meaning of the Loss” within their personal narrative, and understand that their story is always evolving as they continue “Living on the Grief Spiral.”

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Helping them understand who they are after their loss
- Making meaning of the loss
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Pages with the MY STORY headings (*see activity description*) or MY STORY companion worksheets (*find MY STORY worksheets in Appendix*)
- Markers
- Scissors
- Art materials (*stickers, magazines, colored pencils, crayons, markers*)
- Glue sticks
- Stapler
- *Optional Example:* A very simple, short AUTOBIOGRAPHY or picture book BIOGRAPHY (preferably written for a young reader, or a picture book about a famous person’s early life—check with staff for ideas or make a sample booklet to show them)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin by telling the group they are going to be able to share and write their own personal stories that they then can take with them.
- Introduce the idea of an AUTOBIOGRAPHY:
 - *“Has anyone ever heard of something called an AUTOBIOGRAPHY?” (Show example if you have one.) “An AUTOBIOGRAPHY is simply a special kind of book where someone writes (or draws) their own story, all about themselves. It’s a way of collecting all the important parts of their life—their adventures, their feelings, the people they love—and putting it all together in one place.”*

- **Optional:** Share a copy of an AUTOBIOGRAPHY (preferably written by or for a young reader) or an example that was made. Explain that it is a STORY that a person writes about themselves.
- Let them know that everybody has a STORY and each person's STORY is unique to their experiences.
 - *“Every single person here has their own incredible STORY. And even though sad things happen in our lives, our STORIES don't stop there. Our STORIES keep going, and we keep adding new pages and new adventures to them, even after we've experienced big changes like missing someone we love.”*
 - *“Today, you get to start writing (or drawing) your own AUTOBIOGRAPHY! You will get a chance to make a MY STORY booklet today. Inside, there are different pages with ideas to help you tell all about you: your family, what you love, your strengths, and yes, even pages to remember the special person you're missing, and how you feel now.”*
- Emphasize choice and options for creating their STORY.
 - *“Remember, this is your STORY. You get to choose what you put in it. You can write, you can draw, you can use colors—whatever feels best for you. And if you're not ready to write about something, that's OK too; you can always leave a page blank or come back to it later. What you put in your STORY is always up to you. You'll get to take this booklet home with you to keep adding to it.”*
 - *“If writing is a bit tricky today, one of us volunteers can be your ‘scribe.’ That means you tell us your STORY, and we can help you write down your words if you like and then leave you space to draw the picture. So don't worry about writing perfectly, just focus on your story.”*

Activity Description:

- Pass out blank pages or books already put together with the headings below. If you're having them write the title at the top, write them large enough so they can see the heading for each page to copy down. Point out all the art supplies and options that they have for creating their book.
- Ensure volunteers are available to help them if needed. Prompts can be helpful as they work on each page as noted below:
 - **Page 1 All About Me / My Favorites:** *“Start by telling us about you! What's your name? What makes you special? What are your favorite things to do, to eat, to see? You can write or draw.”*

- **Page 2** My Family / People I Love: *“Who is in your family? Who do you love spending time with? You can draw them or write their names.”*
- **Page 3** My Strengths / Things I’m Good At: *“What are you really good at? What makes you feel strong or proud? It could be anything—being a good friend, telling jokes, drawing, playing a game, helping others.”*
- **Page 4** Memories of [Loved One]: *“This page is for the special person you are missing. What’s a memory you have of them? What was something unique about them?”*
- **Page 5** The Things I Miss Most About the Person Who Died: *“Here you can write or draw about specific things you truly miss about your person or things you miss doing with them.”*
- **Page 6** Changes in My Life Since My Person Died: *“Acknowledge how things have shifted. What’s different for you, big or small, since your person died?”*
- **Page 7** Questions I Have Since My Person Died: *“It’s normal to have lots of questions when someone dies. What questions do you have? You can write or draw them here.”*
- **Page 8** Things That Make Me Mad, Sad, and Happy: *“All feelings are OK! What things make you feel mad, what things make you feel sad, and what things still bring you happiness?”*
- **Page 9** Things I Worry About: *“It’s common to have worries, especially when grieving. What are some things you worry about? It’s safe to write them down here.”*
- **Page 10** People I Can Talk With: *“Who are the people you feel safe talking to when you have big feelings, worries, or want to share a memory? You can write their names or draw them.”*
- **Page 11** What I Want the World to Know About Me: *“What is something important about you that you want others to understand or notice? How has your journey shaped you?”*
- **Page 12** Things I Will Remember About My Group at the Caring Place: *“What are some things you’ll remember about being here in our group at the Caring Place? What memories will you take with you?”*
- Encourage them to make them personal—they can cut pictures from magazines, add stickers, doodles—it’s their book!
- Staple each set into a booklet once done (*this can also be done ahead of time*).

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Transition into sharing their STORIES if they feel comfortable. Remind them of the **I PASS RULE**.
 - *“If you feel comfortable, you can choose one page from your STORY to share with the group—maybe something you’re proud of, a memory, a hope, or something you learned about yourself. No pressure at all, only share what you want to.”*
- During sharing, make connections when possible and encourage questions from other groups members.
 - *“Wow, [group member], you put that one of the things you miss most is your person’s hugs. I know another group member mentioned that too—does anyone else miss their person’s hugs?”*
 - *“[Group member], thanks for sharing that you get worried that other people in your life will die now too. That is a common worry. Does anyone else feel that way?”*
 - *“Thanks so much for sharing your STORY with us! I learned a lot about you—does anyone have any questions for [group member] about their STORY or something that they want to ask them before we move on to the next person?”*
- Remind them that as we have new experiences, our STORIES continue to change. Encourage group members to take them home and keep adding to them.
 - *“These booklets are so important. They show us that you are still you, and your STORY keeps going. Even when big, sad, or confusing things happen, like losing someone you love, your STORY doesn’t stop. It just changes, and new chapters get added.”*
- Thank them for sharing their STORIES with the group.

Notes:

- This activity has many pages so it may take time. Allow ample time for quiet reflection, writing/drawing, and individual support. Do not rush the process. Consider splitting into multiple meetings if necessary for completion and processing.
- Memories, feelings, changes, and questions about loss can evoke strong emotions. Be prepared to sit with sadness, frustration, or even anger without judgment. Validate feelings: *“It sounds like that page was difficult”*—*“It’s OK to feel sad or mad when you think about that.”*
- For younger children or those who may struggle with writing, provide ‘scribes’ (volunteers) to help them write down their responses or to read the prompts

aloud. Ensure you have enough volunteers and time if working with a group of younger children. Remember that children may also wish to draw their responses or use other non-verbal methods.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This is appropriate for Introductory or Ongoing Groups. However, if they did this activity in an Introductory Group, it might feel repetitive to do the same book again. Instead, encourage them to bring their completed book if they still have it, or offer alternative pages. Here are some examples of other pages that could be added.
 - **Page 1** Since We Last Met... (New Experiences): *“What new things have happened in your life (big or small) since you wrote your first STORY?”*
 - **Page 2**: New Feelings About My Grief: *“Have any of your feelings about your loved one or their death changed or shifted since last time (for example, maybe feeling more hopeful, less angry, sadder about different things, or experiencing unexpected joys)?”*
 - **Page 3** Ways I Keep Them Close Now: *“What are new or different ways you connect with your loved one’s memory (for example, visiting a new place, a new tradition, looking at different photos)?”*
 - **Page 4** Something New I’ve Learned About Myself: *“What have you learned about your own strength, resilience, or how you handle emotions since then?”*
 - **Page 5** Someone Who Has Helped Me Grow (New Support): *“Is there anyone new in your life, or someone who has helped you in a new way, since your last STORY?”*
 - **Page 6** Looking Back at My Old Story...: *“What part of your first MY STORY book makes you smile, makes you sad, or surprises you now?”*
 - **Page 7** What I’m Proud Of (Since Then): *“What’s something you’re really proud of that you’ve done or experienced since you wrote your first STORY?”*
 - **Page 8** New Hopes or Dreams: *“Have any of your hopes or dreams for the future changed or become clearer?”*
 - **Page 9** What My Loved One Taught Me: *“List specific skills, values, or lessons.”*
 - **Page 10** Future Memories (How I will honor them): *“What new traditions or actions will you take in the future to keep their memory alive?”*

- **Page 11** Words That Live On: *“What’s a favorite saying, piece of advice, or even a funny phrase your loved one used?”*
- **Page 12** My Coping Compass: *“What are 3–5 activities you do that help you feel better, even for a little while (for example, drawing, listening to music, playing outside, talking to a pet, watching a movie)?”*

MY STORY CANVAS

M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To provide a creative, multi-sensory outlet for individuals and families to explore, express, and integrate complex feelings and memories related to their grief journey. To create a tangible piece of art that tells a personal story of loss, love, and life moving forward while remembering their person who died.

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- CANVASES of varying sizes (suggest 8 x 10 or 9 x 12)
- Heavy-duty craft glue (*clear liquid gel glue, Tacky Glue, or a hot glue gun for volunteer use for more permanent or heavy items*)
- Assortment of acrylic paint colors
- Small plates (*as palettes*) for paint distribution
- Various paint brushes and sponges
- Water in small cups for cleaning brushes
- Different types of fabrics, yarn, string
- Scissors for cutting fabric or string
- Embellishments, or a wide assortment of varied items for decorating the canvas (*optional—see below*)
 - **Remembrance:** Old/broken jewelry pieces (*rings, earrings, charms—especially those with sentimental value*), old buttons, old watch parts (*removed from watch*)
 - **Connection:** Game pieces (*dominoes, chess pieces, scrabble letters*), small puzzle pieces, miniature playing cards
 - **Nature/Growth:** Seashells, small smooth pebbles, dried flowers/leaves (*ensure non-allergenic*), small cork pieces
 - **Emotion/Abstract:** Beads (*various sizes/colors/materials*), sequins, gems, small polished stones
 - **Playful:** Tiny plastic toys, toy car parts, tiny Lego bricks (*clean and safe*)

- **Everyday Objects:** Keys, small bottle caps, pieces of interesting paper/cardboard

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome group and introduce the activity.
 - *“Welcome everyone. Today we’re going to create something unique and personal to you. It’s a special kind of collage where we’ll use a mix of textures, colors, and unique objects to tell a piece of our story.”*
- Explain that there is a large assortment of materials for them to choose from to create their CANVAS. Let them know that it can represent their memories, their feelings, their grief, or a combination of all of that—this is their CANVAS to create in their own way.
 - *“We have an assortment of materials today: paints, fabrics, beads, and all sorts of odds-and-ends. Each of these items holds its own unique character, just like each of our memories and feelings.”*
 - *“As you look through these materials, you might find something that sparks a memory of your person, reminds you of a feeling, or just feels ‘right’ for your CANVAS.”*
- Provide some ideas but let them know that they can also do something different.
 - *“Think about a special memory of your loved one. Can you represent it with colors, textures, or objects?”*
 - *“What qualities or characteristics defined the person who died? What materials could symbolize these?”* (For example, strong fabric for strength—bright colors for joy.)
 - *“Are there particular feelings that are strong for you right now? How might you express those?”*
 - *“Is there a place that holds significance for you or your loved one?”*
 - *“What’s something you hope for, even as you grieve?”*

Activity Description:

- Each individual selects a CANVAS and whatever items, fabrics, paints, jewelry, odds-and-ends, etc. they would like to use to make their CANVAS COLLAGE.
- Allow time for participants to go through the assortment of materials.
- Participants may choose to use a combination of paint and other items. Let them know if they want to use paint, they may need to allow time for that to dry before adhering items to it.

- Suggest that they may want to lay out their items before adhering them permanently to the CANVAS.
- Use open ended questions while they are creating:
 - *“What inspired you to choose that particular piece?”*
 - *“Does that color/texture remind you of anything specific?”*
 - *“If this part of your CANVAS could tell a story, what would it say?”*
 - *“What does this item remind you of about your person?”*
 - *“Tell me about what you’re adding here...”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow participants an opportunity to share.
 - *“This is an opportunity to share about your CANVAS if you’d like. You can tell us a story it represents, talk about an item you found meaningful, describe a feeling you expressed, or just point out something you’re proud of. You can share as much or as little as you like, or not sharing at all is OK too.”*
- Process their thoughts and feelings about creating the CANVAS.
 - *“What does it mean to you to have this physical representation of your thoughts and memories?”*
 - *“Did you find it easy or challenging to decide what to put on your CANVAS? What did that process feel like?”*
 - *“How did it feel to work with your hands and the different materials? Was it messy, calming, frustrating, joyful?”*
 - *“Did anything surprise you while you were making your CANVAS—maybe a memory that came up, or a feeling, or something unexpected you created?”*
- Let them know that once dry, they can take their CANVAS home. If they have items at home to add, encourage them to do so (*with adult support if needed*).

Notes:

- If you use old jewelry or broken items, ensure that there are no loose or sharp pieces.
- It can be helpful to group items together, so it is easier for them to find specific items that they’re looking for.
- If you’re planning on doing this activity the following week, you can give a brief explanation and encourage them to bring items from home.

- For varied items, you can look in the miniature figurines section or fairy garden section at craft or dollar stores but please check with staff before purchasing any items.
- This may take more than one meeting, so plan accordingly. Additionally, ensure that projects are dry before they're sent home.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity is a great way to engage teens or adults in an Ongoing Group. If they created one before, it's likely that there will be new items or objects and creating a second CANVAS is beneficial—no additional variations are needed.

MY SUPPORTS BRACELET/NECKLACE/LANYARD

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To have the group members think about who they have as part of their support system and give them a visual representation of supports they have in their lives.

Task/Need:

- Helping them understand who they are after their loss
- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Yarn or string
- Different colored or shaped beads

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Explain to the group that they are going to do an activity to help us think about the people and things in our lives that bring us comfort, help us feel safe, and provide us with support, especially during difficult times, like when experiencing grief.
- Have the group identify who in their lives provides support to them during difficult times.
 - Are there people who they feel comfortable talking to?
 - Are there people they can call when they have a difficult day?
 - Maybe a pet or something at home that is a support for them (special song, book, blanket, etc.)?
- Tell the group they are going to create something tangible to represent these supports out of string and beads.
- Group members can choose to make a BRACELET, LANYARD, or KEY CHAIN with the materials.

Activity Description:

- Each group member takes a length of string and picks beads to represent each of the people who support them in their life.
- They can choose that person's favorite color or some other way to differentiate which person, pet, or object each bead represents.
- Provide group members with some options for selecting beads, like choosing a certain color to represent a safe person or thing.

- *“For example, if your grandmother loves purple, you might choose a purple bead for her.”*
- *“If your dog is super energetic, maybe you’d pick a brightly colored, fun-shaped bead.”*
- *“If your favorite comfort blanket or toy is a certain color, maybe choose a bead to represent that?”*
- When they are finished, the string can be tied off and made into a BRACELET, NECKLACE, or LANYARD for them to wear or so they have a visual reminder of the supports they have in their lives.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Invite group members to share their BRACELETS/NECKLACES/LANYARDS and the meaning behind the beads if they like.
 - *“Would anyone like to share what they made and what their beads represent?”*
- Ask the group what it was like to think about who or what is helpful to them.
 - *“Was it helpful to think about your supports?”*
 - *“Did it bring about certain feelings or thoughts while you were thinking of them?”*
- Point out commonalities or differences among the group.
- Reflect on the purpose of the activity: *“The main goal of this activity was to take a moment to acknowledge the people and things that help us feel supported. It’s a reminder that even when things are incredibly tough, we often have resources around us, especially with the group ending soon.”*
 - Note that if the group felt supportive, they could also make a BRACELET, KEYCHAIN or LANYARD that represents the group members here at the Caring Place.
- Encourage the group to share what they plan to do with their NECKLACE, KEYCHAIN, or LANYARD. Where will they keep it? When will they take it out?
- As always, thank the group for their hard work and sharing.

Notes:

- The concept of a NECKLACE/BRACELET may not appeal to all group members. Consider offering the option of making a LANYARD, KEYCHAIN, or other beaded item to appeal to everyone in the group.
- As noted above, if the group members have a positive connection, this can be adapted as a group closing. For the closing, each group member chooses a bead to

represent others in the group, or if using letter beads, can put the first letter of the group members names to remember that although they won't be together in person, they aren't alone in their grief.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity is appropriate for Introductory and Ongoing Groups, as support may change over time.
 - If group members have done the activity before, ask how their support has changed or remained the same. If they made a BRACELET last time, perhaps they will make a KEYCHAIN or LANYARD this time. This can also be a way to discuss new supports they have discovered since the last time they came to the Caring Place.

HIGHMARK.

CARING PLACE 

finding hope in grief

COMPASSION IN ACTION

Activities for Finding Hope in Grief

