

Healing Hearts



e-Newsletter | July | 07.01.2023

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Mindful Summertime Support Activities

Summertime offers an opportunity for a family's schedule to shift, travel, and try new things. Here are some mindful summertime activities that families can engage in to help them feel supported in their grief journey during this season.

Zen Garden

Zen Garden – Zen gardens are an ancient Japanese aid in mindfulness. Zen gardens can serve as reminders to take mindful breaks, engage in cathartic movements, and take deep breaths. These gardens are composed of sand, rocks, and rakes. Raking the sand around the rocks and creating designs in the sand can be a calming and meditative practice. You can create your own small zen garden as a family to help you and your children have a tangible tool to experience peace and calm in the day.



You will need a few supplies to create your own Zen garden: container, sand, and mini rake.

1. Find a small, flat container to hold the sand, such as shoebox lid or small tray.
2. Add the sand of your family's choosing, a small rake or fork, and rocks.
3. Be as creative as you'd like with any items or colors you add to your garden.

Once the garden is complete, rake the sand in slow, steady designs, breathing slowly to keep your hand on the rake steady. Notice what you feel in your body and what thoughts you have as you go around the rocks in your garden. Notice what you experience when you rake different patterns in the sand. Once you have finished raking your designs in the sand you can keep the design or clear it out. Notice what it feels like to know that your designs can change and are not permanent. Utilize the zen garden anytime you'd like to experience relaxation in your day.

Zen Garden activity is inspired by Highmark Caring Place & [Kumarah](#).

Affirmation Mirror

Kind, affirming words can shape our feelings and thoughts. When we are coping with grief, our self-talk can change. We also may not always express our thoughts and feelings to others.

1. In your home pick a mirror that you'd like to deem your family's "Affirmation Mirror".
2. Utilizing sticky notes, as a family, write down

affirmations that are helpful to your self-talk and affirmations you'd like your family members to know, such as: "I am doing the best I can," "You are not alone," "You are loved."

3. Place the sticky notes around the perimeter of the mirror.

Consider what time of day and how often it would be helpful for each family member to look in this affirmation mirror. For example, look in the mirror before work each morning or before bed each night. You can add/remove affirmations as often as you'd like to do so. Notice what you feel in your body and the thoughts you experience when you look in the affirmation mirror. Notice if your self-talk and the way you speak to your family changes such as experiencing more compassionate self-talk or holding more empathy for your family members.



Inspiring Connections: Texans Players and Students Unite for a Special Day of Support and Fun

Students from the school-based support group held at Gallegos Elementary School received some very special visitors! On May 17, Texans players Neville Hewitt, Alex Bachman, Dayo Odeleye, and mascot, TORO, visited the students of Gallegos Elementary School's school-based grief support group, held in Fall 2022.

The event kicked off with time outside, where the students got to play alongside the players and TORO, playing basketball, football, and showcasing their jump rope skills. To make the day even more special, the Texans surprised the students with sweet treats of ice cream and cookies.



Beyond the fun and games, the students had an opportunity to honor their loved ones who have died. The Texans players and students created memory bracelets that served as personalized tributes to their family members or loved ones. This activity allows students to focus on specific aspects of their loved ones' life and personality, with each bead symbolizing their unique qualities, cherished memories, and lasting bonds. Through this creative activity, the students can find solace in expressing their emotions and can keep the memories of their loved ones close to their hearts.

Bo's Place was honored to be one of the recipients of the Texans' Inspire Change Grant with funds supporting the school-based grief support program. Thank you to the Texans players, staff, and students for making it a great day of unforgettable memories!





Envisioning a World Where No Child Has to Grieve Alone

The 26th National Alliance for Children's Grief ([NACG](#)) Symposium took place in Pittsburgh, PA June 14-16. Pittsburgh is the place Fred Rogers called his neighborhood, and his inspiration was felt throughout the gathering.

The opening plenary speaker was Dana Winters, Executive Director of the Fred Rogers Institute and she shared that Fred Rogers once said: *"Human relationships are primary in all of living. When the gusty winds blow and shake our lives, if we know that people care about us, we may bend with the wind... but we won't break."*

Ms. Winters also spoke about the importance of helpers, and the symposium was attended by more than 400 people from across the country (and a few international attendees) who are helpers for grieving children. Over 80 workshops and poster presentations covered the latest theories and practices in the field of children's bereavement, and attendees had the chance to connect and share ideas with others who are doing this important work.



The New York Life Foundation was the premier sponsor of the Symposium and hosted a reception for attendees at the Highmark Caring Place. Staff and volunteers of the Highmark Caring Place gave tours and generously shared activities and resources they use with their grief support group participants. Fred Rogers was an Honorary Chairman for The Caring Place and the Caring Foundation from its inception in 1985 until his death in 2003, and this quote from him is painted prominently on the wall of their facility:

"It is only natural that we and our children find many things hard to talk about. But anything human is mentionable and anything mentionable is manageable. The mentioning can be difficult, and the managing too, but both can be done if surrounded by love and trust." -Fred Rogers

Pictured here are Marian Mankin, Bo's Place Program Director, and Julie Hennington, NACG staff member and Bo's Place Volunteer. Many thanks to the NACG staff, volunteers, members and supporters who work to help build awareness of the prevalence of childhood bereavement and provide education and resources to prepare helpers to better support the grieving children in their own neighborhoods.



Volunteer Spotlight: Varsha Podduturi

Varsha Podduturi is one of our Junior League Volunteers who volunteers in the kitchen during family group times and helps out with special projects. Every year, we have a group of volunteers from the Junior League of Houston who commit to providing at least 50 hours of service to Bo's Place. They are a part of a long line of Junior League support for Bo's Place, including some of the very first grants that Bo's Place received for programming and staff.

Varsha has been volunteering with the Junior League for five years, and she admitted that she had been waiting all that time for a placement with Bo's Place.

She was drawn to Bo's Place as a volunteer placement because she is a Forensic Pathologist and her line of work deals with grieving families. Varsha has seen the difference that Bo's Place makes in the lives of grieving families, and she wanted to be a part of that.

When she shares with others that she volunteers at Bo's Place, she describes it as a place where families can come get support for the death of a loved one. Families can learn healthy coping mechanisms and connect with other families in similar circumstances.

One of Varsha's favorite memories is when the Junior League sponsored a holiday meal night. Bo's Place asks that meal sponsors send volunteers who can take a tour of the facility and serve the food to the participants. Some of the volunteers had not been to Bo's Place before, and they were very impressed with the niceness of the kitchen.

When Varsha is not volunteering or working, she is busy working to increase the awareness of what forensic pathologists do. She is even considering making "reaction videos." Reaction videos capture actual experts and a friend reacting to episodes of CSI. These videos are then uploaded to YouTube. You can follow Varsha at @forensicpathdoctor and learn more about her work.



Varsha encourages others to volunteer at Bo's Place or at least learn more about it because it does such great work in the community. After all, the death of a loved one is something everyone experiences, and Bo's Place has wonderful resources.

Thank you, Varsha, for your dedication to Bo's Place!



Join us for Our Upcoming Volunteer Facilitator Training

"I feel so glad to be here once I get here." –Current volunteer facilitator

There is something special about being at Bo's Place in person. Many of our current Tuesday volunteers remarked that it didn't matter what they had to get through to get to Bo's Place that day, because once they were here in the building, everything else faded away.

At the beginning of our fiscal year last June, we had a goal of increasing in-person family support groups. With help from our volunteers, we have been able to increase our services to those who are grieving the death of a loved one. We have more than doubled our in-person support group enrollment this year!



While we have helped so many families this year, there are many more families that are grieving that need our support. Volunteer facilitators are still needed to help continue growing our in-person support groups. Will you give up 3 hours a week to support a grieving family? No experience is required; you come with a giving heart, and we provide all training necessary. As a Bo's Place volunteer facilitator, you will help heal the hearts of grieving children, teens, and adults. In the process, you will learn to be an empathic and active listener, as well as techniques to reduce stress, build resilience, and prioritize self-care.

Our next Volunteer Facilitator Training is July 29-30, 9am-4pm each day, at Bo's Place, 10050 Buffalo Speedway.

If you are interested in learning more, please call 713-942-8339 or email volunteer@bosplace.org.



Grant Spotlight: The Brown Foundation

Bo's Place was honored to be chosen as the recipient of a \$145,000 grant by The Brown Foundation in June for general operating needs

to help sustain our grief support and education services. This grant will impact the more than 6,000 individuals Bo's Place serves annually. The Brown Foundation, Inc. has supported us since 2002, donating a total of \$1,538,417. The Foundation has supported the mission and growth of Bo's Place, donating generous grants annually toward general operating costs. They were the top donor to our first capital campaign in 2005 and funded the hiring of clinical staff in 2021. Bo's Place is deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve more children and families on their grief journeys with the support of donors like The Brown Foundation!



Happenings

Bo's Place hosted the **Good Grief for Helping Professionals** training on Friday, June 9. Professionals representing staff from churches, hospitals, community centers, hospices, and other helping organizations learned methods and activities to support bereaved clients in their grief journey using grief theory, indicators of grief, and what grief looks like across the lifespan. Thank you to Bo's Place staff members Alison Smith and Courtney Reynolds for teaching the training and our 47 participants for attending!



Bo's Place Grief Support Services

At Bo's Place, we believe that grieving families heal when they share their experiences with each other. We offer free Grief Support Groups in English and Spanish to families and individuals.

If you or someone you know would like information about Bo's Place Grief Support Groups for children, families, and adults, click [here](#) or call 713.942.8339.

Bo's Place exists to enhance the lives of those who have experienced the death of a loved one.

