

COMPASSION IN ACTION

Activities for Finding Hope in Grief

S-Z





SAND JAR STORY: EXPLORING FEELINGS & MEMORIES

Y—M—T—A

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

(*Note: Young Groups require more volunteer assistance)

Purpose: To provide a creative space for group members to explore and express the feelings and cherished memories associated with their grief journey. The activity helps to acknowledge and share individual experiences, foster group support, and create a lasting visual representation of personal growth and connection.

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- Clear jars or containers with lids
- Funnels or scoops
- 8 different colors of sand
- Pens/markers (*optional*)
- A book about feelings (*optional, for younger groups*)
- Accompanying worksheet, to color with feelings (*see sheet at end of this activity*)
- *For Large Group Closure variation:* One large clear jar

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Introduce feelings through one or more of the suggested activities below:
 - Read a book about feelings (*for younger groups*)
 - Use FEELINGS CHARADES (*for younger/middle groups*)
 - “Let’s play a quick game of FEELINGS CHARADES to get us thinking about different emotions.” (Act out feelings like Happy—Sad—Angry—Surprised, etc., and have the group guess.)
 - Start a conversation about different feelings that may occur in relation to losing a loved one. Encourage open sharing and list on a whiteboard or large piece of paper.
- Discuss how feelings can vary during grief and that even people in the same family might have different feelings. Emphasize that all feelings are OK.
- Assign a color to each feeling as a group or individually.

- **Option A:** Have the group decide together which feeling each color represents and write it on a whiteboard.
 - *“We have 8 different colors of SAND here. Let’s give each color a feeling! As a group, what feeling should [blue, for example] represent?”* (Write down the group’s decisions, perhaps on a whiteboard, so everyone can see.)
 - Suggestions to start discussion, allowing group members to decide as they see fit.
 -  Blue = Sadness, tears
 -  Grey = Confusion, feeling lost
 -  Black = Anger, frustration, pain
 -  Yellow = Joy, hope, good memories
 -  Green = Growth, finding purpose in the pain
 -  Purple = Strength, courage
 -  White = Peace, acceptance
- **Option B:** Group members can decide individually what each color matches with feelings. It may be helpful for them to write it down if they like.

Activity Description:

- Explain the JAR ACTIVITY:
 - After the group (or individuals) decides what color represents which feeling, explain that they will each get a JAR.
 - Make scoops and funnels available.
 - Let them know they can fill their own SAND JAR with colors that represent how they feel about their person’s death and what their grief feels like.
 - *“You can fill your JAR with the colors that represent how you feel about the person who died, and what your grief feels like right now. Some JARS might have lots of colors, some just a few, or maybe even just one main color. All of these are OK, and your JAR will likely look different from others, which is part of what makes it special!”*
- Filling the SAND JARS:
 - With younger groups, volunteers may need to assist them.
 - Remind them to fill the JAR close to the top so the colors stay separated.
 - *“Try to fill your JAR close to the top. This helps the different layers of color stay separate.”*

- Explain that shaking the SAND JAR will mix the colors, and that's OK too, as often we may feel lots of things when grieving.
 - *"Sometimes when we're grieving, our feelings can feel a bit jumbled or mixed up. If you shake your SAND JAR later, the colors will mix, and that's OK too! It can remind us that it's normal to feel many different things all at once."*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- After everyone completes their SAND JAR, give them the opportunity to share if they like.
 - As people share, you can ask questions like:
 - *"What does this color represent for you?"*
 - *"Does anyone else have [color] in their jar?"*
 - *"It's interesting how [person A] chose [color] for [feeling], and [person B] chose the same color for a different feeling. This shows how personal our feelings are."*
 - *"What thoughts or feelings came up as you created your SAND JAR?"*
 - *"Did anything surprise you while you were making your JAR, or as you listened to others share?"*
- Point out that people grieve differently and feel different things at different times.
 - *"Look around at all the unique JARS! They remind us that everyone grieves in their own way and feels different things at different times. There's no single way to do it."*
- Emphasize connection and support, noting that the SAND JARS symbolize that although the grief journey and feelings may be different, they are all here together to support one another, and they are not alone.
- Thank them for sharing and let them know they can take their SAND JARS home with them.

Notes:

- **This activity can be adapted as a group closing as described below:**
 - Each group member chooses one color of sand that best represents them and their personality. Each group member will then have their own JAR. The first layer in their JAR is their own color. Make sure that they leave enough space for each person to layer in their color.
 - *"The idea is that by the end, your SAND JAR will hold a beautiful, multi-colored representation of everyone in our group, including yourself."*

- *“If, at some point, the SAND LAYERS mix, that’s also OK. Sometimes our individual experiences within a group can blend together beautifully, creating something new and harmonious, just like mixed colors.”*
- *“They serve as a tangible reminder that you are part of something bigger, and you have made a unique impact on this group.”*

For Ongoing Groups:

- This can be used in an Ongoing Group in the original version or the group closing, without additional adaptations as the feelings and colors would change with the change of the group makeup.
- However, if they have made a SAND JAR before, ask them how this JAR is the same or different from the previous one made. What in their story feels different now?

Feelings Factory

Grief can generate a lot of strong feelings. It can be helpful to understand what feelings you’re having and to be able to express those feelings in a safe way. Color in how much of each feeling you’re feeling right now. Remember that this can change from day to day and even from moment to moment.

	Sadness	Guilt	Confusion	Frustration	Fear	Happiness	Anxiety	Anger	
100									
90									
80									
70									
60									
50									
40									
30									
20									
10									

SCREAM BOX

P—Y—M

Suggested Groups: Preschool, Young, Middle

Purpose: To provide a safe, private, and constructive outlet for children to express intense feelings of anger related to their grief.

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Developing coping skills and supports

Materials:

- Cereal boxes (*one per group member*)
- Cardboard tubes (*toilet roll size*)
- Colorful duct tape
- Construction paper and markers (*optional, for decoration*)
- Scissors
- Newspaper

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Start the discussion with group members about feelings and what makes them angry (things at home, at school, with friends).
 - *“We’re going to talk about a really strong feeling we all have sometimes: ANGER. Has anyone ever felt angry? What kinds of things make you angry?”*
- Introduce the idea that sometimes people feel angry after the death of someone in their life for many reasons:
 - Their loved one died.
 - Their lives have changed.
 - Things don’t feel fair.
- Ask the group to share if there is something that made them angry about the death (this discussion will work best with young or middle rooms).
- Further the discussion and ask if their anger has ever gotten them into trouble.
 - *“Sometimes, when we get really angry, that feeling can become so big inside us that we yell at people, break things, or say things we don’t mean. Has your anger ever gotten you into trouble or made you feel worse after it happened?”*
- Let them know that it can be helpful to find safe ways to express their anger and that today, they will have the chance to make something that might be helpful when they have angry feelings.

Activity Description:

- Each child will need one cereal box, one cardboard tube, and some newspaper.
- Have each child crumble newspaper and stuff in the cereal box until full.
- Close the box and secure it with duct tape.
- On the skinny side of the BOX, have the child (or assist the child) in cutting a circle the same size as the cardboard tube.
- Insert the tube (you can secure it with duct tape if necessary).
- Use construction paper, markers, etc. to decorate the BOX with things that make them angry or in a way that they like.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Once everyone is done, let them know that they can try them out together.
- Tell them to scream or yell as loud as they can into the BOX.
 - *“The idea is simple: when you have a really big, angry feeling and it feels too loud for where you are, you can put your mouth to the tube and send that angry sound right into the BOX!”*
- Have them try a few other calming strategies with the SCREAM BOX.
 - **Breathwork:** *“Before you use your SCREAM BOX, try this: Take a big breath in through your nose like you’re smelling a flower (count to 4 slowly in your head). Hold it for a moment (count to 4). Then, slowly blow out into your SCREAM BOX like you’re blowing out a candle (count to 4). Doing this before and after can help your body calm down even more.”*
 - **Physical Release:** *“Sometimes, anger also makes our bodies feel tense and tight. As you use your SCREAM BOX, you could also squeeze your hands into fists and then let them go or push your feet into the floor really hard. Letting out the anger with your voice AND your body can be super helpful.”*
 - **Visualization:** Before screaming, have children visualize the thing that is making them angry shrinking or disappearing.
 - **Positive Self-Talk:** *“After you’ve used your BOX and let out some of those big angry feelings, it’s good to remind yourself of positive things. You can even whisper into your BOX something like: ‘I am strong. I can handle my feelings.’ What are some kind words you could tell yourself after using your SCREAM BOX?”*
 - **Creative expression:** Let them know that sometimes writing or drawing can also help—they can do that before or after using their SCREAM BOX.

- **Movement:** After using the SCREAM BOX, they can engage in some form of physical activity, such as running, jumping jacks, or dancing, to release any remaining energy.
- Suggest they use their SCREAM BOX at home when they are angry. The screams will be muffled, and they can scream and yell into their BOX instead of doing something that might get them into trouble.
 - *“If using your SCREAM BOX helps you feel a little calmer, that’s great! Afterwards, you might feel ready to tell an adult you trust about what made you angry, or you might just feel better and can go play.”*

Notes:

- This activity is a great choice if the feeling of anger or frustration comes up frequently in the group discussions.
- Encourage children to focus on the present moment while using the SCREAM BOX, paying attention to the sensations in their body and the sound of their voice.

For Ongoing Groups:

- If group members have done this before in an Introductory Session, use suggestions below:
 - Ask group members if they still have their SCREAM BOXES, and if so, have they used it? Allow time for discussion.
 - If they want to make another, they can do so. How is their new SCREAM BOX different or the same as the one that they first made? Will they keep the new one someplace different?
 - Have group members bring in their SCREAM BOXES from previous Sessions to use.

SHREDDING ACTIVITY

M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To explore feelings including fear, anger, sadness, and regret. To symbolically choose to either hold on to these feelings or to release them.

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- Paper of different colors
- Pens/pencils or markers
- Clipboards
- Shredder

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin by talking about what it means to “*let go*” in the context of grief, allowing time for the group to discuss the subject.
 - “*What does ‘letting go’ mean to each of you in the context of your grief? Or what might it feel or look like for you to let go of a particular situation or circumstance related to your loss?*” (Allow a few minutes for group members to share, validating all perspectives.)
- Ask the group if there are any situations that they would like to let go of and allow group members to write their responses onto paper. Let them know they don’t have to share with the group. They can simply release or hold what they wrote as well.

Activity Description:

- Pass out paper and pencils/pens. Ensure they have something to write on. Invite them to write down whatever they like.
 - “*On your paper, I invite you to write down anything that feels heavy—any fears, regrets, sadness, anger, burdens, should-haves, or unspoken words related to your grief that you might wish to ‘let go’ of.*”
- Explain that some feelings can be hard to speak about and being able to write them down and then erase or shred them can be helpful.
- Let the group members know that they have the choice to hold on to it or to SHRED it.
 - For those who want to SHRED, explain that they don’t have to say what they wrote, they can just SHRED the paper.

- For those keeping it, let them know that they can share if they like but don't have to—suggest that perhaps they want to fold it and tuck it away for later reflection if they choose to keep it.
- Allow group members to hear the sound of their paper going through the SHREDDER.
 - *“For those choosing to SHRED, notice the sound and the physical action. Sometimes the act of hearing those words disappear, physically tearing them up, can be a really impactful part of this process.”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow time for reflection once everyone has decided to keep or SHRED their paper. Don't rush the discussion.
 - *“What was it like for you to make that choice today—to hold or to release a feeling?”*
 - *“For those who SHREDDERED, how did it feel to place the paper in the SHREDDER? What was it like to hear that sound?”*
 - *“For those who chose to keep their paper, what does it mean for you to hold onto those feelings right now? What comfort or truth is there in not letting go of them just yet?”*
 - *“Regardless of whether you SHREDDERED or held, did this activity provide any insight for you about your feelings or your grief journey? Did it perhaps clarify something you are, or are not yet, ready for?”*
 - *“Is ‘letting go’ always the goal in grief? What can be gained by holding onto certain feelings, even if they're difficult?”*
 - *“This activity often helps us identify some of the emotional baggage we carry. How might understanding these specific feelings impact your experience of grief moving forward?”*
- Ask the group what they would like to do with the SHREDDERED material.
 - *“For the SHREDDERED papers, would the group like to do anything with these tangible representations of what was released? Perhaps combine them (if different colors were used) into a vase or jar as a shared symbol of our collective acts of letting go, or dispose of them?”*
- Thank the group for their participation and courage in doing this activity.

Notes:

- Source: This activity was inspired by an exhibit on Love and Forgiveness held at the Pittsburgh Children's Museum.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This can be used for Introductory or Ongoing Groups as what they express on the paper can change. If using in an Ongoing Group, consider these suggestions:
 - How does this experience today compare with doing this activity in the past? Did they keep what they wrote last time or SHRED it? How does that differ from what they did this time?
 - Were there things they wrote or felt that they SHREDED last time, but still deal with today?

SNEAK-A-PEEK

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To work as a team to complete a challenging task, fostering communication and collaboration while exploring themes of memory, loss, and reconstruction.

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Building blocks or something similar (*Legos, popsicle sticks, etc.*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Let the group know that they're going to work on something together that will require communication and teamwork.
- Use the analogy of building a house—an architect designs, a builder interprets the plans, and workers carry out the plans—and every role is important.
- Explain that their mission is to recreate a MYSTERY STRUCTURE that has been built and hidden in a secret location. Only one person at a time will get to SNEAK A PEEK at the STRUCTURE for a brief time, memorize as much as they can and run back to their team to guide them on how to build it.
- They will take turns getting to PEEK at the STRUCTURE and help their team to build it quickly and accurately.

Activity Description:

- Build a small SCULPTURE or DESIGN with some of the building materials and hide it from the group.
- Divide the group into small teams of 2–5 members each.
- Give each team enough building materials so that they can duplicate what you have already created.
- Place the ORIGINAL STRUCTURE in a place that is hidden but at an equal distance to all groups.
- Ask one group member from each team to come up at the same time to look at the SCULPTURE for five seconds to try to memorize as much as possible before returning to their respective teams.

- After they go back to their teams, give them 30 seconds to instruct their teammates on how to build the STRUCTURE so that it looks like the one that has been hidden.
- After 30 seconds, ask each team to send up another member of their group who gets a chance to ‘SNEAK A PEEK’ before returning to their individual teams.
- Continue in this pattern until one of the teams successfully duplicates the original SCULPTURE.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Once complete, bring the group all back together to discuss the building process:
 - What was most challenging about their activity?
 - What worked well within their team?
 - What role did you like better—a builder or a peeker?
 - How important was teamwork to reaching your goal?
 - What role did you play in being a part of the team?
 - How did working together, or having the support of your teammates, impact your experience?
 - Despite the challenges, you all persevered and worked together. What qualities does it take to keep going when things are difficult?
 - What’s one thing you learned about your own way of dealing with challenges or communicating during this activity?
 - Was there anything you learned about anyone else who was in your group?
- Thank the group for completing the activity and working together.

Notes:

- If using with a Young Group, it should be an “older” Young Room and be sure that this activity is not too complex (build a simpler STRUCTURE, allow more time for PEEKING at the STRUCTURE). During wrap-up, focus more on basic communication and feelings of working together.
- Volunteers should walk around to observe how the group members are interacting and participating in the project. Volunteers can also share their observations.
- This activity can help volunteers recognize different types of characteristics in the group that can be useful for future meetings (quiet members, talkative members, members who like to take charge).

Ongoing Groups:

- This can be used in an Introductory or Ongoing Group. However, it can be helpful to gauge if many have already done this activity. If they have, consider using the variation below or using another group building activity.
 - **Variation—Relating the blocks and rebuilding to grief:** In the activity set-up, explain the analogy of grief feeling like trying to rebuild something that is broken, without having all the pieces or information that you need. In activity processing and wrap-up, further the analogy and discussion related to grief by asking questions like:
 - How does this activity relate to dealing with loss and grief?
 - How can remembering and recreating memories, even imperfectly, feel comforting?
 - Where in the activity did you experience the most difficulty, and how might this be similar to facing loss?
 - How important was teamwork to the success of building the STRUCTURE? How does having support help in dealing with grief?
 - The final STRUCTURE is probably not perfect. That's OK! Sometimes, grief and rebuilding life after loss is messy and doesn't look the way we initially imagined. How does acceptance of imperfections apply to both the activity and coping with grief?
 - Despite the challenges, your team worked together. What qualities does it take to persevere? Where do you find your resilience and hope during difficult times?

SNOWBALL FIGHT

Y—M—T—A

Suggested Groups: Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To create a playful yet meaningful activity for group members to safely explore and express shared feelings (expectations, fears, hopes) related to their grief and the group experience.

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Identifying and expressing feelings

Materials:

- Plain white paper (*enough for 2–3 sheets per person*)
- Pencils/pens, markers (*if drawing pictures*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Prior to group, ensure that you will have a physical space large enough to safely have a SNOWBALL FIGHT. Ask staff to use the Community Room if possible.
- Begin by sharing that for the group to support each other, it's a good idea to get to know each other.
- Acknowledge that all are here in the group because someone in their life died, but they may have other things in common as well. This activity will allow them to find out more about each other.

Activity Description:

- Instruct the group to take one of their plain pieces of paper and write one thing they are excited about; on another paper, one thing they are nervous about; and on the last piece, one thing they would like to learn (or any variation of these topics).
 - Note that if Younger Group members need help writing, volunteers can scribe for them, or they can draw something.
 - Let them know that they don't have to write their name on it and that no one has to know what they wrote unless you choose to tell everyone later.
- Once done, have each group member wad their papers up into three "SNOWBALLS."
- Have a SNOWBALL FIGHT with the PAPER SNOWBALLS (aim only from the shoulder down).
- At a certain time have everyone stop, pick up a SNOWBALL, and read what is written.
 - Ask the group if they think the written item is exciting, worrisome, or something to learn.
- Invite group members to identify the paper that belongs to them if they wish.

- Point out similarities as they arise.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Ask the group what it was like to do this activity.
- What did they discover about other group members?
- Point out similarities.
- Let group members know how the SNOWBALLS will be disposed of.
- Be aware that some group members may not want to wad up their paper. Let group members know that this is OK if this occurs.

Notes:

- Assess the group's energy. This activity might be better suited for a later meeting, once volunteers are familiar with the group dynamics.
- Some adults may not want to participate in this type of playful activity.
- Make sure there is enough space to do this activity safely.
- **Variation:** You can also have group members write two things that are true about themselves, and one thing that is not true. After the SNOWBALL FIGHT, the group members read the paper aloud and the group has to guess whose paper it is.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This can be used in an Introductory or Ongoing Group. If using in an Ongoing Group, consider the variation below.
 - This variation uses pre-made SNOWBALL questions and soft POMPOM SNOWBALLS to create a guided discussion.
 - **Materials needed:** SNOWBALL GRAPHIC/CIRCLES to write questions on; set of pompom SNOWBALLS (check with staff to ensure this is available); questions (choose some QUESTIONS from the “Questions for Q & A Activities” in the Appendix—you will need to write these on the SNOWBALLS, unless there is a set already available at the site).
 - Group members take turns selecting a question from the SNOWBALL GRAPHIC. When they answer it, they get a POMPOM SNOWBALL to be used during the SNOWBALL FIGHT at the end.
 - Once all the questions have been answered, or all POMPOM SNOWBALLS are distributed, allow them to have a SNOWBALL FIGHT.
 - Facilitate a discussion at the end as noted in the activity wrap-up above.

SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To create an opportunity for the group members to tell their story and express their feelings using music. Also provides opportunity for group members to identify and show how their life has changed before and after the death.

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- Paper
- Pencils/Pens
- Crayons/Markers/Paint
- iPad or Computer (*for digital cover art or music reference*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin with a discussion about the concept of a journey and how life can be seen as a journey.
 - *“Today we’re going to explore our journeys through the powerful lens of MUSIC. We all experience life as a kind of journey, with different chapters, ups, and downs. MUSIC often plays a role in those journeys, doesn’t it?”*
 - *“Think about your favorite story, a book, or even a movie. What are some of the key parts of that journey? (for example, beginnings, challenges, moments of change, discoveries).”*
- Discuss with the group how they relate to MUSIC and the ways in which MUSIC can be used to tell a story.
 - *“MUSIC has an incredible way of telling stories, not just with words, but with melodies and rhythms too. It can capture moments, memories, and especially feelings.”*
- Questions to consider asking:
 - *“Does anyone here use MUSIC when they need to calm down or relax? How about to get energized? Or just to help you understand what you’re feeling?”*
 - *“What are some other ways MUSIC shows up in your lives? (background to studying, while driving, at celebrations, at quiet times, etc.).”*

- *“How does it make you feel when you listen to certain kinds of MUSIC? (Encourage sharing of various emotions, like happy, sad, thoughtful, nostalgic, angry, comforted etc.).”*
- Allow time for discussion and then introduce the activity.
 - *“Today, we’re going to create a SOUNDTRACK OF OUR LIVES—like an ALBUM or a PLAYLIST that tells your unique story. This isn’t about being a professional musician or artist; it’s about using creativity to explore our feelings and experiences.”*
 - *“Think of it as two parts: The SONGS that represent different moments, feelings, or chapters in your life, and the cover art that visually expresses the essence of your ALBUM.”*
 - *“We know that not everyone connects with MUSIC in the same way, and that’s perfectly OK. If you don’t have specific SONGS that come to mind, you can create your own song titles that describe a feeling or an experience. Or you might just focus on the cover art that tells your story visually. There’s no right or wrong way to do this.”*

Activity Description:

- Provide the group with paper, art supplies, and pencils or pens to write with.
- Tell the group to create a PLAYLIST OF SONGS that tell the story of their life.
 - These can be SONGS that have special meaning to them or SONGS that they relate to.
 - Note that this can include SONGS from *before* the death of their person, and SONGS that speak to how things are *now*, or even SONGS that are focused on the *future*.
- Give suggestions of SONGS that might reflect:
 - A happy memory
 - A challenge faced
 - How they feel when missing their person
 - Something they have learned
 - A hope for the future
 - How they see themselves
 - Changes in their life
 - A SONG that gives them strength
 - A SONG that reminds them of their person
- If they know it, have them write down the title of the SONG and the artist; or they can create their own SONG TITLE if they like.

- After they have some ideas for their PLAYLIST, let them know that they can work on their cover art (or if they want to do the cover art first, that's OK).
- When working on the cover art, you can prompt them to think about:
 - **Colors:** Do certain colors represent different feelings or parts of your story?
 - **Images:** Are there symbols, objects, or landscapes that represent your experiences?
 - **Words:** They can include your PLAYLIST title, important words, or phrases.
- If they want to look at ideas, allow them to use the iPad to look up cover art. If they like, they can also use an app like Pic Collage or Flip Ink on the iPad to create their cover art (ensure that these apps are available by checking with staff).
- Encourage them to be as creative as they want to be with their cover art and draw whatever is meaningful to them.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Invite sharing if the group would like to do so.
 - *"We'd like to invite anyone who feels ready to share their PLAYLIST, their cover art, or just talk a little bit about their process. You can share as much or as little as you like or keep your PLAYLIST and cover art for yourself—it's up to you."*
- During sharing, ask open-ended questions and encourage questions from the group.
 - *"Can you tell us about one or two SONGS on your PLAYLIST and why you chose them?"*
 - *"What did you create for your cover art, and what do those images or colors represent to you?"*
 - *"What was it like to think about your life as a SOUNDTRACK?"*
 - *"Did anything surprise you while you were creating?"*
 - *"How did it feel to think about different SONGS or ideas for your cover art? Was it easy or difficult to do?"*
 - Remember to facilitate peer connection (if it arises organically): *"Did anyone else connect with that feeling [participant] mentioned?"—"It's interesting how [Participant A's] use of [color] resonates with [Participant B's] feeling of [emotion]."*

- Encourage group discussion and highlight common themes, but also note uniqueness:
 - *“As we listen to each other’s SOUNDTRACKS, what are some things you’ve noticed? Are there common themes or feelings, even if the songs or art are different?”* (For example, feelings of loss, love, resilience, hope, confusion, strength, remembrance.)
 - *“Just like every piece of music is unique, so is every one of your stories and experiences. There’s no one right way to grieve, and there’s no one right SOUNDTRACK for your life after loss.”*
- Let them know that they can continue to add to it if they like.
 - *“You can take these home today, and maybe you want to continue to add to it. It is up to you. Thank you all for doing this activity and sharing with us.”*

Notes:

- This activity provides a creative and personalized outlet for emotional expression, especially relevant for middle and teen groups who often connect deeply with MUSIC.
- A group member may want to play a SONG or a part of it. If it is appropriate, you can allow this during the group time, or plan another time for this (perhaps in the next meeting)
- The discussion encourages empathy and understanding among group members by sharing personal stories through a common medium.

For Ongoing Groups:

- For Ongoing Groups, you can have the members share their previous PLAYLIST and cover art if they still have it. Allow them to share and discuss and perhaps create a new PLAYLIST and cover art—have them compare. You can also consider one of these suggestions below:
 - **Variation—SEQUENTIAL STORYTELLING:** Over several meetings, participants could be encouraged to focus on different “chapters” of their LIFE SOUNDTRACK: one meeting for “Before the Loss,” another for “The Immediate Aftermath,” and a third for “Finding a New Normal” or “Looking Forward.”
 - **Variation—DIFFERENT CATEGORIES:** Add different song categories for them to think about with their PLAYLIST, such as:
 - THEIR WALK OUT SONG—their anthem, a song that represents who they are.

- **THEIR PERSON’S WALK OUT SONG**—a song that represents who their person was, or a song that reminds them of their person.
 - **COMFORT SONG**—a song that feels like a hug or brings them peace.
 - **STRENGTH SONG**—a song that makes them feel strong or courageous.
 - **MEMORY LANE SONG**—a song that transports them back to a specific memory.
 - **GRIEF SONG**—a song that describes or helps them make sense of their grief.
 - **HOPE OR NEW BEGINNING SONG**—a song that focuses on new perspectives or hope.
 - **INVISIBLE SUPPORT**—a song that represents love or support of someone who isn’t physically here, but you still feel their presence or support.
- **Variation—ADDING LINER NOTES**
 - Allow the group to put “Liner Notes” inside the case. These could be short descriptions, dedications, or messages.

SPECIAL KEEPSAKES

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To provide a tangible, personal object that acknowledges and honors the ongoing connection with the person who died, particularly during times of celebration or remembrance, and to process how celebrations have changed. This KEEPSAKE can represent a message, a gift of love, or a cherished memory.

Task/Need:

- 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:

- Clear fillable plastic baubles/ornaments
- Embellishments for filling:
 - Plastic craft “snow”/fine white glitter (*or other colors*)
 - Variety of colorful ribbons, yarn, embroidery floss (*pre-cut into small pieces*)
 - Small beads, sequins, craft gems
 - Small, dried flowers/leaves, or pressed petals (*optional, for a natural touch*)
 - Miniature photos of the person who died
 - *Size depends on the ornament size. A standard 4 x 6 or 3 x 5 print may need to be cropped or cut. Remember to let the families know their picture may be cut if you are requesting group members to bring in a photo.*
 - Small written messages/notes (*provide small strips of paper and fine-tipped pens/markers*)
 - Tiny symbolic objects (*mini-charms, buttons, small pieces of fabric, etc.*)
- Embellishments for decorating outside of ornament:
 - Paint pens or permanent markers
 - Acrylic paint
 - Ribbon/yarn
 - Mod Podge
 - Glitter

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Frame this activity as MEMORY BAUBLES or SPECIAL OCCASION KEEPSAKES rather than a holiday ornament. Explain that a SPECIAL OCCASION can be any date significant to them or their family—not just Christmas or widely celebrated holidays. This proactively ensures everyone feels included, regardless of their cultural, religious, or personal family traditions.

- Open the discussion regarding times throughout the year that can feel more difficult since their person died.
 - *“As we move through the year, there are often certain times that feel special, like holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, or unique family traditions. For some, it might be the start of a special season or a cultural celebration. These SPECIAL OCCASIONS can bring up many different feelings, especially after someone we love has died.”*
 - *“Sometimes, these times might feel really different or even a little challenging because our loved ones aren’t physically here. Other times, they can be a beautiful opportunity to remember and celebrate the person or share special memories. There’s no right or wrong way to feel about these times.”*
 - *“How many of you find that SPECIAL OCCASIONS, whatever they may be for your family, feel a little different now?”* (Allow for gentle, non-pressured nodding or brief shares).
 - *“Today we’re going to create something very personal and special: a MEMORY BAUBLE or a SPECIAL OCCASION KEEPSAKE. This will be a personal reminder that even though someone is no longer with us physically, our connection to them continues, and we can still honor them during these significant times.”*

Activity Description:

- Provide each group member with a plastic bauble, a paper plate/craft mat, and a selection of filler materials (glitter, ribbons, beads, small cut-outs of paper, miniature photos if offered, etc.).
- Encourage discussion and thoughts about what to put in the ORNAMENT.
 - *“Before we start filling our BAUBLES, let’s take a moment to think about the person we’re remembering. What colors might they have liked? What feelings do you want to capture? What memory or message feels important to you today?”*
 - Offer small slips of paper and fine pens. *“If you wish, you can write a tiny message, a secret memory, or even a question to your loved one and gently roll it up to place inside your BAUBLE. This is just for you—no one has to know what it says unless you want to share it later.”* Reinforce that these messages are private.
 - *“Now, choose materials that speak to you. Maybe the bright glitter reminds you of their laugh, or the soft ribbon feels comforting like a hug. There’s no wrong choice here—just choose what feels right to you.”*

- Allow them to decorate the outside as well, allowing ample time for creativity.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Give each group member the opportunity to share their MEMORY BAUBLE. Remember to emphasize that sharing any messages group members wrote is optional.
 - *“Would anyone like to share their BAUBLE with the group? You don’t have to explain everything about it, but maybe you could share what colors you used, or why you chose a certain type of filling, or simply a feeling you associate with it now that it’s complete.”*
 - *“It’s really meaningful that some of you chose to write messages. You don’t ever have to tell us what they said, but maybe you could share what kind of message it was—like, was it a ‘Thank You’ message? A ‘Missing You’ message? A ‘What I Wish I Could Tell You’ message? Or maybe something else?”*
- Allow time to process feelings related to the activity.
 - *“As you were creating your BAUBLE—choosing your colors, filling it with memories, or writing your message—how did that feel for you? What kinds of feelings came up during the process of making it today?”*
 - *“What was the easiest part about making your BAUBLE? What was the most challenging part, or something that made you think a lot?”*
 - *“Where do you think you might keep your MEMORY BAUBLE?”*
- Thank the group for sharing.

Notes:

- Use inclusive language (“Special occasion”—“Significant date”—“Family traditions”—“Remembrance times”) instead of solely “Holiday” or “Christmas.”
- Do not push group members to read the messages they wrote.

For Ongoing Groups:

- If group members have already done this in an Introductory Group, allow them to share how the BAUBLE they made today is different or the same as the one they previously created.
- You could also have them create a BAUBLE that represents hopes, wishes or intention for the future while keeping their person in mind. It could be about a new tradition they want to start, a way they plan to honor their loved one in upcoming events, or a message they hope to carry forward.

SPOONS

M—T—A

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

Purpose: For group building or as an icebreaker or for sharing feelings or memories

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- DECK OF CARDS (*use more than one deck for groups larger than 8 participants*)
- PLASTIC SPOONS (*enough for each person to have one*)
- Questions Box or Basket
- Questions Sheets (**QUESTIONS can be found in QUESTIONS FOR QUESTION & ANSWER ACTIVITIES in the Appendix**)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Arrange the room so that everyone is sitting around a table (or smaller tables pushed together). This will allow for CARDS to be easily passed between players.
- Explain to the group that you will be playing a fast, fun CARD GAME that will give them a chance to connect and share their experiences.
- Note that the goal is to get four CARDS of the same kind (*four Kings, four 7s, etc.*)
- Explain game play and ensure everyone understands prior to starting.
 - *“I will draw a CARD from the deck. I’ll decide to keep it or pass it to the person on my right. If I keep it, I’ll discard one of my other CARDS and pass it right.”*
 - *“This continues around the circle, everyone passing a CARD to their right as they receive one from their left. Keep an eye on your CARDS as they come around!”*
 - *“Once someone gets four of a kind, they will take their SPOON from the table in front of them. As soon as you see someone take a SPOON, you can take a SPOON. The person without a SPOON will get to pick a question from our QUESTIONS BOX to share with the group.”*
- Let them know that they can either answer the question or pass on answering and allow others in the group to answer if they like.

Activity Description:

- The number of SPOONS should be one less than the number of group members.
- SPOONS are placed in the center of the table(s).
- After the SPOONS are placed in the center of the table, the dealer shuffles the deck and gives everyone four CARDS.
- Once everyone has four CARDS and has looked at them, the dealer draws a CARD from the remaining deck.
- The dealer looks at the CARD and decides to keep it or pass it to the player to their right. If the dealer keeps it, then they must discard another CARD from their hand and pass it to the right.
- As the player to the right looks at the CARD that was passed, the dealer picks up another CARD and decides to keep or pass.
- This process continues all the way around the table(s), with all players eventually looking at their CARDS at the same time.
- The goal is to get four of a kind as noted above.
- The player to the dealer's left will create a discard pile for all the CARDS that make it back to the dealer. If needed, those CARDS can be reshuffled, and the game continues if no one has been able to find four of a kind.
- The first person to find four of a kind removes their SPOON from the table. This can happen overtly or covertly (*player's choice*).
- Once one SPOON has been removed, each player is able to grab a SPOON regardless of the CARDS in their hand.
- The person who does not get a SPOON at the end would be "it." However, if there are health/safety concerns, the game still works if everyone receives their own SPOON and places it in front of them. In that case, the last person to grab their SPOON is "it" and pulls a question.
- In this version of SPOONS, being "it" means you read and answer a question from the QUESTIONS BOX. The questions can be used as Icebreakers, where they would be more designed for the participants to get to know one another and build rapport. The questions can also be more grief-specific to allow the participants to share more about their feelings/memories.
 - You can also have the list of questions available and allow the person to choose the question that they would like to answer.

- Participants can always use the **I PASS RULE** with any question. They can also be the first person to answer the question before opening it up to the group to allow others a chance to respond.
- All CARDS are collected and reshuffled, SPOONS are reset, and a new game begins.
- The person who is the dealer can move to someone new each game, which changes when players receive their CARDS. Game can be replayed as many times as the schedule allows.
- If one player is consistently “it,” they can choose someone else to answer the question. That person can also pass if they like.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- At the end of the game ask the participants how they are doing and feeling. Check in to see if they liked the game.
- If doing the game as an icebreaker, focus on the connections that were made as they continue to learn about one another.
- If the game used grief questions, acknowledge the difficulty of talking about feelings or memories and again reiterate any connections that were made during the game.

Notes:

- The dealer usually sets the pace for the group. If the pace is moving too fast, a volunteer can be designated as the dealer to slow the pace down.

For Ongoing Groups

- In Ongoing Groups, facilitators may be able to incorporate more grief-related questions than in an Introductory Group since members may be further along in their journey.

SPOTIFY PLAYLIST

Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To create a shared musical space for expressing feelings, honoring memories, and acknowledging the unique grief journeys of each group member through the power of music. This activity also fosters a sense of connection and creates a tangible keepsake.

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- SPOTIFY ACCOUNT (*check with staff to see if there is a site account*)
- iPad that is connected to the internet (for managing PLAYLIST)
- Bluetooth speaker
- Paper or whiteboard—to list SONGS as they are added to the PLAYLIST
- QR Code postcards—small cards or paper slips with the QR code of the completed PLAYLIST (*staff can prepare this after the PLAYLIST is made*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Volunteer should create an empty SPOTIFY PLAYLIST (for example, “*Our Grief Journey Playlist—[Date/Group Name]*”) before the Session and test device to ensure it’s connected to the Bluetooth speaker.
- Let group know that the activity today will focus on MUSIC and how it can be used to express things when words feel difficult.
 - “*Many people find comfort and connection through MUSIC, especially when they’re grieving. It can help us remember, feel close to someone, or just acknowledge our feelings.*”
 - “*Has anyone here ever heard a Song that captured how they were feeling, or reminded them instantly of someone special?*”
 - Allow time for discussion.
- Let the group know that today they are going to create a SHARED PLAYLIST—like a GROUP MIXTAPE of their grief journeys, memories, and feelings.
- Explain that everyone will get to choose one SONG (or more, if time allows) that holds a special meaning to them. It could be:
 - A SONG that reminds you of your loved one, perhaps a SONG they loved or one you shared.
 - A SONG that speaks to your current feelings or journey with grief.

- A SONG that offers you comfort, hope, or strength.
- Explain that they will have a moment to introduce the SONG, tell the group briefly about it—sharing as much or as little as they like. Then they will play a clip of the SONG for the group.
 - Note that if the SONG is not on SPOTIFY, they can still talk about it and perhaps share some of the lyrics that they find meaningful.

Activity Description:

- Offer choice with who wants to share first or go around in a circle if they like.
- When it's a group members turn, have them share the title and artist, the reason they chose the SONG (if they want to share) and their favorite lyrics or part of the SONG, if they like.
- Once the SONG is located, play a short clip of the SONG and add it to the group PLAYLIST.
- After the clip, allow time for discussion among the group, and provide support if strong emotions come up.
- If the SONG isn't available, offer for the group member to choose a different SONG, or talk about the SONG if they like, including any meaningful lyrics from the SONG.
- Afterwards, participants will have access to the SPOTIFY PLAYLIST to listen to when desired by scanning a QR code that can be provided on a postcard (or any sheet of paper) to all members of the group. Staff can prepare this to give to group for next meeting.

Helpful Instructions—Creating a SPOTIFY PLAYLIST:

- Log into a SPOTIFY account.
- Search for the SONG or artist.
- To the right of the SONG, there are three dots; click on the three dots, then click "Add to PLAYLIST."
- You would either create a NEW PLAYLIST or click on the PLAYLIST you would like to add this to, then click "Done."

Creating a QR Code (*staff can do this, unless volunteers plan to do so*):

- Go to bit.ly
- Log in or create an account.
- On your page, click on the top left "Create New," then Create QR Code.

- Under “Destination URL,” insert the link of the SPOTIFY PLAYLIST (which you could find by pulling up the PLAYLIST in a web browser on your PC).
- If you click “Customize” at the top center, you can change the color or center logo.
- Title the link, then at the top right, click “Create QR Code.”
- From there, you can download the QR code image.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Thank the group for sharing their MUSIC and creating the PLAYLIST together.
- Allow time for reflection on the experience. Guiding questions:
 - *“How was it for you to share your SONG today? Did anything surprise you about hearing everyone’s choices?”*
 - *“What did you notice about the SONGS or feelings that were shared? Were there any common themes, or were they all very different, and how does that make you feel about our shared and individual grief journeys?”*
 - *“Was there a SONG someone else shared that particularly resonated with you, even if you hadn’t heard it before, or one that helped you understand their experience a little better?”*
 - *“Did listening to the MUSIC, or preparing your own SONG, bring up any new memories or thoughts for you that you hadn’t considered recently?”*
 - *“Beyond this activity, how do you think you might use MUSIC, or this SHARED PLAYLIST, as a tool for comfort or remembrance in your daily life?”*
- Note that at the next meeting, they will have slips of paper with the QR code for them to have as a remembrance from the group.

Notes:

- **Closing Ceremony:** This can be used as a closing ceremony activity with the entire group, MUSIC from the PLAYLIST can be played with a slideshow of photos from the group and if shared, photos of those being remembered.
- This can take an entire meeting, especially with a larger group. Allow for 1–2 SONGS per person or consider extending into a second meeting if needed.

For Ongoing Groups:

- As a new PLAYLIST would be created, this can be replicated in an Ongoing Group. Group members can choose the same or different SONGS if they did this activity in the past. They can also choose to do a themed PLAYLIST this time (suggestions below):
 - SONGS for Strength & Resilience
 - SONGS for Peace & Comfort

- SONGS that Make Us Smile
- SONGS that Remind me of...

Below is a QR Code that will take you to a PLAYLIST that was created by a group of kids at one of the Sessions at the Caring Place, as an example.



STACKING CUPS

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To create a fun, interactive opportunity for group members to practice working together, build communication skills, and experience firsthand the value of teamwork in a low-stakes environment. It aims to build a sense of community and emotional safety within the group.

Task/Need:

- Group Building

Materials:

- A rubber band/string device per group (*everyone in the group will have a string attached to the rubber band*)
 - Pre-tie these or have a simple demonstration at the beginning if participants are making their own.
- 20 CUPS per group (consider larger cups for younger groups)
- Timer

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Set up stations prior to group members coming into room.
 - Place the 20 CUPS per group randomly (or in a low initial stack of 1–2 CUPS to get them started) within each designated area.
 - Make sure each rubber band/string tool is in good condition and has enough strings for anticipated group sizes (4–6 strings for groups of 4–6).
- Welcome group and explain to the group that they will be doing a fun interactive activity that will help them to get to know one another and work as a team.
 - “Life can sometimes feel like a puzzle, or like we’re trying to build something challenging. But just like building a sturdy tower, it’s often much easier and more fun when we work together.”
 - “Today, we’re going to experience that firsthand with a challenge called STACKING CUPS.”
- Explain the challenge and rules for the game.
 - “Around the room, you’ll see sets of CUPS. Your task is to work with your small group to stack these CUPS as high as you can to build a tower.”
 - “Now, here’s the fun twist: You can’t touch the CUPS with your hands directly!”

- Hold up and demonstrate the rubber band/string tool and tell them that as a group they will use this tool—each person in your group will hold one of the strings attached to the rubber band. They then will need to pick up a CUP with that tool.
- *“To pick up a CUP, you’ll all need to pull your strings out at the same time to widen the rubber band, carefully lower it over a CUP, then slowly bring your hands together to release the tension on the strings, which will grip the CUP. Then you’ll move it to where you want to stack it and gently release it.”*
- Let them know that the goal is to stack all 20 CUP, one on top of the other, to create a tall stable tower, and they will do it in timed rounds.
- If it falls, let them know that they can start stacking again until time is up.
- Divide into smaller groups if needed—having 4–6 group members per each station.

Activity Description:

- Once in groups, start the timer for 5 minutes and circulate around to watch how the groups communicate.
 - For Younger Groups, consider having volunteers directly assist as “anchors” for the strings to ensure participation and reduce frustration, or simplify the goal to *“stack as many as possible.”*
- Offer encouragement (*“You’re doing great!”*—*“Keep going!”*) but avoid giving specific instructions on *how* to stack or communicate. Let them discover it.
- The goal is to have group members recognize that communication and teamwork will help the group succeed more quickly or discover that less communication and teamwork will lead to increased confusion and frustration and require more time to complete.
- After the first round, allow groups to compare stacked CUPS and see who got the highest stack.
- Do 2–3 rounds and then come back together as a larger group.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Lead discussion with group about the activity.
 - *“How did that feel? What was it like trying to build a tower with just the Lifter tool?”*
 - *“What were some of the feelings that came up during the activity—maybe excitement, frustration, concentration, laughter?”*

- *“How do you think your team did with communicating? What were some specific things you heard (or didn’t hear) that helped or hindered your stacking?”*
- *“Did you notice someone taking the lead? Or maybe someone suggesting a different way to do things? What impact did that have on your group?”*
- *“Can you think of a moment where your group had really great communication, and everything clicked?” (Give an example if needed: “Like when you all decided to say ‘up’ or ‘down’ together.”)*
- *“Were there any moments where communication was a bit trickier? What did that feel like?”*
- Bring the conversation back to group support and real life.
 - *“We sometimes face challenges in life that feel like building these towers—big and maybe a little overwhelming. How can good communication and teamwork, like you showed here today, help us when we’re facing tough situations?”*
 - *“Think about our group here: what did you learn about how we might support each other during our time together?”*
- Thank the group for playing and allow time for any closing thoughts.
 - *“This activity shows us that even when things are difficult or challenging, we can often achieve more when we work together and talk openly with each other. It’s about respecting each person’s role and voice. And that’s exactly what we hope to build here in our group—a safe space where we can work through things together, communicate, and support each other.”*
 - *“Does anyone have any final thoughts on that game or how it was to play?”*

Notes:

- Observe group dynamics and member interactions, and offer support as needed. If a group is struggling, help them solve problems as a team, but don’t provide the solutions. (For example, *“It looks like you all are lifting at different times, what do you think can help that?”*)
- Remember to bring the activity back to the purpose of the grief support group during the wrap-up—using teamwork skills learned here in the context of their shared journey of grief.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Prior to using in an Ongoing Group, ask if group members have done this activity before. If they have, consider a variation as noted below:
 - Instead of CUPS, try building with smaller or irregularly shaped objects (blocks, cardboard tubes). This increases the coordination challenge.
 - **Blindfolded Round** (*ensure no sensitivity to this prior to doing*): Introduce a round where one or more participants are blindfolded, emphasizing verbal directions and trust.
 - Challenge groups to build a specific shape or add a “Transfer” task (*move CUPS from one table to another*).



STONES OF LIFE

M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To offer a symbolic and meaningful ritual for group closure, allowing participants to reflect on their grief journey, acknowledge growth and resilience, express feelings, and prepare for transitioning out of the group. It provides a tangible keepsake and a gentle space for goodbyes.

Task/Need:

- Group Closure
- Identifying and expressing feelings

Materials:

- STONES—rough and unpolished, smooth and shiny, sparkling gems, and heart stones
- Small jewelry bags for each group member
- Scrolls to be inserted into each jewelry bag with the reading of “*THE STONES OF LIFE*”
- A decorative basket or some other container to pass the STONES around for group members to select

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Prepare materials ahead:
 - Sort and separate STONES and have papers with *STONES OF LIFE* available
 - Place jewelry/organza bags at each person’s seat.
 - Have reserved HEART STONES available for the end.
- Welcome group back in for last night. If doing this last, plan for it to take 20–25 minutes.
- Reflect with group members on the time spent together in the group, acknowledging the difficult things shared but also the hope found in being around others who are also grieving.
 - “*When we first came together, many of us didn’t know each other well. We were navigating different paths, each carrying our own experiences of loss.*”
 - “*Think back on some of the activities we’ve done, the stories we’ve shared, and the discussions we’ve had. Remember the times we laughed together, and the times we leaned on each other through tougher moments.*”

- *“What was it like to be part of this group for you?”* (Allow for a few brief, high-level shares or quick one-word reflections if comfortable, but don’t dwell deeply here as the STONE ACTIVITY is the main reflection.)
- Affirm the shared journey—*“It sounds like we’ve really created a special and supportive space together.”*
- Introduce the closing ceremony.
 - *“As we prepare to say goodbye to our time together, we’re going to take part in a special closing ceremony, a ritual many groups use, called THE STONES OF LIFE. It’s a way to reflect on our journey, honor our feelings, and take a piece of this experience with us.”*
 - *“Each of you has a small bag in front of you. By the end of our ceremony, you’ll fill it with different STONES, each with its own special meaning, and a special message from our group to you.”*

Activity Description:

- Note that before they begin to fill their bag, you want them to think a little bit about the metaphor for STONES and grief.
 - *“Let’s talk for a moment about how grief itself can sometimes feel like a STONE. For some, grief can feel incredibly heavy, like a large, rough ROCK weighing you down. For others, it might feel like a lighter, perhaps sharper, STONE, with edges that catch you off guard.”*
 - *“Sometimes, STONES are smooth and cool to the touch, offering comfort. Other times, they can be rough, even sharp, symbolizing the pain or harshness we feel. Just as STONES can be different, so too can the feelings in our grief journey—sometimes heavy, sometimes a bit lighter, sometimes rough, sometimes smooth.”*
 - *“Now, let’s explore this metaphor a bit more closely with the STONES you’ll choose today.”*
 - (For older groups you can offer this additional prompt, inviting deeper discussion on the connection before reading the script): *“Thinking about what we just discussed—how grief can feel like a STONE—does anyone want to share an initial thought on how their journey with grief might be like the journey of a STONE? For example, the idea of a rough STONE becoming smoother over time? Or what the ‘sparkle’ might represent?”* (Allow for brief contributions here or let them hold these thoughts as you read the script).
- Explain that you are going to read something for them and read the following:

The **STONE CEREMONY** is just one way we connect to our past and to each other, as we honor important feelings and memories together. These bags are part of our closing **STONE CEREMONY**, a ritual shared by Caring Place groups. When a group ends, we have a **CEREMONY**, marking a sendoff to all our group members.



In a moment, each of you will fill a bag with **STONES**. One by one, each of you will choose a **ROUGH STONE** with sharp edges, a **SMOOTH AND SHINY STONE**, a **SPARKLING GEM**, and a **HEART STONE**.

The **ROUGH STONE** symbolizes the corner of your heart that feels painful because someone close to you has died. It is through the wearing down of a **ROUGH STONE** by other rough encounters that the **STONE** becomes smoother and more polished. Without these rough encounters, the **STONE** would not become as polished and smooth. This wearing down of the sharp edges happens over time. Like the **STONE'S** journey from a **ROUGH STONE** to a **SMOOTH ONE**, a person's grief journey begins as very rough and becomes smoother over time.

At various times in the journey, there may be both rough and smooth times, gradually giving way to more smooth times. The **SMOOTHNESS OF THE STONE** represents the hope of a person's grief journey becoming smoother over time. The **SHININESS OF THE STONE** symbolizes the enduring beauty of life and the parts of you that are shiny and whole, and stronger than before.

The **SPARKLING GEM** symbolizes your beauty, resilience, strength, rarity, and uniqueness. Each **GEM** is unique just like you are.

- *“Now, let's take time to fill your bag. When you're done, we'll continue with our **CEREMONY**.”*
- Pass the container of **STONES** around the group, inviting each member to select **STONES** (one **ROUGH**, one **SMOOTH AND SHINY**, and one **SPARKLING GEM**) representing his/her grief journey. Allow time for participants to choose their **STONES**.
- Note that before they continue, you have a **HEART STONE** for them to place in their bag.

- *“This is from all of us as volunteers. This symbolizes our support for you on your grief journey. We hope this serves as a reminder that you are cared for, you are not alone, and you will always hold a special place in our hearts.”*
- Explain that you have a final reading to share with them and a copy of it is available for them to place in their bag.

STONES OF LIFE

The paths we take in life are both rough and smooth, like the STONES in a riverbed. The **ROUGH STONES** hurt and scrape us, while the **SMOOTH AND SHINY STONES** warm and embrace us. If we are open to accepting others’ love and understanding, our lives are filled with **BRIGHT GEMS OF HOPE AND PEACE**. Our group is ending. Just like the STONES in this bag, some days that lie ahead may be rough and bumpy, while some will be smoother and shinier than others. To help you through all your days, may the STONES symbolize the strength, the hope, the friendship and support you found through this group experience.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Thank the group and give them time to reflect on any feelings or thoughts they may have.
- Guiding questions:
 - *“As you look at your stones, what comes to mind about your grief journey? How do these STONES speak to your own experience?”*
 - *“Did choosing a particular STONE feel especially meaningful or powerful for you today? Can you share why?”*
 - *“What might these STONES symbolize for you as you move forward?”*
 - *“Looking back at our time together in this group, is there Something I appreciate about our group...?” (For example, “The listening ears”—“The laughter”—“Feeling understood”).*
 - *“Is there Something I learned from our group...?” (For example, “That my feelings are normal”—“That everyone grieves differently”—“New ways to cope”).*

- *“Is there Something I learned about myself while being a part of this group?”*
- *“And as we prepare to say goodbye, what is A wish I have for our group (or for each of us) as we continue our individual journeys?”*
- Offer final words of gratitude and support.
 - *“Thank you so much for sharing your journey and your insights today, and throughout our time together. It has been a true privilege to witness your courage and to share this space with you.”*
 - *“Remember that these STONES are a tangible reminder of your strength, your journey, and the connection you found here. Keep them close, or in a special place, as a comfort and a symbol of your growth.”*
 - If group is ending with this, end with the Pledge to close out.

Notes:

- Allow time for quiet reflection and silence, especially during STONE selection. Do not rush the process.
- If using for a Younger Group, focus more on the visual aspect and simplify the metaphor.
 - For example, *“The ROUGH STONE feels heavy, maybe like sadness or anger. The SMOOTH STONE feels gentle, maybe like calm or comfort.”* Ensure they grasp the *Why* in a concrete way.
- **Variation:** The STONE CEREMONY can also be used as a comparative activity where the group members select one STONE to represent where they were in their grief journey at the beginning of the Group Session and another to represent their present position on the grief journey.
- **Variation:** Each group member selects *one specific type of STONE* that best represents *their own unique journey or spirit*. They then contribute enough of *that chosen STONE* so that every other person (including themselves) receives one. At the end, every participant will possess an identical bag containing a sample of each group member’s “representative” STONE.
 - The member briefly shares why they chose that specific stone type and what it represents for them.
 - After sharing, the group member ensures that every other group member receives one piece of that person’s chosen STONE for their own bag. The group member also takes one for their own bag.

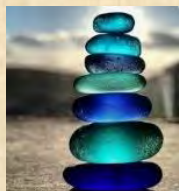
- **Wrap-Up:** Focus on the significance of the identical bags. *“What does it mean to know that every person in this group now holds this exact same collection of STONES, each chosen by one of us? How does having a tangible piece of everyone’s journey feel?”*
- Every participant leaves with a bag containing the exact same collection of STONES, where each stone type was uniquely chosen by one member of the group (plus a universal HEART STONE). This bag represents the **group as a whole and the unique contribution of each member.**

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity can be used for closings for Ongoing Groups. Group members can compare the difference between their first Session ending and their current Session ending in choosing STONES (*see variation above*) or consider doing the variation where each person chooses one STONE to represent themselves as noted above.

Stones of Life Scrolls

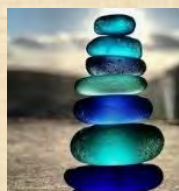
The Stones of Life



The paths we take in life are both rough and smooth, like the stones in a river's bed. The rough stones hurt and scrape us while the smooth and shiny stones warm and embrace us. If we are open to accept others' love and understanding, our lives are filled with bright gems of hope and peace.

Our group is ending. Just like the stones in this bag, some days that lie ahead may be rough or bumpy, while some will be smoother and shinier than others. To help you through all your days, may the stones symbolize the strength, the hope, and the friendship and support you found through this group experience.

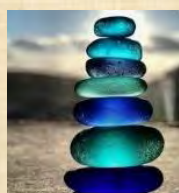
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STRESS AWARENESS AND SELF-CARE

T—A

Suggested Groups: Teen, Adult

Purpose: To compassionately acknowledge how grief and life's demands contribute to STRESS, help group members identify the physical and emotional manifestations of this STRESS, and begin exploring self-care and coping strategies within the context of their grief journey.

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Post-it paper, flip chart, or whiteboard for group brainstorming
- Colored pencils, crayons, markers
- Body cut out/worksheets (*found at the end of this activity*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Have a discussion with the group members about the importance of managing STRESS in our lives, and how grief may impact their STRESS.
 - *“As we gather today, I want to gently acknowledge that grief is a profound experience that impacts every part of our lives—our minds, our hearts, and our bodies. It often brings with it a unique kind of STRESS, layered with all the other responsibilities and demands we might be facing.”*
 - *“It’s completely normal to feel overwhelmed, tired, anxious, or a multitude of other emotions when grieving. Our aim today is not to fix anything, but to simply create a space to notice, acknowledge, and gently explore how STRESS might be showing up for us, and how we might offer ourselves a little bit of CARE.”*
- Introduce the activity that they will be working on.
 - *“Many of us carry so many stressors and responsibilities (whether it’s managing daily tasks, family, work, school, bills, or just navigating the world while grieving) that profoundly affect how we feel, both emotionally and physically. Sometimes, these STRESSES feel invisible until they manifest in our bodies.”* Let them know that this activity helps us to identify how and where some of these stressors affect our bodies.
 - *“Today’s activity invites us to identify some of our stressors and notice where we might be holding them in our bodies. There’s no right or wrong*

way to do this. It's simply an invitation for SELF-AWARENESS and understanding."

- Present the group with the worksheets.
 - *"We'll be using these simple body outlines as a canvas. You might think of it as a 'Body Map' for your feelings and sensations. We're going to think about what STRESS feels like in our bodies."*
 - *"Has anyone ever noticed their shoulders tightening, a knot in their stomach, or headaches when they're feeling particularly STRESSED or overwhelmed? These are all ways our body communicates with us."*

Activity Description:

- Encourage the group to brainstorm different stressors that they have in their lives (you may write a list on the post-it paper or white board).
 - *"Let's start by thinking about different sources of STRESS in our lives right now. These can be big or small, related to our grief or separate. What are some of the things that feel heavy or overwhelming? No need to filter, we'll list them as they come."*
 - Write down group contributions on the whiteboard/flip chart. **Consider offering options for sharing:** *"You can share aloud, or if you prefer, you can write it down to keep to yourself if that feels best."*
- Allow the group time to think about how their bodies react to the stressors in their lives.
- Have group members identify where in their bodies they feel their stressors, noting similarities and differences amongst group members.
 - *"When you think about those stressors, think about where in your body you might feel that STRESS. For example, sometimes people feel tightness in their shoulders, or a clenched jaw."*
 - *"If you like, you can indicate on your body worksheets with colors, symbols, words, or drawings to represent where you feel the STRESS. For example, if you feel tension in your shoulders, you might draw squiggly red lines there. If your stomach feels anxious, you might use a tight knot shape."*
- Allow the group members time to fill in their body cut outs to reflect their identified stressors and how they see themselves.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

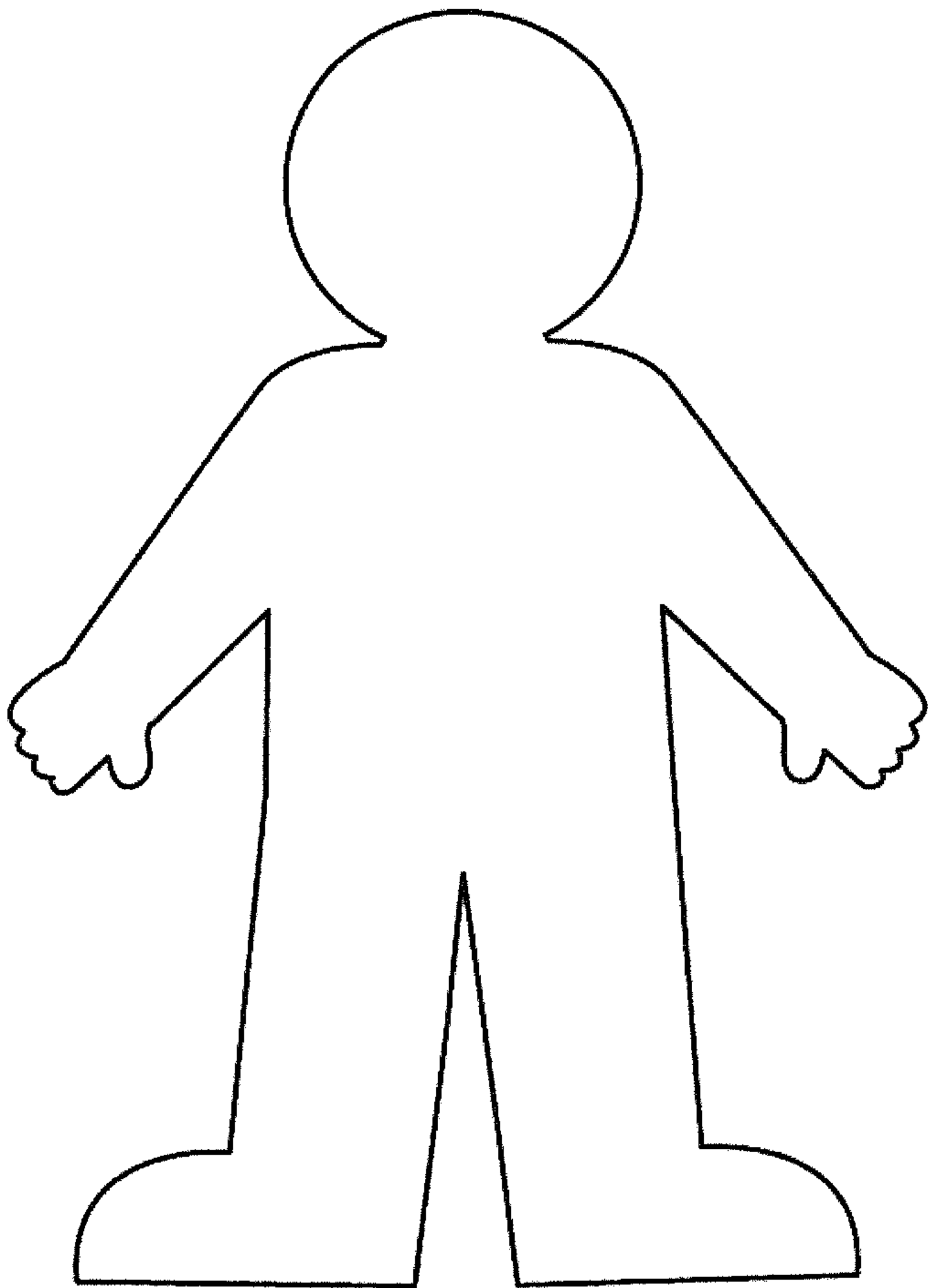
- Invite the group members to share their drawings with the group.
 - *“As you feel ready, I invite anyone who feels comfortable to share what you’ve noticed or depicted on your body map. You are not required to share if you don’t wish to. If you choose to share, you can simply point to a part of your drawing, describe a feeling, or share a word or two.”*
- Focus on similarities and differences.
 - *“It’s often powerful to see the commonalities in our experiences—how many of us hold tension in similar places. And it’s also helpful to recognize that STRESS can manifest uniquely for each person, and that’s normal too.”*
- Help make connection to SELF-CARE and coping.
 - *“Now that we’ve identified some of the ways STRESS shows up, let’s shift our focus slightly to how we can offer ourselves some COMFORT and CARE. Understanding where we hold STRESS is the first step towards being able to address it.”*
 - *“Thinking about your body map, what’s one small, gentle thing you might do today, or this week, to offer kindness or relief to one of those STRESSED areas?”*
- Brainstorm COPING STRATEGIES with the group.
 - *“Let’s brainstorm together. What are some small, realistic ways we can tend to ourselves when we notice these physical sensations of STRESS? Remember, we’re thinking about things that feel accessible and supportive right now, especially when navigating grief.”*
 - Prompt with examples: *“It could be something as simple as taking a few deep breaths, stretching, gently massaging your temples, stepping outside for 5 minutes, listening to calming music, or journaling for a few minutes. It doesn’t have to be a grand gesture.”*
 - Emphasize “GENTLE” and “REALISTIC” in Grief: *“In grief, our energy levels are often low, so grand plans for SELF-CARE can feel overwhelming. Let’s focus on tiny, achievable acts of SELF-COMPASSION.”*
 - Acknowledge and validate as group members share, reminding them that while eliminating STRESS is impossible, by becoming aware and taking small steps for SELF-CARE, STRESS may feel more manageable.
- Thank the group for sharing and let them know that they can continue the conversation in future meetings if things come to mind.

Notes:

- This activity can be done by doing body tracings (see BODY DRAWINGS ACTIVITY) as an alternate option for a more personalized representation. If doing body tracings, ensure that there is enough space in the room to do so.
- This activity helps connect the abstract concept of STRESS to concrete physical sensations, promoting SELF-AWARENESS.
- This activity serves as an excellent foundation for future discussions on COPING MECHANISMS and SELF-CARE STRATEGIES. You can continue to check in with group members to see if they have tried some of the COPING STRATEGIES they identify, or if they have noticed anything as the meetings continue.

For Ongoing Groups:

- If using in an Ongoing Group, you can ask if group members have done this before.
- If so, see if they can recall what they put on their body worksheets last time and if anything has changed.
- Ask group members if they have used any of the SELF-CARE TECHNIQUES that they discussed from the first time they did this, and if so, if it has helped.



SUN-CATCHING FOR HOPE

P—Y—M—T

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

Purpose: To provide a creative way for participants to visually represent their journey through grief and to foster a sense of ongoing hope and remembrance, encouraging them to carry these positive feelings beyond the group's conclusion by creating and displaying their SUNCATCHER.

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- BUTTERFLY cutouts (*two matching cutouts per participant—these form the top and bottom of the SUNCATCHER*)
- Tissue paper in a variety of colors/patterns
- Glue sticks or glue
- Embellishments: beads, sequins, glitter, small feathers, colored markers or crayons (*optional*)
- String for hanging finished SUNCATCHERS
- Clear contact paper or self-adhesive cellophane, to laminate the finished BUTTERFLY, making it more durable (*optional*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Before starting, gather all materials and arrange them clearly. Have your own example BUTTERFLY (perhaps a partially completed one) to show as an illustration, not a model to be copied.
- Welcome the group back and let them know that they will each have the opportunity to make a SUNCATCHER—show example so they can see what the end product will look like.
- Briefly explain the purpose of the activity, emphasizing personal expression and the symbolism of the BUTTERFLY representing hope.
 - *“The purpose of this activity is to help us express our feelings, remember our person, and think about the journey we’ve been on together here at the Caring Place. Sometimes, making something with our hands can help us think about things we might not always say with words.”*
 - *“Let’s think about a BUTTERFLY—it starts as a caterpillar and transforms into something different and beautiful. Just like the caterpillar, we’ve all been on a journey of change, especially as we cope with grief. We’re also*

here at the Caring Place, growing and finding strength, just like a BUTTERFLY emerges. Your BUTTERFLY can represent your journey and the hope you carry.”

- Discuss decorating the BUTTERFLY using:
 - Colors that their special person liked.
 - Stickers or other embellishments that remind them of that person.
 - Colors they like themselves.
 - Colors that make them think of hope.
 - Colors related to the strength they found in being in a supportive group.
- Let them know there will be time to share their BUTTERFLY with others if they like.

Activity Description:

- Participants create their SUNCATCHERS, allowing for freedom of expression.
- Encourage them to incorporate colors, patterns, and embellishments that resonate with:
 - Their personal grief journey
 - The person they are remembering
 - Things that represent their time at the Caring Place
- Use gentle prompts like:
 - *“What colors represent hope to you?”*
 - *“What textures or patterns symbolize your strength?”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow time for sharing.
 - *“Now that we’ve all had a chance to create our beautiful SUNCATCHERS, we’re going to take a moment to look at what we’ve made and think about what it means to us.”*
 - *“Would anyone like to share? You can talk about the colors you chose, or maybe a little piece of tissue paper that has a special meaning. Or perhaps you can tell us one word that describes your BUTTERFLY and why. There’s no need to share if you don’t feel ready, and that’s perfectly OK.”*
- Encourage them to reflect on the process.
 - *“What was it like to create your SUNCATCHER today? Were there any parts that felt easy, or maybe a little bit challenging?”*
 - *“Did anything surprise you while you were making it? Maybe a color you didn’t expect to use, or a memory that came to mind?”*

- *“As you were choosing your colors and putting your BUTTERFLY together, did you have any particular thoughts or feelings? Was it a peaceful feeling, a thoughtful feeling, or something else?”*
- *“If your BUTTERFLY could ‘talk,’ what do you think it might want to tell us about your journey or your feelings?”*
- *“If you were going to give your BUTTERFLY a name, what would it be and why?”*
- Closing out the activity—end with thanking them for their openness and creativity.
 - *“Thank you all for being so open and creative today. Each one of your BUTTERFLIES is truly unique and special. Remember, just like our grief journeys, there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ ways to feel, or to make art. What matters is that you’re expressing yourselves and finding moments of hope and connection.”*
 - *“As you take these home, we hope your SUNCATCHER will be a special reminder of your time here at the Caring Place, the strength you’ve found, and the special memories you carry in your heart. Just as these BUTTERFLIES let light shine through, we hope you remember that even in challenging times, there’s always light and hope within you.”*

For Ongoing Groups:

- This works well as a large group closing activity.
 - If using as a large group closing (staff will inform you if they are doing so); staff will invite the group to share their BUTTERFLIES and tell a little bit about it.
 - Staff will highlight how BUTTERFLIES are similar and different, representing hope and light, while also acknowledging individual and family grief journeys.

SUPPORT ON THE JOURNEY (*WALKING STICKS*)

T—A

Suggested Groups: Teen, Adult

Purpose: This activity provides a creative and therapeutic outlet for grieving teens or adults to express their emotions, process their GRIEF JOURNEY, and build resilience. The WALKING STICK becomes a tangible symbol of their strength and the path they are navigating while also allowing for shared reflection and group support.

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- Smooth wooden WALKING STICKS (*one per participant; variations in size/shape are fine*)
- Acrylic paints (*wide range of colors*)
- Paintbrushes (*assorted sizes*)
- Sealer (*to protect the paint*)
- Various embellishments: Beads, small stones, feathers, ribbons, stickers, etc. (*optional*)
- Markers/Pens (*permanent or acrylic paint markers work best*)
- Small bowls/cups of water
- Paper towels/rags
- Aprons/drop cloths (*to protect clothing and furniture/carpet*)
- Optional: Mod Podge (*for adhering embellishments*), stencils

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Introduce the idea that each of them will have the opportunity to create a WALKING STICK.
 - *“Welcome, everyone. As we gather today, we’re going to engage in an activity that offers a unique way to reflect on our individual GRIEF JOURNEYS. We understand that grief can feel like navigating an unfamiliar and sometimes challenging path, and today, we’re creating a symbolic companion for that journey.”*
- Let them know that they can decorate in whatever way they choose to remember their loved one and to honor their own unique JOURNEY.
 - *“Think of the WALKING STICKS as a tool for support, and a canvas for you to express your unique story. There is no right or wrong way to do it, and we have lots of available art supplies here for you.”*

- Offer suggestions for themes but let them know that they can create whatever they like.
 - Just as a WALKING STICK provides stability on a rough path, support from friends, family, or a community can help them navigate grief—**decorating representing their supports.**
 - The STICK can symbolize carrying the love and memories of the person they lost as they move forward. They're not leaving their loved one behind but rather taking them along with them—**decorating represents their person.**
 - A WALKING STICK endures different terrains and weather, just like grief comes in waves and changes over time—**decorating the stick in a way that represents their unique grief journey.**
 - While grief can feel overwhelming, a WALKING STICK is used for moving ahead, symbolizing their strength and resilience even when the path is hard—**decorating with words of affirmation and support to continue to help them on their journey.**
- Here are some prompts and questions to help guide their reflections as they decorate their WALKING STICKS:
 - What colors, symbols, or designs remind you of your loved one?
 - Is there a word or phrase that represents their impact on your life?
 - If your loved one could leave you with a message for your JOURNEY ahead, what might it be?
 - Who or what helps you when grief feels heavy? How can you represent that on your stick?
 - What qualities (strength, resilience, hope, love) do you want to carry with you?
 - If your GRIEF JOURNEY were a path, what kind of terrain would it be (mountains, winding road, river, forest)? How can your WALKING STICK help you navigate it?
 - How has your GRIEF JOURNEY changed you so far?
 - What symbols or patterns could represent healing or hope for you?
 - Imagine yourself in the future, looking back at this time. What would you want to remind yourself about your strength and progress?

Activity Description:

- Set up WALKING STICKS and materials with plenty of space for participants to work on them. You may want to consider asking staff to use the Community Room for more space if needed. Ensure that they wear an apron to protect clothing if using paint or other art supplies that could get messy.
- Allow time for participants to decorate their STICKS, reflecting on their JOURNEY through symbolism.
- Walk around, offer gentle encouragement, support any who needs guidance, and reassure all that individual choices in creative expression are individual and should remain non-judgmental and completely supported.
- The use of background music or nature background scenes can assist all participants in staying engaged in this safe space activity.
- Let the group members know that they can leave their STICKS there, and sealant will be applied by volunteers/staff before the next meeting.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Invite group members to share if they are open to doing so.
 - *“Would anyone want to share? You might share one small detail, a color, a feeling, or you might share more deeply about the symbols you chose. You can also share if there is a story or memory behind what you put on the WALKING STICK. It’s up to you.”*
- Allow time for group reflection and connection
 - *“As we’ve listened to each other, what have you noticed? Are there any themes that emerged, or any common threads in our unique JOURNEYS?”*
 - *“Did anything surprise you about the process of creating your WALKING STICK, or about what emerged for you?”*
 - *“Was it difficult or easy to decide what to put on it?”*
 - *“What feelings came up for you as you decorated?”*
- Share an affirmation, such as: *Like this WALKING STICK, you are strong enough to carry memories and move forward. Your grief is part of your story, but it does not define you. You are not alone on this path.*
- End with gratitude for their openness and creativity. Remind them that, just as they’ve decorated their WALKING STICK in a way that is personal to them, their GRIEF JOURNEY is unique, and there’s no “right” way to grieve.

Notes:

- This activity will take several meetings. Do not rush the process and ensure that there will be enough time, including the time for drying and sealing in between group nights.
- Art can tap into deep emotions, and this may be most appropriate for group members whose loss was not recent. Ensure that your group is emotionally ready for an activity like this.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity is best suited for Ongoing Groups. If group members have already done this activity, you can ask them if they still have their WALKING STICK. If they will be making another, offer that they can choose a different theme.



SUPPORT THAT REMAINS (*PAPIER-MÂCHÉ BALLOONS*)

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To help group members recognize that when someone dies, even though we no longer have their physical presence, all the things they taught us, all our memories of them, all the ways the affected our lives remain and endure.

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- Sharpie Markers (*only use a Sharpie Marker so that the words will not run when they get wet*)
- Balloons
- String
- Strips of newspaper (*thin strips for base layer—precut strips can help save time and reduce frustration*)
- Tissue Paper (*strong, good quality; a wide variety of colors, pre-cut into strips suitable for writing; have blank strips and some with pre-written suggested words—see below*)
- Plain Paper Strips (*printer paper, colorful cardstock, etc.—for additional written messages or thicker structural support*)
- Papier-Mâché Mix (*pre-mixed and ready to use—essential for volunteer facilitators to ensure consistency and hygiene; provide individual small bowls/containers for each participant*)

Papier-Mâché Recipe Options (*prepare one of these types*)

- **Flour & Water** (*cooked paste for durability and mold prevention*)
 - A better option for long-term storage than uncooked paste
 - Cook 1 cup flour with 4 cups of water slowly until thickened, cool completely
 - Add a few tablespoons of salt to any flour-based paste to help prevent mold
- **School Glue & Water** (*easier for children to handle, dries quicker*)
 - 2 parts glue to 1 part water
- **High-quality Mod Podge** (*for papier-mâché or purpose-made papier-mâché glue*)

- Protective Gear—Disposable Gloves, Aprons/Old T-shirts

- Drop Cloths/Newspapers/Plastic Sheeting (*to protect tables and floors*)
- Drying Area: Designated space for two weeks to allow items to dry completely without disturbance (*for example, covered tables in a separate room*)
- Optional Decoration Materials for Week Two—Paints (*acrylic*), paintbrushes, glitter glue, stick-on embellishments, beads (*with glue*), ribbons, stencils, metallic markers, stickers
- Small Envelopes/Slips of Paper (*for anonymous submission of memory words in Week One, if preferred*)
- Sealable Bags/Containers (*for participants to store unfinished or completed items*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome and explain that the activity that they will be working on will take two meetings.
 - *“Welcome, everyone. Today, we’re going to begin a special two-part activity. We know that grief brings many changes. This activity helps us remember that even when someone is no longer physically with us, the love and the connections we shared remain, strong and present within us.”*
- Introduce the BALLOON and WORDS OF CONNECTION.
 - *“Let’s begin by choosing a BALLOON. For this activity, we’ll think of this BALLOON as a symbol representing the physical presence or tangible reality of the person before they died. It holds the space where they once were in our lives.”* (Offer various sizes of BALLOONS.)
 - In preparing the activity, take strips of tissue paper and write things that a person may have gotten from whoever died (*Support—Love—Wisdom—Encouragement—Companionship—Lessons Learned—Compassion*). Share these WORDS with the group members and ask them for suggestions of additional WORDS they can think of. Ask them what ways they were impacted—both good, and perhaps difficult, or even skills they gained from their person or the experience of their death.
- Explain the steps in the activity.
 - *“We’ll be using papier-mâché, which involves dipping strips of paper into a glue mixture and laying them onto the BALLOON. This will create a ‘Shell’ around our reflections.”*
 - *“First, we’ll cover our BALLOONS with a base layer of newspaper strips. This makes our Shell strong and creates a Solid Foundation, representing the place this person held in our past and the Foundational elements of our life they touched.”*

- *“Then, we’ll take the tissue paper strips with our WORDS OF IMPACT and what remains, dip them gently in the papier-mâché mix, and carefully place them over the newspaper layers. Think of this as embedding those aspects—the good, the challenging, the lessons learned—right into the Fabric of our Shell.”*
- **Crucial Instruction for Integrity:** *“Please remember not to cover the very bottom part of the BALLOON where the knot and string are tied. We need that area open for the second part of our activity.”*
- *“Don’t worry about perfection; it’s the process and the meaning that matters most. We encourage you to use gloves if you’d like to, as papier-mâché can be a bit messy.”*

Activity Description:

- **WEEK ONE:**

- Have BALLOONS blown up and ready to cover—they can choose from those blown up.
- Tie a string around the knot at the base of the BALLOON.
- Start by having group members cover the BALLOON first with the newspaper strips dipped in the mâché mix to give it a sturdy base.
- Then ask the group to pick the WORDS written on the tissue paper that remind them of things they feel they received from the person that died. They can write their own if they like.
- Dip them in the mâché, placing them on top of the newspaper pieces.
- Make sure they do not cover the base of the BALLOON where the knot and string are tied.
- Allow BALLOONS to dry until your next session.

- **WEEK TWO:**

- Give the children the BALLOONS they covered the week before.
- Remind them that the BALLOON represented the physical presence of the person, and the WORDS represent the various impacts, lessons, and echoes of their presence in our lives.
- Prepare them for the next step and a potential difficult moment of popping the BALLOON.
 - *“Today’s next step is significant, and I want to acknowledge upfront that it might bring up strong feelings for some. This part of the activity gently symbolizes the physical absence of the person*

and the changes that came with that, allowing us to focus on what continues to resonate within us.”

Empowering Choice (IMPORTANT)

- *“Each of you will have the choice to POP the BALLOON from inside your Shell, or to leave it intact if that feels better for you right now. There is absolutely no pressure or expectation to do anything that feels too difficult or upsetting. This is your personal journey, and we support whatever choice feels right for your heart today, or not at all if you wish. Some might prefer to just let the BALLOON slowly deflate naturally over time, and that is a valid choice too.”*
- Be sensitive to others—if there are others in the group who may be bothered by the sound of popping, offer to take the group members one by one to another space to pop the BALLOONS.
- For those who choose to pop it, pull the BALLOON out of the mâché by the string.
- Show the mâché shell left and explain that you still have all those things that person gave you even though they are now gone.
 - *“The physical BALLOON is gone or deflating, just as our loved one’s physical presence is changed. But look closely—**what remains?** You still have this strong, beautiful Shell, covered in WORDS **reflecting the impact, the lessons, the parts of yourself shaped by that person.** The influences, both positive and challenging, are still embedded here.”*
- Provide the option for group members to write messages to their person and roll them up to put them inside the Shell.
- Once they are done, cover the opening with masking or duct tape and allow them to decorate the Shell however they like.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow time for reflection on the process and sharing if they like.
 - Ask open-ended questions.
 - *“What was it like to create this—from beginning to end? Did anything about the process or the act of putting WORDS on your BALLOON surprise you or help you reflect in a new way?”*
 - *“For those who chose to remove your BALLOON, what was that experience like for you? What did you notice or feel when you saw the Shell that remained?”*

- *“What words or symbols on your finished Shell now feel most meaningful to you, and why? How does it reflect the impact or ENDURING PRESENCE of this person in your life?”*
- *“What feelings came up for you as you made your Shell, or decorated it today?”*
- Highlight that like the person who died, the BALLOON is changing or no longer a physical part of the sculpture, but the impact of the BALLOON will last long after it was physically removed from the sculpture.
- Ask for any closing thoughts and thank the group for their creativity and courage in their sharing.

Notes:

- Be aware that this activity may be difficult for group members that did not have a positive relationship with the person who died or have limited/no memories. It may be better to choose a different activity, or alter your language with this activity, as suggested below:
 - *“We recognize that relationships with those who die are varied and complex. Some may have been loving, others strained, and some may have caused pain. This activity is designed to honor your experience of that relationship and help you reflect on its impact on you, whatever that may be.”*
 - Neutral language is key—be mindful of language, consistently using neutral terms like “person who died”—“their impact”—“the relationship” rather than defaulting to “your loved one”—“their love”—“cherished memories.”
 - Instead of WORDS of how they impacted them, note that the group member can choose WORDS of affirmation for themselves, or offer WORDS like strength, peace, self-protection.
 - If struggling with ideas, offer: *“How did their presence, or even their absence, shape your sense of self or your life?”*
 - Offer that they can draw instead of writing. Perhaps there is a symbol that is important to them. Allow them to change the focus to whatever they like.
- Reminder—allow choice in popping the BALLOON and be aware of sensitivity in the room.
- This activity requires several meetings to complete. Ensure that you allow time for this when planning.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity can be done in an Ongoing Group; assess if group members have done this activity previously. If they have, offer to have group members bring in their previous Shell if they still have it. They can add memories or more messages to that Shell if they like and talk about where they keep it at home.
 - Invite group members to construct a new Shell. This serves as an acknowledgment of the dynamic nature of the grief process and any significant developments since their previous participation.
 - Allow them to compare/contrast the first Shell to this Shell.

THE SUN SHINES ON Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: Encourage self-sharing and identifying commonalities within the group.
Build group cohesion.

Task/Need:

- Group building

Materials:

- **A Circle of Chairs:** Make sure there is one fewer chair than there are participants (*for example, if you have 8 children, you'll need 7 chairs*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Arrange the chairs in a clear circle in an open space. Double-check that there's exactly one less chair than there are people playing.
- Introduction to the Game
 - *"Welcome, everyone! Today we're going to play a game called **THE SUN SHINES ON**. It's a fun way to learn more about each other and see how many things we might have in common."*
 - Explain that they are all unique; but sometimes it can be fun to discover that they have more in common than they think, and that is what the game is about.
- Have everyone sit in a chair, except for one person who will stand in the middle. The person in the middle will make a statement that starts with: **"THE SUN SHINES ON ANYONE WHO..."** and then they'll complete the sentence with something that is true about them. For example: *"The sun shines on anyone who has blue eyes."* Explain how they play:
 - If that statement is true for you (*like, if you also have blue eyes*), you have to get up and quickly find a different empty chair. You cannot sit in the chair you just came from or the chair next to it.
 - While everyone is scrambling for a new chair, the person in the middle also tries to find an empty chair!
 - The person who is left without a chair will be the next person to stand in the middle and make a **"THE SUN SHINES ON..."** statement.
- Provide an example before starting.
 - *"I'll go first to show you. **THE SUN SHINES ON ANYONE WHO IS WEARING SNEAKERS.**' (Wait for everyone with sneakers to move.) See?"*

Activity Description:

- Start the game by asking a member of the group to volunteer by standing in the middle and making the first statement. Keep the first few statements light and general to get everyone comfortable (*“THE SUN SHINES ON anyone who loves pizza”*—*“THE SUN SHINES ON anyone who has a pet”*).
- The role of the facilitator is to:
 - Help guide anyone who might be confused, make sure people are finding *new* chairs, and gently encourage participation.
 - Remind children to move carefully so no one gets hurt while moving chairs.
 - Gently Prompt (*if needed*). If a child is consistently getting left in the middle and struggles to think of a statement, you can gently offer suggestions like, *“You could say ‘THE SUN SHINES ON ANYONE WHO LIKES TO DRAW,’ or ‘THE SUN SHINES ON ANYONE WHO HAS AN OLDER SIBLING.’ ”* (Be careful not to put words in their mouth, just offer ideas.)
 - Keep it going until everyone has had a chance to be the person in the middle, or until you feel the group has made good connections.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Bring everyone back together and sit comfortably (*you can use all the chairs now or sit on the floor*).
- Have an open discussion with members about their experience with the game.
 - *“What did you notice about playing THE SUN SHINES ON? Did you find out you had more things in common with others than you expected, or less?”*
 - *“Was there anything that surprised you that you shared in common with someone?”*
 - *“How did it feel when someone made a statement that also applied to you, and you got to switch chairs with other people who were similar?—Did it feel good to know you weren’t the only one?”*
 - *“What was it like when something only applied to you? What did it feel like to be different than others?”*
 - Tell the group that this game helps us remember that even though our paths might be different, we often share experiences, thoughts, and feelings. We’re a group of unique people who also have many things that connect us.
- Thank them for playing and let them know how their participation helped to let everyone get to know each other.

Notes:

- This activity can go on until everyone has had a chance to be the leader at least once. You may want to have one volunteer stand in the middle of the circle to assist children in deciding what to share if necessary.
- In later group nights, use this activity to encourage the children to share common grieving feelings; see variations below. *Note—these should only be used when the group is more comfortable and trust has been built.*
- **Variation—SPECIFIC TOPICS:** “Today, we’re going to try something a little different with *THE SUN SHINES ON*. Instead of just general things, we’ll think more about things related to our experiences with loss.”
- **Variation—Use CHIPS/TOKENS:** Put small CHIPS or TOKENS with symbols in a container (perhaps a “SMILEY FACE” for “Share something about yourself”—a “HEART” for “Share about the person who died”—a “CLOUD” for “Share a feeling/experience about loss” a “WAVY LINE” for “Share a change you’ve experienced”).
 - When someone is in the middle, they pick a CHIP. This CHIP tells them the type of statement they should try to make.
 - 😊 Share something about yourself (for example, “*THE SUN SHINES ON anyone who likes to play video games.*”)
 - ❤️ Share something about the person who died (“*THE SUN SHINES ON anyone whose person who died loved to bake cookies.*”)
 - ☁️ Share a feeling or experience related to that person or their loss (“*THE SUN SHINES ON anyone who sometimes feels lonely since their person died.*”) Only use these types of statements if the group is very ready.
 - ~ Share a change you have experienced since the person died (“*THE SUN SHINES ON anyone who has had to help more with chores since their person died.*”)

For Ongoing Groups:

- No specific modifications are needed, as this is a dynamic game. However, you can use a variation noted above, or create new questions like:
 - THE SUN SHINES ON anyone who—has participated in more than two Sessions.
 - THE SUN SHINES ON anyone who—made a quilt square with their family.
 - THE SUN SHINES ON anyone whose—name is on the “Tree of Growth.”

THIS OR THAT WHEEL

Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To create a light, interactive, and safe space for group members to get to know one another better, discover unexpected commonalities, and subtly build a sense of community

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Identifying and Expressing Feelings

Materials:

- Computer or Tablet to display and operate WHEEL OF NAMES Website
- Prepared THIS OR THAT prompts (*see end of this activity below*)
- Whiteboard or Flip chart to jot down patterns
- Small notecards or slips of paper if group members would rather write than say something out loud

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome group and explain that they will be playing a fun game to help them discover some commonalities or differences within the group.
 - Note that it is similar to THIS OR THAT if they have played that before.
- Explain that you will be using a WHEEL OF NAMES (digital) which is preloaded with THIS OR THAT Questions to answer.
 - Go to the website: <https://wheelofnames.com> and set up the WHEEL with THIS OR THAT suggestions. Or you could make up your own categories (*see end of activity*).
 - Examples: *Coffee or Tea—Spring or Summer—Night Owl or Morning Person*

Activity Description:

- Volunteer spins the WHEEL and reads the Question aloud.
- The lead can ask the group members to choose one of the two options THIS OR THAT?
 - They can signal with a thumbs up/down, raise a hand, or simply state your choice.
- Volunteers can generate discussion by talking about the differences and similarities in selections.
 - *“It sounds like many of us are [option] people!”* or *“Interesting, we’ve got a nice mix here!”*

- If the members of the group have already had a chance to get to know each other, you can invite them to elaborate on their answer, asking them what it is that they like about that option. You can also engage the other group members by asking what they would choose.
- Allow them to come up with categories if they like to add to the list on the board, then throw the question out to the group.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Discuss how much everyone has learned about each other.
 - *“What did you notice during our game today? Did anything surprise you about your own choices or others’ choices?”*
 - *“What was it like to hear other people share their preferences? Did you find any unexpected common ground or discover new facets about each other?”*
- Ask if it felt different when they chose an option that the majority of the group chose, compared to choosing an option that no one chose, or few members chose.
 - *“It’s a reminder that it’s OK to stand alone in your choices or experiences, just as it’s comforting to find those who resonate with you. We value all your unique voices and perspectives here.”*
- Thank the group for sharing.

Notes:

- This activity works well for new groups or as an orientation activity. The WHEEL can also be used for a variety of activities. It is a fun way to pick names, topics, feelings, etc.
- You can do this without the WHEEL and just write Questions on the board or read aloud.
- This activity also works well if you have all group members stand on a line, then have them step forward if they choose ‘Option A’ or step back if they choose ‘Option B.’ This allows group members to see the similarities and differences they have with each other. It can also help if you have a group that likes to move!
- **Variation:** If the group wants to move more, you can also have them do a different dance move for “THIS” and “THAT” (for example, *“If you choose THIS, do a disco hand move; for THAT do a running man.”*)

For Ongoing Groups:

- This is a great, fun activity for Ongoing Groups. Switch up questions and allow groups to generate their own Questions.

'THIS OR THAT' OPTIONS

Breakfast	or	Dinner?
Sweet	or	Salty?
Beach	or	Mountains?
Swimming	or	Skiing?
Dogs	or	Cats?
Coffee	or	Tea?
Summer	or	Winter?
Pancakes	or	Waffles?
Morning	or	Night?
Text	or	Call?
Chocolate	or	Vanilla?
Rain	or	Snow?
Hamburger	or	Hot Dog?
Fruits	or	Veggies?
Milk	or	Juice?
Pasta	or	Pizza?
McDonalds	or	Burger King?
Cone	or	Sundae?
Night Owl	or	Morning Person?

Books	or	Movies?
Music	or	Podcasts?
Cooking	or	Takeout?
Plan Ahead	or	Go with the Flow?
Silence	or	Conversation?
Creative task	or	Practical Task?
Listening	or	Talking?
Small Gatherings	or	Big Party?
Routine	or	Spontaneity?

THUMBS UP, THUMBS DOWN

P—Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To offer a quick, low-pressure way for group members to share a “snapshot” of their experience since the last meeting, acknowledging the changing emotional landscape of grief. It promotes honest sharing, builds empathy, and reinforces that all feelings are valid on the grief journey. It provides a way to check in with all group members, even those that tend to be quiet.

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- None

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Start by inviting everyone to share how they have been feeling since they last met, using these gestures:
 - THUMBS UP: Feeling good, hopeful, positive moment, coping well.
 - THUMBS DOWN: Struggling, difficult moment, negative experience, feeling overwhelmed.
 - THUMBS SIDEWAYS/FLAT HAND: Neutral, OK, holding steady, a mix, “just existing.”
 - WIGGLING FINGERS (*or both hands, palms facing up*): Feeling conflicted, up and down, unpredictable, mixed emotions.
- Invite someone to go first if they like and remind everyone that they can pass if they like.
- **Important Note:** The goal is not to make sure each group member has something positive. If they share a THUMBS DOWN, accept that and thank them for sharing. Use simple validating phrases like “*Thanks for sharing that,*” or “*It sounds like it was a tough week, it makes sense that you would feel that way.*” Do not offer advice or try to cheer them up—acknowledge and validate.

Activity Description:

- Each group member can rate their week with options above and ensure everyone has the opportunity to share if they like.
- The **I PASS RULE** applies.

- Pre-framing can help eliminate concerns with someone who is long-winded:
 - *“Share a brief sentence or two about why you chose your answer.”*
 - If you need to have them wrap up:
 - *“Thank you so much for sharing that deeply, [Participant’s Name]. I really hear you. Let’s do this—let’s continue our check in. I’d like to give everyone a chance to weigh in with the group on how they are doing before we get more deeply into our discussion topic or activity.”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Thank the group for their participation and check-ins.
- Point out any commonalities if they occur.

Notes:

- This can be used as a meeting opening ritual or closing ritual for each group night.
- This group activity can be done with adults. It can work with quiet adult groups to get the conversation going.

For Ongoing Groups:

- No modifications are needed as the answers will change week to week. This activity is suitable for any group and provides a valuable way for a quick assessment of members, serving as an effective check-in point between meetings.

TOUGH FEELING & REGRET CREATURES

M—T

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen

Purpose: To provide a safe and tangible outlet for expressing and exploring challenging emotions (such as guilt, regret, anger, confusion, anxiety, fear) and difficult experiences related to their grief journey. The act of externalizing these feelings through creative sculpting can foster self-awareness, validate complex emotions, and empower participants to discover personalized strategies for acknowledging or responding to them.

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Making meaning of the loss
- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Model Magic
- Rolling pin
- Tools for sculpting—plastic knives, small shape cutters (*optional*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Lead discussion on TOUGH FEELINGS (fear, anxiety, and guilt) and regrets that they may have since their family members have died.
 - *“We know that grief isn’t just about sadness or missing someone. It can bring up a full range of intense, sometimes uncomfortable emotions like anger, guilt, confusion, fear, or even regrets about things that were said or left unsaid. Sometimes, these feelings can feel really big and overwhelming, and it’s hard to find words for them.”*
- Introduce the activity and explain what they will be doing.
 - *“Today, we’ll be using Model Magic—you can shape it, mold it, express with it, and it can be changed over and over again. Just like feelings, it can be solid and strong, or soft and changeable.”*
 - *“Let’s take a few quiet moments to think about a TOUGH FEELING or a difficult memory or regret that you might be holding onto related to your grief. It could be anger, confusion about why something happened, guilt over something you said or didn’t say, fear about the future, or anything else that feels heavy.”*
 - *“There’s no need to share what you’re thinking aloud. Just bring it to mind. As you think about that feeling or experience, what form might it*

take? What does it look like? It doesn't have to be a literal CREATURE. It could be:"

- *"A small, thorny ball if it feels prickly."*
 - *"A heavy, grey blob if it feels burdensome."*
 - *"A snarling monster if it feels mean and menacing."*
 - *"A knot if it feels twisted up inside."*
 - *"A fragile, broken piece if it feels delicate or shattered."*
 - *"You could even simply roll out the clay and carve a word or symbol into it."*
 - *"Or maybe it's just a shape that feels like that emotion to you, even if you can't describe it."*
- *"The key is to give your feeling or experience a physical form, whatever that means to you."*

Activity Description:

- Make Model Magic of different colors available, as well as sculpting tools and guide them to create something that represents their feelings.
- Once the representations are completed, give the children the options of what they might want to do with it:
 - **Acknowledgment/Containment:** *"You might choose to place your SCULPTURE inside one of these small boxes or bags. This can symbolize putting it away safely for a while, acknowledging its presence but deciding it doesn't need to be front-and-center right now."*
 - **Transformation/Reshaping:** *"You could take your SCULPTURE, carefully un-make it, and then reshape the clay into something new—something that represents hope, strength, or what you want to feel. This shows how feelings can transform, and how you have the power to create change."*
 - **Temporary Release/Change:** *"You could use your hands or a rolling pin to change or disrupt its shape. This isn't about destroying the feeling entirely, but symbolizing that you can act upon it, interrupt its power over you for a moment, or acknowledge its shift."*
 - **Naming/Reflecting:** *"You could write a word or two on a small notecard describing what it is and keep the SCULPTURE as a visual reminder that you've acknowledged that feeling and chosen to engage with it."*
 - **Acceptance/Holding:** *"You might simply hold your creation in your hand, acknowledging its presence without needing to change it"*

immediately, recognizing that difficult feelings are part of your human experience.”

- Emphasize choice and autonomy—there is no right or wrong way.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Use this activity to facilitate a discussion of both the feelings that the children have and ways that they have found to deal with the TOUGH FEELINGS. Ask if anyone would like to share:
 - *“Did making your Creation help you understand the feeling a little better?”*
 - *“What did you choose to do with your Creation (Reshape it, Put it away, Gently press it)? How did that feel for you?”*
 - *“Was there anything surprising about this activity or the feeling that emerged?”*
- Connect to real life and discussion of coping skills.
 - *“This activity was a symbolic way to interact with our DIFFICULT FEELINGS. In our daily lives, when TOUGH FEELINGS like guilt, anger, fear, confusion, or overwhelming regrets surface, what are some of the ways you have found to deal with them?”*
 - *“What do you do when you experience a TOUGH FEELING? How do you manage nightmares, unpleasant memories, or challenging thoughts?”*
(Prompt ideas: Talking to Someone—Writing in a Journal—Listening to Music—Exercise—Drawing—Taking Deep Breaths—Distracting with a Movie—Setting a Boundary—Going for a Walk—Spending Time with a Pet.)
- Thank the group for sharing their feelings and creations.

Notes:

- This can be an emotional activity. Do not rush when they’re sharing feelings. Be comfortable sitting with silence. The silence may allow group members more time to reflect and sit with feelings.
- Avoid interpreting what someone’s CREATURE or BLOB means. Ask them, *“What does it mean to you?”*

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity can be used in Ongoing Groups as feelings change over time. If they made one in the past, you can ask:
 - Do they still have the CREATURE they made before? If so, they can bring it in. If not, do they remember what they made?
 - How is what they made this time different or the same?

TOWER OF TOGETHERNESS (*SPAGHETTI & MARSHMALLOWS*)

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To foster teamwork, communication, and creative problem-solving skills in a low-stakes, fun environment; encourage group cohesion and trust among peers. To create a shared positive experience that builds camaraderie within the grief peer support group.

Task/Need Addressed:

- Group building

Materials:

- **One Box of DRY SPAGHETTI** (uncooked, regular size, approximately 1 lb)—*Important: Do not use thin or angel hair SPAGHETTI, as it's too fragile; standard SPAGHETTI is ideal*
- **One Bag of MINI MARSHMALLOWS** (enough to provide approximately 50–75 MARSHMALLOWS per team, ensures plenty for construction)—Stale MARSHMALLOWS work even better as they're stickier!
- A flat, stable work surface for each team (*a tabletop*)
- A tape measure or ruler (*to measure tower height at the end*)
- Wet wipes or hand sanitizer (*optional, for cleanup*)
- Best for groups of 4–6 individuals per sub-group for optimal interaction

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome back and introduce the activity.
 - *“We’re going to try something a little different today that involves some teamwork and creativity. Take a look at your tables—you’ll see some dry SPAGHETTI and MARSHMALLOWS. These are going to be your building blocks for today’s challenge.”*
 - *“Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to work together as a team to build the tallest FREESTANDING STRUCTURE possible using only the SPAGHETTI and MARSHMALLOWS provided. It needs to stand on its own without you holding it, and it has to last for at least 10 seconds when we measure it.”*
- Emphasize process over product: the goal isn’t just about building the tallest TOWER; it’s about *how you work together* to get there.
- Give timeframe for how long they can work on it and encourage different ideas!

Activity Description:

- Divide the larger group into smaller teams (ideally 4–6 participants per team). Volunteers can assist with this.
- Once teams are formed, have each team designate a workspace and ensure they have their pile of SPAGHETTI and MARSHMALLOWS.
- Watch how the team members interact. Who takes the lead? Who is quiet? Is everyone's voice heard? How do they handle disagreements or challenges (SPAGHETTI breaking, STRUCTURE collapsing)?
- Encourage communication: If a team seems stuck or frustrated, you can offer gentle prompts like, *"What's your plan for the base?"*—*"Have you shared all your ideas with each other?"*—*"How are you deciding what to try next?"* (without offering solutions).
- Encourage problem solving without solving it for them. If a STRUCTURE collapses, acknowledge it: *"Oh, that's tricky. What did you learn from that, and what might you try differently now?"*
- Give a 5-minute warning and countdown—when the time is up, instruct all hands off the structures!
- Gently, as a facilitator, measure the height of each FREESTANDING TOWER that remains standing for at least 10 seconds. Applaud all efforts, regardless of height.
- Invite each team to briefly show off their creation. They don't need to explain much at this point, just to display their TOWER proudly.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Process with them how the challenge went.
 - *"What was your team's favorite part of building your TOWER?"*
 - *"What was the most challenging part?"*
 - *"How did you feel when parts of your TOWER broke or fell?"*
 - *"What did your team do when you faced difficulty?"*
- Guide reflection with the group (as appropriate for age group):
 - *"SPAGHETTI can be pretty fragile on its own, but what happened when you put it together with MARSHMALLOWS? What made your STRUCTURES stronger? ('Working together'—'Using a wide base'—'Listening to ideas'—'Adding more supports' etc.)."*
 - **Parallel to grief:** We feel fragile alone but find strength and stability in connections and support.

- *“Did anyone’s TOWER fall down, or did some pieces break? How did that feel? What did you do after that happened? (‘We didn’t give up’—‘We tried a new idea’—‘We helped each other rebuild’ etc.).”*
 - **Parallel to grief:** There will be setbacks or challenging days, but we learn to rebuild and find new ways forward with support.
- *“Did different people in your group have different ideas about how to build? How did you put those ideas together? What happens when everyone tries to do it alone, versus when everyone helps?”*
 - **Parallel to grief:** Everyone grieves differently and supporting each other means valuing different perspectives and working together.
- *“Did anyone feel stuck or like they needed help at some point? Was it easy or hard to ask for help, or for someone to offer it?”*
 - **Parallel to grief:** It’s OK to ask for help, and it’s important to offer it to others.
- Make the connection to support from each other.
 - *“Just like these TOWERS, when we’re going through tough times, especially with grief, we can feel really fragile. But look at how strong you all made these TOWERS when you worked together and supported each other! Our group here is like that. Each of you is like a piece of SPAGHETTI, and our connections and sharing are like the MARSHMALLOWS holding us all together.”*
- *“This group is a safe place where we can try out new ideas, help each other when things get tough, and build a strong network of support, even when we feel a little wobbly.”*
- Thank the group for their hard work and sharing their ideas and thoughts on the process.

Notes:

- Children (and teens) may need time to process before responding. Don’t rush their answers, especially in the processing.
- Gently draw the parallels between the building activity and the themes of grief, support, and connection. This makes the fun activity meaningful (*see notes in the activity for guidance*).
- Model excitement for the challenge and genuine interest in their creative process.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This is appropriate for Introductory or Ongoing Groups, and their group makeup may be different, so additional adaptation is not needed; however, you could vary it slightly to have them make a BRIDGE versus a TOWER, with a small toy car on the BRIDGE.
- The challenge is the longest BRIDGE to span the gap between two platforms, and it has to support the weight of a small toy car.
- Below are some processing ideas if using the BRIDGE idea:
 - *“Our BRIDGES had to connect two separate platforms. What does ‘Connection’ mean to you in our group? How do we build Connections with each other, especially when we’re each on our own ‘Platform’ of grief?”*
 - **Parallel to grief:** Finding ways to connect with others who understand, even when feeling isolated.
 - *“Sometimes people in grief feel like they’re trying to walk across a fragile BRIDGE all alone. What kind of support could make that journey easier or make their ‘BRIDGE’ stronger?”*
 - **Parallel to grief:** Being there for others, offering a listening ear, understanding what someone else might be going through.
 - *“When parts of your BRIDGE collapsed, what was that like? What did your team do? Does this remind you of moments in grief when things felt like they fell apart, and how you tried to pick up the pieces?”*
 - **Parallel to grief:** Processing setbacks, learning from difficult experiences, and finding resilience to rebuild.
 - **Future Challenges:** *“Knowing what you learned today, what’s one piece of advice you’d give to someone facing a new challenge or trying to connect two difficult parts of their life?”*

TRADING CARD ACTIVITY

Y—M—T

Suggested Groups: Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To provide a low-pressure, creative way for group members to introduce aspects of themselves, fostering a sense of connection through discovering shared interests, values, and experiences. It highlights the unique qualities each person brings to the group while building appreciation for individual identities within a supportive community.

Task/Need:

- Group building

Materials:

- Sturdy Paper/Cardstock: Pre-cut into TRADING CARD sizes (2.5 x 3.5 inches or slightly larger), in a variety of colors—ensure enough for 7–10 cards per participant, plus extras
- Markers, Colored Pencils, Crayons
- Pens/Pencils
- Magazines, old books, newspapers for collaging; kid-friendly scissors; glue sticks; stickers, plain or symbolic (*optional*)
- Small Envelopes or Bags (*one per participant, to safely store their cards*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Explain that the group will be making TRADING CARDS to learn more about each other and determine if they have things in common with other members of the group.
 - *“This activity is a fun and creative way to help us introduce different aspects of ourselves—both big and small—and to help us discover connections with others in the group. We’ll be creating unique CARDS that tell a bit about who we are, and then sharing them to see what interests, thoughts, or experiences we might have in common.”*
 - *“You’ll each receive a set of BLANK CARDS. We’ll be filling these CARDS with different parts of our identity, things that make us, us.”*

Activity Description:

- Give each child 7–10 construction CARDS and have them put their name or what they would like to be called in the corner.
- Give them ideas of what to put on the CARDS with these Guiding Prompts:
 - *“Think about different aspects of yourself. What makes you, you? You can use words, drawings, colors, or images from magazines.”*

- **Preferences/Likes:** Favorite food, color, type of music, animal, season, movie/show, book genre, sport (*the lighter elements*).
- **Skills/Talents:** Something you're good at, a hobby, something you enjoy creating.
- **Values/Qualities:** A trait you admire, a value that's important to you (Kindness—Honesty—Creativity—Humor, etc.); a feeling you appreciate.
- **Dreams/Hopes:** Something you'd like to try, a place you'd like to visit, a simple dream.
- **Coping Tools:** Something that helps you feel calm, something that helps you express feelings (Writing—Walking—Listening to Music, etc.).
- **Things that bring Comfort/Joy:** A smell, a sound, a particular activity.
- **Words** that describe you
- After their CARDS are created, explain the next part is to help connect with each other and discover more about each other.
 - *“Each person will lay out their CARDS so others can see them. Then, we’re not TRADING in the sense of keeping someone else’s CARD. Instead, we’ll look at each other’s CARDS and identify any cards that resonate with us, or remind us of ourselves, or spark an interest. It’s like finding a connection.”*
 - *“Let’s first take turns sharing with just the person next to us (or in a small group of three). Share a little about your CARDS. You can say ‘I notice your CARD about X, and I really like that too’ or ‘Your card about Y makes me curious, can you say more?’ ”*
- After small group sharing, or if the group is small enough for everyone to see, invite general observations. *“Now, as you look at everyone’s CARDS on the table, what connections do you see? What CARD, even if it’s someone else’s, feels like it could be ‘your’ CARD too? You can gently point to a CARD or say, ‘I saw [Name’s] card about [item], and I connect with that too because [brief reason].’ ”* Next, each group member will take the CARDS they like from the other person (as many as they want).

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow time for reflecting on the activity and connections made.
 - Talk about what CARDS were TRADED the most and which ones made that person unique.
 - *“What was it like to see what others chose to put on their CARDS?”*

- *“Did you discover any unexpected commonalities or ‘me too’ moments with other group members? How did that feel?”*
- *“Were there any CARDS that particularly resonated with you, even if they weren’t exactly the same as yours?”*
- *“Just as we found things in common, we also saw CARDS that were completely unique, truly reflecting a special part of that person. How did it feel to create those CARDS that were uniquely yours?”*
- Ask what they learned about other group members and if there are any other closing thoughts.
- Allow them to put their CARDS in an envelope or bag to take with them.
- Thank the group for sharing.

Notes:

- Ensure enough time for both creation and connection. The “discovery” phase is crucial.
- Activity can be repeated more than once if they like it since they can put different things on their CARDS or create more CARDS.

For Ongoing Group:

- Assess whether group members have done this before in a previous group. If so, ask if they remember what they put on their CARDS or if they still have them. Allow them to create new CARDS.
 - How are the CARDS they made this time the same or different from last time they did this?
 - Did they create new CARDS this time or find different things in common this time that they didn’t in the last group?

TREE OF GROWTH

P—Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle, Teens, Adults

Purpose: To provide a creative outlet for exploring personal growth and resilience; reflect on sources of strength, support, and future aspirations. To facilitate discussion and connection within families or groups.

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- One canvas per group member
- Colored pencils, markers, and an assortment of paints and brushes
- Textural embellishments: tissue paper, pipe cleaners, feathers, cardstock
- Glue/glue sticks

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Cover tables with protective coverings.
- Set up individual workspaces with materials, ensuring ease of access.
- Introduce the activity:
 - *“Welcome, everyone. Today we’ll be working on an activity that will give you a creative way to show your story. You each will be making a TREE, like the TREE we have in the Community Room. A TREE is a powerful symbol—it stands firm through storms, it grows year after year, sometimes it loses leaves, sometimes it blossoms. Our own lives and journeys through grief can be a lot like that. They involve changes, roots that hold us, branches that reach out, and continuous growth.”*
- Share some guiding questions to consider:
 - *“As you create your TREE, you might think about some questions. You don’t have to answer them aloud or even completely. Let them simply spark your thoughts and guide your creative process.”*
- **Questions for Adults/Teens** (can be displayed on a whiteboard or printed for reference):
 - **Roots:** *“What are your deepest foundations? What anchors you—your family, friends, beliefs, memories, life lessons learned (from any experience)?”*

- **Trunk:** *“What are your core strengths and resilient qualities that help you stand strong through life’s changes?”*
- **Branches:** *“Who or what supports you in your life now? Where do you reach out for connection, comfort, or new experiences?”*
- **Leaves/Fruits/Flowers:** *“What aspirations do you hold for your life moving forward? What feelings or aspects of yourself are growing, blooming, or providing nourishment?”*
- **Environment:** *“What season does your TREE reflect today—spring (new beginnings)—Summer (warmth, growth)—Autumn (letting go, reflection)—Winter (rest, quiet)? How does this relate to your current ‘Season’ of Life?”*
- **Questions for Younger Children (Adaptations - focus on concrete aspects):**
 - **Roots:** *“What helps your TREE grow big and strong?”* (Your Grown-Ups—Friends—Healthy Food—Playing Outside)
 - **Trunk:** *“Who makes you feel safe and loved?”*
 - **Branches:** *“What fun things do you like to do that make you happy? Things you love or bring you comfort?”*
 - **Animals:** *“What kind of animals or happy things live in your TREE? Do those animals remind you of someone special or have qualities you have?”* (Maybe a Bright Bird if they like colors—A Monkey if they have lots of energy, etc.)
 - **Colors:** *“What color leaves does your TREE have? Maybe it’s your favorite color or your person’s favorite color?”*

Activity Description:

- Group members take a few minutes to reflect on the guiding questions. Encourage them to think about their personal experiences, sources of support, and aspirations for the future.
- Using the materials provided, group members create their own TREE OF GROWTH on the canvas. Encourage creativity and self-expression. They can use paint, tissue paper, and other embellishments to represent the different aspects of their tree (roots, trunk, branches, leaves, etc.).
- Play calming background music if it suits the group.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow time for optional sharing.
 - *“If you’d like, you’re invited to share something about your TREE. You can point to a part that feels especially meaningful, share a color choice, or simply tell us what the process was like.”*
- Facilitate a discussion about the common themes and insights that emerged during the activity. Adjust language based on age group, but guide with general ideas:
 - *“As we look at our diverse TREES, what do you notice? How unique each one is, yet how they all reflect some aspect of growing and living. What common themes emerged, or what surprised you?”*
 - *“Notice that some TREES might be blooming, while others might be standing bare and strong in winter, or reaching towards new sunlight. This reminds us that our own growth after loss is rarely a straight line—it has seasons and changes, and every stage is a part of the journey.”*
- Thank the group for sharing.
 - *“Thank you for sharing your time and creativity today. You can take it home as a visual reminder of your strength, your supports, and your ongoing journey. It can be a little snapshot of who you are right now, and who you are continuing to become.”*

Notes:

- For Older Groups:
 - Invite group members to write positive affirmations or goals for their future growth on small pieces of paper and attach them to their TREES. If they like, they can write positive affirmations for other group members.
 - **Gallery Walk:** Display the completed TREES and allow group members to view and appreciate each other’s creations.
- For use as a **Closing Activity**:
 - If using as a group closing, consider using markers or colored pencils; but not paint (*as it will not have time to dry*)—or have them work on this prior to the last night, and on final night do a Gallery Walk.
 - Consider having them write positive affirmations or messages to other group members for them to include on their TREE.
 - For a younger group, you can see if they would each like to add a fingerprint (with an ink pad) as a leaf on each other’s TREES.

- Adapted Guiding Prompts to use this as a **Closing Activity**:
 - **Roots:** *“What’s keeping you grounded right now?” (This Group—A Pet—A Routine—A New Insight—A Tough Lesson you’re still processing but building strength from)*
 - **Trunk:** *“What strengths have you relied on or discovered in yourself lately? Have you gained strength from anyone in this group, or the group in general?”*
 - **Leaves/Colors:** *“What feelings are most present for you in this moment or this past week? You can use colors, or quick symbols to add to the leaves. If you like, you can ask group members to add their first names to a leaf—although we’re ‘leaving’ the group, they can still be a part of your story if you like.”*
 - **Branches:** *“Who or what are you reaching out to for support, or who/what is supporting you, as you continue your journey? What brings you comfort?”*
 - **Overall ‘Season’:** *“What ‘Season’ feels most accurate for your grief journey right now?”*
 - During activity processing, allow time for reflection on the group ending, and their TREE reflecting where they are in their grief journey.

For Ongoing Groups:

- If using in an Ongoing Group, you can ask if anyone has done this activity before. If so, ask them if they still have their TREE OF GROWTH and if so, how is the TREE they created this time different or the same?

WEAVING RIBBONS

P—Y—M—T—A

Suggested Groups: Preschool, Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To support group members in building, expressing, and sharing memories of their person who died and their grief journey with the active encouragement of the group. This activity also serves as a meaningful group closure experience.

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- Several colors of Satin RIBBON cut in 55” or 67” lengths
- Sharpie Markers/Opaque Paint markers (*about 6–10 per group*)
- Tables covered
- Lattice or lattice board (*for weaving the RIBBONS into a display*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Prior to group, cut enough RIBBONS for each participant to have one or two each. Have a few extra RIBBONS cut and ready.
- Cover tables to protect them from marker stains and set up the WEAVING structure.
- Introduce the activity, briefly explaining that the purpose is for personal reflection and sharing within the group.
 - *“Today we’re going to create something special together using these RIBBONS. This activity is a chance to think about your person who died, share a memory or a message, and contribute to a shared artwork that represents our time together.”*
- Explain the RIBBON MESSAGES: Instruct that they can write or draw on their RIBBON. Invite them to take a moment to consider what message or memory feels most important, and give suggestions:
 - A memory of the person who died.
 - A message to the person who died.
 - Words of thanks or goodbye to the person who died, or even to the group or the Caring Place.

- Something they learned, or a favorite moment during their time at the Caring Place/in this group.
- Something they will always remember about this experience.

Activity Description:

- Each group member can select 1–2 RIBBONS and use the markers to write or draw what they like on their RIBBON.
- **Optional Two RIBBONS:** If appropriate for the group, consider offering each participant two RIBBONS. One can be woven into the communal structure, and the other can be kept as a personal memento.
 - Offer this choice clearly: *“You can create two RIBBONS if you like—one to weave into our group project, and one to take home with you. If you want to take both home with you, that’s OK too.”*
- As participants finish writing, guide them to bring their RIBBONS to the communal weaving structure (*lattice, foam board*).

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Once most RIBBONS are complete, invite everyone to gather around the weaving structure.
- Facilitate sharing (*optional*): Invite participants who wish to share their RIBBONS and what they’ve expressed on them. Reiterate the **I PASS OPTION**.
- After everyone who wished to share has done so, engage the group in a brief discussion:
 - *“What was it like to participate in this activity?”*
 - *“What does this woven Artwork represent to you?”*
 - *“As we see all these RIBBONS woven together, what commonalities do you notice? What bonds do you see connecting us and our memories of our people who died?”*
 - *“Notice the different colors, the different thoughts, stories, and emotions represented here. Each one is unique, but together, they create something beautiful and strong. Almost like a rainbow of support and caring. You all have helped each other weather the storm. Thank you for being a part of this group.”*
- Allow time for any closing thoughts or feelings and let the group decide what they would like to do—keep the artwork together or each take home their RIBBONS.

Notes:

- Secure the RIBBON to the table in several places to prevent slipping during writing or drawing.
- Colors of RIBBONS determine the markers to be used. Light-colored ribbons work well with Sharpie pens (except for yellow). Dark-colored ribbons work best when using opaque paint pens.
- For permanent structures, like the one in Pittsburgh, ensure the ribbon is well-secured. For lattice boards that are temporary, talk with staff about where it can be stored and for what length of time.
- For younger children, supervise the use of the paint pens and permanent markers.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity can be used for an Ongoing Session as group members change.
- Acknowledge during the weaving that some of them may have done this activity before.
- Ask if it feels different doing the activity this time than previously.

WHAT DOES YOUR GRIEF LOOK LIKE?

M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To provide a creative and non-verbal outlet for group members to explore and express their individual feelings and experiences related to their grief.

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Helping them understand who they are after their loss
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- One large sheet of paper (*butcher paper, poster board*) large enough to cover most of the table space, with a Circle drawn on it and divided into equal sections, ensuring each group member has their own designated area
- Markers, pens & pencils
- Variety of textures/3D materials—yarn, string, fabric scraps, cotton balls, feathers, pom poms, pipe cleaners
- Glue sticks or white glue
- Scissors

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Pre-draw the large Circle on the paper and divide it into sections (one per anticipated group member). In the center of the Circle, write “WHAT DOES YOUR GRIEF LOOK LIKE?” This saves time and ensures uniformity.
- Welcome group back and explain that today your activity is going to focus on how GRIEF is unique for each person.
 - *“Today, we’re going to explore something that is truly unique to each of us: our GRIEF. Even if others have experienced a similar loss, your journey, your feelings, your GRIEF is entirely your own.”*
- Hold up the prepared paper and gesture to the central question. *“We often talk about GRIEF in words, but sometimes feelings are too big or too complex for just words. Today we’re going to try to let our feelings ‘speak’ through images, colors, textures, and shapes. We’re going to explore the question: WHAT DOES YOUR GRIEF LOOK LIKE?”*
- Explain that there are lots of materials to use—they can use any and all and design what their GRIEF looks like in their designated space on the paper.

Activity Description:

- Prompting Creative Thinking (*offer suggestions*)
 - *“If you were to describe your GRIEF to someone who couldn’t use words, what would it look like? What shapes come to mind? What colors feel like your GRIEF?”*
 - *“Does your GRIEF have a texture—is it smooth, rough, sharp, soft? Does it feel heavy or light?”*
 - *“Can you represent how things felt before your person died, and how they feel after they died, in your section? Is there a word, a statement, or even just a feeling that captures it?”*
 - *“There’s no pressure to draw perfectly, or even to ‘draw’ at all if you prefer to use words, patterns, or just colors. Use your section on this paper to express what comes to mind when you think about your GRIEF. It can be how it feels right now, how it’s felt over time, or anything at all that comes to you.”*
- If someone seems stuck, you can gently repeat some of the earlier prompts without pressure: *“Remember, there’s no right or wrong way. What colors are speaking to you today?”* or *“If your GRIEF had a shape, what would it be?”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- When it seems like most are getting close to done—let them know in a few minutes you will be transitioning to sharing what was made.
 - *“All right everyone, it looks like most of us are wrapping up. Before we finish, I invite you to step back for a moment and look at all our creations together on this paper.”*
 - *“Take a look around. You can see how incredibly diverse and personal everyone’s GRIEF LOOKS are. There are no two sections exactly alike, and that’s OK, because your GRIEF JOURNEY is your own.”*
- Facilitate sharing if the group is comfortable doing so.
 - *“We have a chance now to share a little bit about what you created, if you’d like. There’s no pressure to share, but if you feel comfortable, we’d love to hear a little about your picture and what it represents to you. You can share as much or as little as you like. Would anyone like to go first?”*
 - After one person shares, gently ask the group, *“Does anyone else have thoughts on what [person] shared?”* or *“Did anyone else use a similar color/texture/idea in their own picture?”* This helps build connections.

- Highlight common themes and uniqueness.
 - Once sharing has occurred (or even if it hasn't, just by observation), point out observations without interpretation: *"I'm noticing a lot of different colors in here today—some really bright ones, some darker ones. It really shows how many different feelings GRIEF can hold."* Or, *"I see some people used words, others used symbols, which reminds us that we all process in different ways."*
 - *"Even though our drawings look different, can anyone see anything in another person's section that feels familiar to their own experience?"* This further encourages group connection.
- Let the group know that you will hang it up for a reminder of what was shared and created today and thank them for their creativity and openness.

Notes:

- Be careful not to interpret what they make and allow them to tell their story. Ask open-ended questions and allow them to share as much or as little as they like to explain what they are creating.
- This activity can also be adapted to an individual format by using individual pieces of paper, which group members can then choose to take home or leave for display. Providing each person with their own space to create allows for more personal reflection and a tangible item to keep.

For Ongoing Groups:

- If a number of group members have done WHAT DOES YOUR GRIEF LOOK LIKE? before, consider using a variation as noted below.
 - Re-frame the activity as: WHAT DOES YOUR GRIEF LOOK LIKE NOW? or HOW HAS YOUR GRIEF CHANGED? Provide each member with an individual sheet of paper (or if using the communal circle, divide it into "Now" sections).
 - Invite them to reflect on their previous drawing (if they remember or if it was displayed):
 - *"Has its color changed? Is it the same shape, or has it shifted?"*
 - *"Does it feel lighter or heavier? More jagged or smoother?"*
 - *"How does this current representation compare to how your GRIEF felt when you first drew it?"*

WHO HELPS YOU CATERPILLAR

P—Y

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young

Purpose: To help young group members visually identify, acknowledge, and internalize who is in their personal support system, empowering them to remember who they can turn to during difficult moments

Task/Need:

- Developing coping skills and supports

Materials:

- Book: *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle
- Round circles cut from various colors of construction paper (enough for 5–8 circles per child, plus extras)
- One long strip of paper or a pre-drawn “Leaf” shape for each child to glue their CATERPILLAR onto
- Child-friendly glue sticks (*or white glue with sponges/small brushes for easier application*)
- Washable markers, crayons, and colored pencils
- Stickers, glitter glue, googly eyes, yarn bits for antennae (*optional*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Create an example ahead of time—the visual aid is helpful for them to understand the activity. Be sure to include general examples like family members, pets, teachers, coaches, friends, etc.
- Let the group know that you’re going to start with a story and then do an activity together.
 - *“Hello everyone! Before we start our activity today, I have a very special book to share with you, all about a little CATERPILLAR who got very, very hungry, and eventually became a beautiful BUTTERFLY!”*
- Read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Engage with the children during the story, asking questions like “What do you think will happen next?” or “What else did he eat?”
- Transition from the book into the activity.
 - *“Wow, that was quite a journey for our little hungry CATERPILLAR! He ate so much to grow big and strong, and eventually, he changed into something beautiful. The hungry CATERPILLAR ate food to grow, but we have special people who help us grow strong and happy inside, especially when we feel big sad, or mad feelings because someone we love died.”*

- Explain to group members that everyone needs support to get through hard times.
 - *“Everyone, even grown-ups, need special people who help us when we have those big feelings. These are people who listen to us, give us hugs, make us laugh, or just help us feel safe and loved. They’re like our special ‘Helper Food’ that makes us feel better.”*
- Introduce the activity and materials to explain the HELPER CATERPILLARS they can make.
 - *“Today we’re going to make our very own HELPER CATERPILLARS! Just like the HUNGRY CATERPILLAR ate delicious food to grow, each circle on our CATERPILLAR will be someone who helps us feel strong and OK when we have those big feelings. These are people we can turn to when we need comfort or someone to talk to.”*
 - Show the example and explain that this person had support from (whoever was put on the example).
 - *“A HELPER is someone who loves you, takes care of you, listens to you, and makes you feel safe. It could be someone in your family, a teacher, a babysitter, a special friend, or maybe even a beloved pet. It’s anyone who helps you feel good.”*

Activity Description:

- Let the group member pick whatever circles they like and let them know that on each circle they can put a helper person.
- For non-writers/reluctant children: *“If you can’t write yet, or if it’s tricky, you can tell me the person’s name, and I can write it for you! Or, if you want, you can draw a picture of your HELPER on the circle. Whatever feels best!”*
- As children work, circulate and offer gentle prompts:
 - *“Who makes you feel safe?”*
 - *“Who supports you when you’re sad?”*
 - *“Is there someone at school you can talk to, like a special teacher or friend?”*
 - *“What about a family member who listens to you?”*
 - *“Is there anyone here that you think you would want to add to your caterpillar—maybe a friend you have made at the Caring Place?”*
 - *“Sometimes even a special toy or a pet can feel like a helper who listens, how about that?”* (Ensure these are acknowledged as important HELPERS if they come up).

- Help them put their CATERPILLAR together with glue.
 - *“Once you have some HELPERS on your circles, you can glue them together, connecting each HELPER just like the HUNGRY CATERPILLAR connected all his meals, to make a long, wiggly HELPER CATERPILLAR on your paper!”*
- Let them know that they can draw a face or use the supplies like stickers, googly eyes, or other additions to decorate them.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Invite the group members to share their CATERPILLAR.
 - *“These are so wonderful! Would anyone like to show us their CATERPILLAR and tell us about one or two of their HELPERS? You don’t have to tell us all of them, just one or two special people who help you feel supported.”*
 - *“What’s one thing your HELPER does that makes you feel better?”*
- Encourage children to take their CATERPILLAR home to remind them of the supports they have in their lives.
- Thank the group for participating and making their CATERPILLARS.

Notes:

- This can be done without the book if needed—just introduce the idea of HELPERS and make the CATERPILLARS without using the book.
- In colder months, groups can make WHO HELPS YOU SNOWMEN instead of CATERPILLARS.

For Ongoing Groups:

- If your group has done WHO HELPS YOU CATERPILLAR in an Introductory group, this activity can be a way to revisit the concept of support systems and acknowledge growth, change, and the addition of new helpers. Use these updated questions while working on the CATERPILLARS:
 - *“Last time, we made our HELPER CATERPILLARS to remember who helps us. Today, let’s see how much more our support net has grown, just like the HUNGRY CATERPILLAR getting bigger! Who are new people who have helped you since we last made our CATERPILLARS?”*
 - *“Have you found new ways that old HELPERS have supported you?”*
 - *“What new feelings have you had, and who helped you with those?”*
 - *“Think about your time here in our group—have new friends become HELPERS for you?”*

WISH BOX/BUBBLE

Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To provide a closing ritual for the group and to encourage looking into the future. To give group members time to reflect on their time spent at the Caring Place and empower group members to nurture hope for their continuing journey and reflect on their growth.

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- Small BOX, clear plastic “BUBBLE” or other small container
- Small strips of paper
- Markers (if using BUBBLES—markers for writing on plastic), stickers, etc., to decorate the BOX/BUBBLE
- Pens, pencils, markers

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin by acknowledging that the group is ending and thanking group members for their contribution to the group throughout the entire session.
 - *“Welcome, everyone. Today marks the close of [this Session / the Group’s journey together]. Endings, even when we know they’re coming, can bring up many feelings—maybe some sadness, gratitude, uncertainty, or even a sense of accomplishment. That’s perfectly normal, especially after we’ve shared such important time and emotions with one another. You all have contributed so much to this group, and some really strong connections were made.”*
- Introduce the activity:
 - *“As a way to honor our time together and to help us carry forward what we’ve gained, we’ll be creating a WISH BOX or WISH BUBBLE today. Think of it as a special container to hold positive affirmations, inspiring thoughts, personal insights, and GOOD WISHES—not just for others, but also for yourself and for your journey ahead.”*
 - The strips of paper they’ll be writing on can hold a variety of things:
 - *A genuine wish or affirmation you have for a fellow group member.*
 - *A strength you observed in someone.*

- *An insight you gained during the group.*
- *A hope or intention you have for your own future.*
- *A positive quality you want to carry forward.*
- This ensures everyone can contribute authentically, regardless of the nature of specific past relationships, focusing on future growth and the present group support.
- Let them know that they can decorate their container however they like.

Activity Description:

- Give each group member a small BOX or other container to decorate as they wish.
- Provide the group members with enough strips of paper to write something for each group member. It can be the same for everyone, or unique—let them know that they can choose what they write. If they like, they can draw something instead.
- Encourage them to write or draw a note for themselves as well—what they gained, what they’re proud of, a hope for themselves in the time ahead.
- When they have written or drawn their messages, they can put them in each other’s BOXES. Let them know that they can read them then or later—whatever they would want to do.
- Allow them to write wishes for groups members who are absent as well.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- If anyone would like to share a general message that they hope for the Group, allow time to do so. Let them know that they don’t have to share if they don’t want to.
- Allow time for processing:
 - Ask what they’ll remember most about this Group?
 - How does the Group feel that others made wishes for them?
 - Reflect on the good and sometimes difficult work that has taken place during the Group and the relationships made during the Session.
 - *“As we prepare to leave this Session, what is one feeling, one hope, or one positive intention you’d like to hold onto for your continuing journey?”*
- Thank the group for giving you the privilege of being with them during their grief journey and wish them well in their futures.

- *“Your WISH BOX/BUBBLE now holds tangible reminders of your connections, your hopes, and your personal growth. Take it home and revisit it whenever you need a boost or a reflection of the positive energy from this group.”*

Notes:

- Emotions and feelings may be strong with the group ending—validate emotions shared.
- If there is hesitation about writing messages for everyone, let them know that they can write wishes for themselves or for the group generally. Offer to write the messages for them if they don’t want to write.

For Ongoing Groups:

- No modifications are needed as Group members would be different from an Introductory Group. If some Group members are the same and they have done this activity before, have Group members talk about new wishes they have for one another now.

WISH WANDS

P—Y—M

Suggested Group (s): Preschool, Young, Middle

Purpose: To encourage group members to acknowledge WISHES they hold for current participants, future members, themselves, their deceased loved ones, their families, or others in the world. This fosters connections with their community; it encourages self-reflection and personal growth and creates a sense of hope for the future.

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- Wooden dowels
- Markers
- Ribbon, yarn, or streamers
- Glitters, stickers, craft gems
- Small charms or beads, bells (*optional*)
- Adhesives: craft glue, tape, hot glue

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Validate feelings about group coming to a close.
 - *“As we gather for our last time together, it’s normal to feel a mix of emotions—perhaps a bit sad that our time is ending, grateful for the connections we’ve made, or hopeful about what comes next. All those feelings are valid here.”*
- Ask, *“Do you ever WISH that you had a WAND that would make WISHES come true?”*
 - *“We don’t have MAGIC WANDS that make things poof right now, but we can make SPECIAL WANDS to help us think about our WISHES, and to remind us of the things we hope for—for ourselves, for the people that are important to us and for the world.”*
 - *“Today, we get to make our own SPARKLY WANDS. And then, we can share just a tiny bit about what our WAND makes us think of.”*
- Explore WISHES through questions.
 - *“Can you think of a few things that you would WISH for if you did?”*

- *“Do you ever WISH you had an extra cookie? (Haha!) Or WISHED your favorite teddy bear could talk? Or WISHED it was always playtime?”* (Get some silly answers to lighten mood.)
- *“Sometimes, when we miss someone special who has died, we might WISH we could give them a big hug, or tell them something, or hear them laugh. It’s OK to have WISHES about those special people and memories, too.”*
- If a group member notes that they WISH their person wasn’t dead, acknowledge their feeling. (*“Oh, it’s so normal to WISH for that, because you miss them so much, and that feeling is a very big, important feeling to have.”*) They can have and hold that WISH. You can also ask them if they WISH for anything else for their person too.

Activity Description:

- Let the group members know that they will be building WISH WANDS that will represent the WISHES that they have for the person who died, for themselves, for their group, for the world, or WISHES that their person might have for them.
- Guide them to pick a stick, decorate it, and add ribbons or other embellishments as they like.
- Allow them to decorate their WANDS in any way that they want to and assist them as needed.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow the group members to share their WANDS and WISHES.
- As a group closing activity, allow group members to share WISHES that they have for the rest of the group.
- Let them know that WISHES are a way of acknowledging their hopes and feelings.
- Ask what they like best about their WISH WAND.
- Bring the group to a close and let them know that they can take it home.
 - *“Now, you get to take your special WISH WAND home with you! You can put it somewhere where it reminds you of your happy WISHES, or of the special people in your heart, or of the fun time we had in group!”*

Notes:

- This activity may be appropriate for an older group of Preschool Children. Please check with staff before planning this activity in a Preschool Room.
 - Remember to use more concrete language with Younger Children. Talk about “Happy Feelings”—“Things You Hope For”—“Special Memories”—“What Your Wand Makes You Think Of.”

- An alternative is to use tubes of BUBBLE solution with BUBBLE WANDS attached as a substitute for the wooden dowels. The tubes can be decorated with stickers, gems, ribbons, etc.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This can be used in an Ongoing Group. If Group members have made WISH WANDS before, invite the Group to review their previous WISHES. This prompts reflection on what has changed, what has been achieved, or what they still hold as important.

WOODEN TOWER (“JENGA”) CHANGE GAME

T—A

Suggested Group (s): Teen, Adult

- *Best when used with small groups of six or less. However, there must be at least two people. A volunteer can serve as the second person if there is only one group member.*

Purpose: To give group members a comfortable way to talk about changes in their lives, through play, since losing a family member

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- One *JENGA* or similar WOODEN BLOCK TOWER GAME (*suitable for a group of six*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin a discussion with group members about the changes that occur in a family after a death: household tasks, living arrangements, hobbies, habits, etc.
- Explain that the group is going to play *JENGA* and each block will represent a change that has happened in their lives.
- Ask the group to think about some changes that have happened to them since the death.

Activity Description:

- Group members take turns removing a block and placing it on top of the TOWER.
- With each block moved, the member states one change they’ve experienced since the death of their family member.
- Every group member will get a chance to remove a block.
- Tell group members the objective is to keep the STRUCTURE from collapsing.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- *“How did it feel while removing the blocks during the game?”*
- *“What was it like to share the changes that have happened to you since the death?”*
- *“What changes were easier/harder to talk about?”*

- Ask: *“Can we make the TOWER exactly the way it was before?”* Talk about how the TOWER is like their lives—it’s different now, but it’s still standing. It’s still strong, even if it looks different.
- What does the TOWER represent?
- Talk about how the blocks are being moved rather than taken away.
- Have the group identify the biggest changes in their lives since the death.
- Explore how the STRUCTURE’s stability changes, moving from sturdy to unstable.
 - Compare the change in the stability of the STRUCTURE to the impact of grief.
- Pose the question, *“What if the blocks being removed represented supports instead of changes? What might it mean when support systems are changed or lost after a death?”*

Notes:

- Pause occasionally to observe the TOWER as members remove pieces.
 - Observe how the STRUCTURE changes.
 - Acknowledge when the STRUCTURE is still standing. Discuss with the group whether they believe the STRUCTURE can withstand another block removal without collapsing.
 - Provide support and attentive listening as group members share.
- Variations:
 - Different colored blocks (or stickers) may be used for different topics. Red blocks can represent memories; yellow blocks can represent feelings. Other categories may be changes, or who helps them. When someone picks a color, they answer a question about that topic.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Change and/or move pieces in the *JENGA* STRUCTURE.
- Construct the *JENGA* STRUCTURE with increased height and reduced width to enhance the challenge.
- Allow members to discuss how the current STRUCTURE differs from previous times they played.
- Some sites may have pre-made questions to modify this game (*see next pages*):
 - Questions related to feelings, coping skills, and memories.
- When group members remove a block, they have the option to answer a question related to one of those topics.

Feelings Jenga

RED • Do you ever get mad? What do you do? • Do you ever get sad? What do you do? • What makes you happy? • What makes you sad? • Tell a story of feeling proud.	BLUE • What fears do you have now that the person died? • Do you have any regrets? • What makes you angry about someone dying? • What special days of the year do you look forward to or dread coming? • What have people said that has been hurtful?
YELLOW • What are some ways to express anger? • What are the things you do to feel better? • How are you feeling now? • What has been hard for you since the death? • What have people said that has been helpful?	GREEN • What is the hardest thing about school since your person died? • The feeling I have that gives me the most trouble is... • Since my special person died, I still worry about... • Describe a time you were loved. • How can people tell when you're sad?
PURPLE • What makes you angry the most? • What do you worry about? • Why is sharing feelings so important? • What feelings did you have when told that your family member died? • What things frustrate you?	PINK • Can you name some of the feelings you have the most? • What feelings do you have about your life now that the person you loved died? • What feelings do you have when your special person who died is not with you at special times? • Tell a time that you were happy with your family • Tell of a time you felt lonely

Memory Jenga

RED • Share a memory of the person who died • What would you tell your person who died about your life now? • What song reminds you of the person who died? • What did you like to do with the person who died?	BLUE • Did your person have a “signature saying” • What type of clothes did they like to wear? Do you have any of their clothing? • What was their favorite holiday? How did they celebrate? • What three characteristics of your person did you like the most?
YELLOW • What was one of their favorite foods? • What is something you would like other people to know about them? • What is something you learned from your person? • What is something you would like to tell them?	GREEN • How are you similar to your person? • How are you different than your person? • What is a memory that is hard for you to think about? • Do any memories of your person make you angry? • How do you feel when you think about your memories?
PURPLE • What do you miss most about them? • Do you worry about forgetting your person? • What helps you remember them? • Is there a food or recipe that reminds you of them?	PINK • I don’t ever want to forget..... • If we had one day together, I would like to.... • Do you ever ask your adults about their memories of your person? • Do you agree or disagree that although the person died, the memories will always be with you?

Icebreakers Jenga

RED • What does your perfect day look like? • What holiday or tradition do you enjoy the most? • Do you have a nickname? How did you get it? • Share your favorite movie or show. • If you could travel anywhere, where would it be?	BLUE • What is your favorite kind of Candy? • What is your favorite subject in school? • What is your favorite Ice Cream flavor? • I-Phone or Android? • What was your person that died favorite food? Are your tastes similar?
YELLOW • Share who died in your life. Is there anything about your person that you would like to tell the group? • Who lives in your home with you? • Share the types of pets that you have. • What is your favorite dessert? • If you could invite 3 people to dinner, who would they be?	GREEN • What types of compliments do people give you? • How long ago did your person die? • For what reasons would you block someone on social media? • Share your favorite restaurant or place to eat. • If money wasn't an issue, what would you buy?
PURPLE • What is your dream job? • If you could have any car, what would it be? • What was an interest of your person that died? Do you have similar interests? • Do you play any sports or instruments? • What is your most prized possession?	PINK • What are your goals for the future? • What is your favorite pizza topping? • What activities do you like to do outside of school? • What is your favorite game, sport or activity? • Which phone app do you use the most? If you could only keep 3 apps, what would they be?

Support & Coping Skills Jenga

RED • What supports do you have? • What have people said that has been helpful? • How are things with your friends since your person died?	BLUE • What do you anticipate your grief will be like in a year or two? • What is one way you cope when you want to be alone? • Who are you most comfortable talking to?
YELLOW • Where do you feel safe? • What special days of the year do you look forward to or dread coming? • What is something you are learning now that will help you in the future?	GREEN • What have people said that has been hurtful? • What have you learned through your grief journey so far? • What has surprised you about grief?
PURPLE • How have you changed since the person died? • Who helped you/is helping you most through your grief process? • What is one way you cope when you don't feel like talking?	PINK • What are your goals for the future? • What do you hope for your family? • What do you wish your peers knew about grief? • What do you wish the adults in your life knew about your grief?

WORRY DOLLS

Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To provide a safe and tangible outlet for group members to identify, discuss, and symbolically manage their WORRIES, especially those related to grief. This helps them explore feelings, gain comfort, and develop a strategy for externalizing anxieties.

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Developing coping skills and supports

Materials:

- **WORRY DOLL Base:**
 - Craft clothespins (*wooden clip-style*) for each child *OR*
 - Pre-sewn stuffed DOLLS with opening to put WORRIES, made of plain colored fabric so children can decorate them.
- **Decoration Materials:**
 - Fabric scraps (*various colors, textures, patterns*)
 - Yarn or embroidery floss (*for hair*)
 - Markers, fabric markers (*if applicable*)
 - Glue sticks or tacky craft glue
 - Scissors
 - Small beads, googly eyes, glitter glue, tiny felt pieces
- **For Storing Worries:**
 - Small paper slips (*pre-cut, about 1" x 3"*) for writing worries
 - A small, plain piece of fabric (*like felt or denim, approximately 2" x 2"*) for each DOLL, with one edge unsewn, or a pre-made tiny pouch/pocket to glue onto the back of the DOLL's "Body"
 - Alternatively, you can have the group make a larger pouch out of fabric (small envelope size) that they can store both their WORRY DOLL and WORRIES in.
 - If using pre-made DOLLS, ensure they have a pouch or Velcro opening, or make a small envelope out of fabric as noted above.

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Have one pre-made example WORRY DOLL to show as an example (ensure that one is made or check with staff to see if there is an example already made that can be used); can show picture instead:

TRADITIONAL WORRY DOLLS



WORRY DOLLS MADE OUT OF CLOTHESPINS



- Start the conversation with the group about WORRIES and how the topic has come up in conversations in group.
 - *“Welcome back! Today we’re going to do an activity related to WORRIES. We noticed that WORRIES have been talked about a lot here and that’s common. Would anyone want to share what they WORRY about?”*
 - *“How does that feeling of WORRY feel in your body? (Butterflies in tummy, Tight chest, etc.) Does it make you feel small or big?”*
 - *“What do you usually do with your WORRIES? Do you keep them inside, or do you share them with someone?”*
 - Allow conversation and support to occur around WORRY and what it feels/looks like for them; and make the connection with their grief if it has not already been talked about. *“Since your person died, you might have even more WORRIES. Maybe you WORRY about who will take care of you, or if something bad will happen again, or even things that feel big right now. All worries are OK to have.”*
- Introduce the WORRY DOLL activity—ask if anyone is familiar with the idea and give a little bit of background information.
 - *“Today, we’re going to learn about a special tradition from the country of Guatemala. Has anyone ever heard of WORRY DOLLS?”*
 - *“The idea is that when you have a WORRY, you can tell it to your special DOLL. You can even write it down on a tiny piece of paper and tuck it into the DOLL’s little pocket. Then, you put your DOLL somewhere safe—maybe under your pillow—and the DOLL holds your WORRY for you while you get some rest or do something else.”*

- *“It’s like the DOLL helps take your WORRY for a little while, so your mind can have a break. You can always take your WORRY back if you want or just let the DOLL keep it. It’s a way to give your WORRY a safe place outside of you.”*
- Explain that they will get to make their own WORRY DOLL in group today.
 - *“While we aren’t going to make the traditional Guatemalan WORRY DOLLS today, since those are tiny and often sewn in a special way, you’ll have the opportunity to create your own version of a WORRY DOLL to help us with our WORRIES. Each one of you will get a clothespin, and lots of colorful things to make your DOLL look however you want.”*
 - Hold up your pre-made example WORRY DOLL. *“See, this is my WORRY DOLL. I made mine with some yarn for hair and a little skirt. And here’s the little pocket where I could put my WORRIES.”*
 - Let them know that it may not take away the WORRY or solve it, but it may make the WORRY feel less big and overwhelming.

Activity Description:

- If using ready-made DOLLS, you can skip ahead to making the fabric pouch/envelope or discussion questions.
- Give each child a craft clothespin and invite them to select from the fabric scraps, yarn, markers, etc.
- Allow group members to select their own “hair,” “clothes,” and facial expressions for the DOLL.
- Explain how to make or attach the small pocket to the back of the DOLL’s “Body.” *“This little pouch on the back is where your DOLL will hold your WORRIES.”* For younger children, volunteers may need to help with gluing the pouch or cutting/shaping fabric.
- Alternatively, they can make a small envelope out of fabric to store their WORRY DOLLS and WORRIES in.
 - Take a rectangular fabric scrap, fold up the bottom half and glue inside with fabric glue.
 - At the top of the rectangle, make cuts as shown at right, and leave open—they can tuck the top into the bottom, along with their WORRIES and DOLL.



- Encourage discussion while they craft their WORRY DOLLS:
 - *“What kind of WORRIES do you think your DOLL would be good at holding?”*
 - *“Sometimes we WORRY about school, or friends, or if someone will forget us. What are some things that make you feel WORRIED sometimes?”*
 - *“What color would your WORRY be?”*
 - *“Do you think talking about WORRIES helps at all? What about writing them down?”*
 - Let them know that it is brave to think about and share about their WORRIES.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- After they finish, ask if they would like to share their WORRY DOLLS.
 - *“Who would like to introduce us to their WORRY DOLL? You can show us what your DOLL looks like, tell us its name if it has one, and perhaps what kind of WORRIES you think it might be really good at holding. You don’t have to share your personal WORRIES if you don’t want to.”*
- Remind them that the DOLL can help to hold their WORRY for a bit while they rest or play, and then they can take it back if they like, according to the tradition.
 - *“Remember the special tradition? When you have a WORRY, big or small, you can tell it to your DOLL. If you want, you can even write it on one of these little pieces of paper [hold up paper slips], fold it up, and tuck it safely into your DOLL’S pocket.”*
 - *“Your DOLL will hold that WORRY for you so you can rest, play, or just feel a little lighter for a while. You get to decide when to tell your DOLL a WORRY, and when to take it back.”*
 - *“You can take these extra little paper slips home to keep writing WORRIES for your DOLL. And if you run out, any small piece of paper will do!”*
- Remind them of other supports they can use too:
 - *“Remember, our DOLLS are one helper, but there are other ways we can manage WORRIES too, like talking to a trusted grown-up, drawing, or spending time with a friend. Having many different supports can be helpful!”*
- Thank the group members for sharing.

Notes:

- During sharing, let group members know that they don't have to share the specific content of their WORRIES. If a child chooses to share a specific WORRY, listen without judgment or attempts to "fix" it within the group setting. Acknowledge and affirm their courage.
- For use with younger children, normalize the feeling of WORRY—emphasize that *everyone* WORRIES, grown-ups included. This helps reduce feelings of shame or isolation.
- For those who struggle with writing, let them know that they can tell their WORRY to the DOLL without writing it down.
- For use with teens and adults, you may want to consider:
 - WORRIES are often more nuanced and deeply intertwined with real-world responsibilities and emotional struggles. Frame the discussion around this complexity rather than simplifying it.
 - Instead of: *"How does that feeling of WORRY feel in your body?"* (though still relevant), add or emphasize: *"How do your WORRIES manifest—physically, mentally, emotionally?"* or *"What are the common themes or things that activate your WORRIES right now?"*
 - Focus on Grief-Specific WORRIES: Directly connect to the unique WORRIES associated with grief (*Identity Shifts—Financial Anxieties—Fear of Forgetting—Future Worries without the Person*).
 - **Respect Intellectual Engagement:** Adults and teens appreciate understanding the 'why' behind an activity.
 - *"The practice of externalizing worries, like giving them to a DOLL, is a long-standing coping mechanism across many cultures. Psychologically, it helps create a separation between you and the worry, preventing rumination and promoting mental detachment, even if just for a short period."*
 - **Offer More Sophisticated Craft Options:** Teens and adults might prefer materials that result in a more "artistic" or less childlike finished product.
 - **More intricate fabric options:** include lace, embroidery thread, beads, sequins, fabric paint, small metal charms.
 - **Alternative Bases:** consider slightly larger wooden figures, pre-made fabric DOLLS, or even simple, elegant stone/pebble bases if

the focus is less on dressing and more on creating a tangible worry object.

- **Advanced techniques:** provide embroidery floss for stitching details, small buttons, or a hot glue gun (with supervision/instruction).
- **Sewn Pouch:** Offer small squares of felt/fabric and needles for basic hand-sewing a pouch directly onto the DOLL for those inclined. This adds a sense of personal investment.
- **Integrated Design:** Encourage them to design the DOLL so the WORRY holder pocket is part of its aesthetic (a tiny satchel, a folded “scroll” held by the DOLL, or a locket).
- **Deepen the Discussion Points:** Shift from general WORRY questions to more introspective and analytical ones.
 - *“What are the persistent WORRIES that seem to resurface repeatedly, especially since experiencing loss?”*
 - *“How do these WORRIES impact your daily life, your sleep, your relationships?”*
 - *“Are there specific ‘unsolvable’ WORRIES you carry? How does carrying those feel?”*
 - *“What emotional or physical sensations accompany your grief-related WORRIES?”*
 - *“If your WORRY DOLL could have a ‘personality’ or ‘expertise,’ what kind of WORRIES would it be particularly good at holding for you?”*
- During wrap up, discuss self-care and how using the DOLL could be a conscious act of self-care.
 - *“This isn’t about ignoring your WORRIES permanently, but about giving yourself permission to put them down for a while. What might that space or ‘break’ allow you to do or feel?”*
 - *“How does consciously transferring a WORRY, even symbolically, feel different from constantly holding onto it internally?”*
- **Connect to Broader Coping Strategies:** Reinforce that this is one tool among many.
 - *“This activity provides a concrete way to externalize a WORRY. What other coping mechanisms do you find helpful when WORRIES feel overwhelming? How might this DOLL complement those?”*

- *“Who are your HUMAN WORRY DOLLS—the people you trust to share your worries with?”* (Using humor here can be effective if appropriate for the group.)

For Ongoing Groups:

- If your group has already completed WORRY DOLLS in an Introductory Session, this activity can be revisited to explore resilience and evolving coping strategies.
 - New Questions/Focus for Reflection:
 - *“Since the last time you made a WORRY DOLL, what WORRIES have become smaller or gone away? What helped your WORRIES get smaller?”*
 - *“What new WORRIES might you have now? (Maybe not just big ones, but any kind of new WORRY.)”*
 - *“Did you use your WORRY DOLL this past week or month? What was that like?”*
 - *“What happened to the WORRIES you put in your DOLL? Did they feel lighter? Did you feel ready to take them back?”*
 - *“Beyond our DOLLS, what other ways have you found to help with WORRIES, since we last talked about this?”* (Talking to a Specific Person—Listening to Music—Playing Outside, etc.)
 - Additionally, you can do a variation on the activity:
 - **Build a WORRY BOX or COPING CRAYON BOX:** Use a small BOX (decorated) where the DOLLS, plus new written WORRIES, and small reminders of other coping strategies (a tiny drawing of a person they talk to, a piece of yarn representing comfort, etc.) can be stored together, representing a WORRY MANAGEMENT TOOLBOX.
 - Encourage them to “update” their original DOLL by giving it new “clothes” or “accessories” (tiny crowns, glasses, scarves) that represent new strength or skills. They can then add a few new “worry notes” to their updated WORRY DOLL.

Background Information:

Guatemalan WORRY DOLLS date back to Mayan traditions and are similar to many amulets around the world, in that they are thought to soothe your fears and anxieties. Unlike most amulets, WORRY DOLLS were often made specifically for children, and in Guatemala, they may still be used for this purpose. These little wooden DOLLS, an inch or less in length, usually come in a box or bag in sets of six.

The Guatemalan tradition is to use one of six WORRY DOLLS each night. The child (or the adult) tells a WORRY to the DOLL and then puts it under her pillow for the night. If a family is large and children all have worries, they may share a bag of WORRY DOLLS, so each child has his or her own. Alternately, each child has their own bag of WORRY DOLLS, and for six nights in a row, they tell a WORRY to one of the DOLLS before slipping it under their pillow.

YARN WEB SHARING

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To promote sharing on a variety of topics and learn about similarities within the group

Task/Need:

- Group Building
- Telling their story

Materials:

- A BALL OF YARN
 - Make sure the BALL OF YARN is large enough to be tossed around the group for the duration of all the questions to be answered.
 - Make sure there is enough space for the BALL OF YARN to be tossed safely.

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin with asking the group what brings them together or what connects them (their loss, their feelings, etc.).
- Tell them that they are going to do an activity using a BALL OF YARN where they will be able to see how they have commonalities with each other.

Activity Description:

- Have the group members form a circle and explain the activity.
 - *“Today we’re going to create a special YARN WEB together. Sometimes, when we’re going through tough times, we might feel alone, or like our feelings are very different from everyone else’s.”*
 - *“I’ll start with the BALL OF YARN. I’ll share something based on today’s topic. Then I’ll gently toss the BALL OF YARN to someone else across the circle. If the BALL comes to you, when you catch it, hold on to your piece of YARN at the place where it separates from the larger BALL. It will be your turn to share based on the topic we picked. While holding your part of the YARN, toss the BALL to another person who hasn’t spoken yet. The trick is: always hold onto your piece of YARN! Soon we’ll have a big web connecting us all!”*
- Allow group members to come up with topics or ask one another questions if they like.
- A WEB is formed as group members hold on to the end of the YARN with one hand while using their other hand to toss the BALL to other group members.

- Sharing Topic Ideas:
 - Low stakes & general connection:
 1. *“Something that brings me comfort is...”* (Could be an object, activity, or person.)
 2. *“My favorite thing to do for fun is...”*
 3. *“Something I like about myself is...”*
 4. *“One thing that helps me when I feel overwhelmed is...”*
 - Related to grief, with open-ended framing:
 1. *“A special memory I like to hold onto is...”* (Doesn’t specify who the memory is about, allows for living or their person who died.)
 2. *“A way I feel strong these days is when I...”*
 3. *“Someone who makes me feel supported is...”* (Allows for living people, doesn’t force discussion of the person who died.)
 4. *“Something new I’ve learned about myself lately is...”*
 5. *“A feeling that sometimes surprises me is...”*
 6. *“Something that helps me remember [their person] in a way that feels OK for me is...”* (Allows space for honoring while still acknowledging complexities of the relationship, by focusing on “a way that feels OK”.)
 7. *“If [person’s] presence in my life taught me one important thing, it was...”* (Focus on ‘taught me’ to include lessons learned even from difficult relationships.)

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Witness and admire the WEB as a group.
 - *“Why do you think we suggested this activity for you?”*
 - *“What do you notice when you look at our WEB? It looks strong, doesn’t it? It connects every single one of us.”*
 - *“Sometimes in life, our feelings, experiences, and thoughts can seem messy or like they’re only ours. But this WEB shows how we are all intertwined and connected, both by things that are similar and by the unique ways we support each other.”*
- Point out the common ‘threads’ that connected group members:

- *“Did you notice any common ‘threads’ that connected many people? Perhaps many of us enjoy drawing, or many of us feel brave when we try new things.”*
- *“How does it feel to see so many similarities among us? To know that others might share a similar experience or feeling to yours?”*
- *If using multi-colored yarn: “And just like the different colored yarn making our WEB special, it’s also great to have our own unique personalities and qualities. Our WEB is strong because it has many threads, not just one kind.”*
- *“It’s a reminder that even in our grief, we can find a network of understanding and support right here.”*
- After the YARN has formed a WEB, hang it in the group room as a representation of their group’s commonalities.
- Thank the group members for sharing.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity can be used in Ongoing Groups as the YARN patterns and stories will change with different members. You can also try having more than one BALL OF YARN tossed in the group. You can have each BALL represent something different. Discuss how the WEBS intertwined even though there were differences and similarities within the group—symbolic of their group members.

ZEN GARDEN

Y—M—T—A

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

Purpose: To allow children, teens, or adults to discuss the concept of peace and promote relaxation

Task/Need:

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

Materials:

- Shoe box lids/candy boxes/pre-made wooden boxes, or plastic take-out containers with lids
- Sand/rice
- Pebbles, small rocks, and/or glass gems
- Comb, mini rake, chopsticks, or bamboo stick
- Fake/real moss, bridge (optional)
- An example/picture of a ZEN GARDEN

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Ask the group to think of a peaceful place. Give group members the option to share their peaceful places.
- Discuss other things/places that help them feel relaxed.
- Explain that the group is going to create their own peaceful space, called a ZEN GARDEN. Ask the group if they have ever heard of a ZEN GARDEN. Have an example ready to show them.
- Ask them to think about which materials will help them feel relaxed so they can add them to their GARDEN.
- Create a relaxed atmosphere in room.
 - Consider dimming light to set ambiance.
 - Incorporate music if group members find it relaxing.
 - Carefully consider the type of music selected, if used.

Activity Description:

- Have the materials set out on the table ahead of time.
- Have the group decorate their box.
- Instruct them to pour the sand into the shoebox lid and level it out evenly.

- Have each group member add the rock(s) in the sand.
- Add anything else they would like to put into their garden (moss, bridge, etc.).
- Use the mini rake or comb to have group members make patterns in the sand.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Ask group members what it was like to make patterns in the sand.
- Discuss the process of making the ZEN GARDEN. Was it relaxing?
- Invite group members to share other ways they relax or cope with stress.
- Talk about what group members will do with their ZEN GARDENS.
 - Where will they display them?
 - How will they use them outside of the Caring Place?

Notes:

- One variation is to have the group work together as a team to make a ZEN GARDEN for the Highmark Caring Place.
 - Tell group members how others who come to the Caring Place in the future will be able to enjoy their GARDEN.
 - Tell the group members where their CARING PLACE ZEN GARDEN will be kept.
- Use rice instead of sand and add glass gems instead of rocks.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Ask group members to bring in their ZEN GARDEN if they still have it.
 - What new items would they like to add to it?
 - How have they used it since they last came to the Caring Place?
- Ask the group to share how their ideas about peace or relaxation changed since the last time they created a ZEN GARDEN.
- Consider describing the ZEN GARDEN as a way to tell their story.
 - For example, *“If your GARDEN could tell a story about your current path or feelings, what would it be?”*
- A different prompt could be:
 - *“What specific moments or feelings do you anticipate using this GARDEN to address?”*
- If there are previous ZEN GARDENS in the room:
 - Acknowledge the ZEN GARDEN and ask the group what they think the materials used in it represent.
 - Discuss what it’s like to come back to the Caring Place and see another ZEN GARDEN that was created during another Session.

HIGHMARK.

CARING PLACE 

finding hope in grief

COMPASSION IN ACTION

Activities for Finding Hope in Grief

