



THINKING OUTSIDE OF TRADITION

In good times and in bad, all throughout our lives, we as human beings need a connection to others. We are wired for connection and friendship throughout the highs and lows of life's journey. When death happens, it is often the darkest, most painful experience of human existence and we need close support and comfort from friends and family to cry with, to share memories with, and to embrace in warmth and love with. This is such an essential part of our grief journey.

During the current pandemic, for the protection of ourselves and others, we have seen disruption from the natural forms of ritual and healing after a death loss. The close physical presence of a friend holding our hands or embracing us as we cry, and the large gatherings of people who mourn the loss with us are now absent from our current grief experience. This can complicate our journey of grief as we are forced to focus our emotions and memories alone, in an isolated experience, or possibly an avoidance of it altogether.

There is so much we can't do now that has always been an important part of the journey of grief. But because it is so important to gather with others, to share stories about our loved ones, and to honor the memory of the lives they lived we must figure ways to recreate these traditions in this new world we are living in.

Several years ago when my friend Harold died, my husband, children, and I went beyond the standard traditions of the funeral and memorial rituals to honor his life. He was a best friend to my husband and me and was also like an uncle to our children. It's because he was such an important part of our life, we decided to hold our own "Family Harold Memorial". I decorated our kitchen with several photos of him and set the table for my family to sit around and recall all of our memories of him. We recalled all the times Harold cooked for our family and we shared

a meal around that very table we sat at. I even mimicked his Cajun and pepper fried chicken recipe and made a huge batch of fried wings. Gospel music, which represented him well, played throughout these preparations and throughout our dinner. Throughout our conversation at dinner, we all shared our 'Harold-isms' or sayings he often said, things he taught us, and special memories—mostly funny—of his lived presence in our lives. It brings me such joy to recall this experience and to have provided it for our children.

To all who are adapting to a world turning away from traditional funeral and memorial experiences at this time, I invite you to think beyond tradition, "think outside the box"; think of igniting all your senses in memory of your special person. Think of gathering with your household, or by yourself, or of offering virtual participation. Other ideas include:

Rituals remain important for our journey through grief. Don't let this pandemic rob you of a unique opportunity to remember your special person. There is no right or wrong way to do it. The important thing is to honor your special person in a way that suits you and your family. Whenever you are ready for this, it can be very meaningful and well worth it.



Laura Cavazos, LPC

- Host a virtual toast in memory of your loved one and share how they touched your lives, serving as an extension of support to one another.

- Create an Honor Space in your home and invite all your family members to contribute something to represent your loved one: pictures, drawings, letters, items of remembrance.

- Prepare your loved one's favorite meal together to honor their memory and share stories of them throughout the preparation.

- Start a memorial page on social media to draw a connection with others via shared stories, pictures, songs from all who knew and loved them.

- Contact your local place of worship or hospital/hospice to see if they might offer a private ceremony for your family. Invite family members to contribute readings or choose readings/songs to add personal meaning.

- Invite family members to write a small note to the deceased on plain paper, tear them up, and add to the soil as part of planting a new tree - inviting new life.



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DEAR FRIENDS,

As we head into the Fall, one thing is certain – this year has been unlike any other year we have faced during our lifetimes. While the year has brought with it so many hardships and challenges, I think this year has also offered all of us opportunities to change our perspectives and stretch our coping abilities. I remain hopeful that these changes will prove beneficial over the long term.

I have seen firsthand the ways in which Children’s Bereavement Center is coping with the changes necessitated by the COVID pandemic. Initially, and like most other businesses across the country, we changed the way services were provided. Laptop computers were purchased for every counselor so they could maintain contact with grieving families, though we were unsure of how this would be accepted or how effective it might be. For families without a computer, counselors

simply made phone calls to check on the welfare of each family member. Maintaining this contact was especially important at the beginning of the shutdown, when many caregivers found themselves dealing with the additional stresses of working from home and serving as substitute teachers for their children. I understand the counselors were told many times that these video and phone appointments were referred to by their clients as “my lifeline”.

This indicates for me the importance of **what we do** – and that is more important than **how** we do it. As long as we focus on our purpose – to support grieving families, help them throughout the grief process, and provide them with the knowledge and skills they need to cope during their healing journey – the **manner** by which we accomplish those goals is less important. This will become even more significant in the months to come, as calls for the Center’s services continue to increase. Because, of course, we are now beginning to receive calls from

families who have lost a loved one to COVID-19.

We will continue to face challenges that will demand our flexibility and creativity. However, due to the obstacles we have faced and overcome in 2020, we are confident and determined to meet the needs of grieving families in our community. While I grieve the loss of life caused by COVID-19, I am proud to be part of Children’s Bereavement Center where these families can find comfort and healing and peace.

On behalf of the Center’s Board of Directors, thank you for your continued commitment to our work. For you, we are grateful.

Stay safe and well until we can see you again.

Sincerely,

Scott Gruendler
CBCST Board Chair

PALOMA PLACE CELEBRATES 2 YEARS IN FLORESVILLE

On November 5, 2017, the lives of the residents in Sutherland Springs were forever changed. When tragedy struck at First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, a grieving community became even more aware of the lack of mental health

services in their area. It was shortly after this realization that we knew our services were needed and we were called upon, in partnership with UTSA, to provide support to help this community heal.

Since opening our doors in July of 2019, the Paloma Place team has helped so many children, teens and adults. Residents of Wilson County and the surrounding areas have been incredibly appreciative of all of the mental health services they receive, one client even stating,

“Paloma Place has greatly impacted my child’s

and my life! Great staff, wonderful facility and great communication! It’s been amazing to see my child improve and smile!”

It is important to us that the residents of Wilson county continue to have access to quality counseling services available to them at no cost. Thank you to all who have supported us on this journey of healing. We are so grateful to celebrate 2 years and look forward to many more!



Children’s Bereavement Center of South Texas location at 140 Paloma Drive in Floresville

LIVE ON ZOOM

When COVID began to plague our community, our counseling team made the strategic move to pivot to online counseling to continue to serve their clients virtually. It was important to them that their work not be disrupted despite the obstacles they faced. With this new presence in the virtual space, we soon realized that we had the opportunity to connect beyond our clients and support the entire community. With the help of Zoom, our counselors directly reached professionals and parents in the community to answer questions about managing

their mental health and the mental health of their families during the quarantine.

The response to our events hosted on zoom resulted in 600 community members registering! Our events covered topics such as the individual’s general mental wellbeing in quarantine, emotions around school’s reopening, and the changes COVID-19 brought to the grief process. Our counselors understand that COVID-19 has brought various disruptions to our daily lives and it was their hope to serve as a resource during this difficult time. All of the changes that we have experienced as an organization have given us an opportunity to grow and adapt in ways that have allowed us to

impact more in our community.

With these new experiences under our belts we plan to host more events in this virtual space in order to continue to serve as a resource to the community. If there is a topic you are interested in our counselors discussing, please contact Chloe Palacios at cpalacios@cbcst.org.



BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIER OF GRIEF

One of the most difficult things to note about grief is that you don’t always know if you are doing it right. There isn’t a handbook that gives you all the steps to take to feel better. Even if there was, that handbook might look different for all of us. At Children’s Bereavement Center of South Texas, our licensed professional counselors help children and their families navigate through their own unique journey of grief.

Darien and his father Mario began their own personal journey when Darien was just 8 years old after Darien’s mother Sarah passed away suddenly due to medical complications. When Mario had to deliver the devastating news to Darien, he described it as the most difficult conversation he’s ever had to endure.

“Nothing compares to having to deliver this type of devastating news to your child. Nothing can prepare you for a moment like that.”



After some time had passed, Mario was referred to the Center and he did not hesitate in taking Darien – despite Darien showing little to no signs of grief. Initially after losing his mom, Darien was described as rock solid and incredibly supportive as his father, Mario, worked through his own grief. It wasn’t until a few months had gone by that Darien confided in Mario and told him, “I lost my mom”. It was this acceptance of the loss that told Mario that Darien was just at the beginning of his grief journey.

At the Center, Darien continued his journey, finding ways to express himself in peer support groups. While Darien expressed himself through various forms of art therapy during peer support groups, Mario was also given the opportunity to share in our group for parents and caregivers. Discussing his loss among others

gave Mario the support he needed. Because our peer support group model brings together children and families all dealing with similar types of loss, it helps break down barriers of isolation that grief so often brings.

“It was a nice feeling, knowing we were not alone, that we were not the only ones working through this sudden loss.”

Mario and Darien found more than comfort at the Center, they found peers who understood their loss and could relate to it directly. It’s this sense of camaraderie that contributes to the comforting atmosphere that we have aimed to create at the Center – a safe place to share and to heal.

After appropriately addressing their grief at the Center, Mario and Darien realized that they had an opportunity to advocate and spread awareness about our mission and the services we provide, to ultimately help other families find healing after losing a loved one. Mario has hosted birthday fundraisers on social media raising thousands of dollars to help fuel our mission of hope and healing. We are so grateful to remain connected to this father-son duo and we admire their strength to look past their pain and work to pay it forward.

SAVE THE DATE!

TOUR OF THE HEART

Contact our Development Director, Kristina Hernandez to Schedule a Tour
khernandez@cbcst.org

NATIONAL CHILDREN’S GRIEF AWARENESS MONTH

November 2020
Join us to raise awareness and wear BLUE to show your support!

20TH ANNUAL HEARTS IN HARMONY AT HOME

Thursday, February 18, 2021



For more information on these and other upcoming events, please visit CBCST.org/events.

