



# NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON CHILDREN'S GRIEF 2026- COURSE GUIDE



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**Opening Plenary- Perception is Everything: Implicit and Explicit Bias in Supporting Children (1.0 CE)**



**Victor Armstrong, MSW**  
**Vice President for Health Equity and Engagement**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic:**

Victor Armstrong serves as Vice President for Health Equity and Engagement with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Victor previously served as the inaugural Chief Health Equity Officer for North Carolina Department of Health & Human Services. Victor has also served as Director of the NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services. Prior to his NC state government roles, Victor was Vice President of Behavioral Health with Atrium Health, based in Charlotte, NC.

Victor has over 30 years of experience in human services, primarily dedicated to building and strengthening community resources to serve individuals who have been historically marginalized. As a nationally recognized speaker on issues regarding both mental health and social justice, he has spoken at events nationwide and abroad, on topics including suicide in marginalized communities, implicit bias in behavioral health, and the role of faith communities in mental wellness. He has appeared before Congress, contributed to national policy development, and been featured in national media outlets, including The New York Times, PBS, and other publications.

Victor currently serves on the steering committee of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. He also serves on the Board of Directors for College for Behavioral Health Leadership, I21 Center for Integrative Health, and McLeod Centers for Wellbeing. He is a member of the Board of Advisors for East Carolina University School of Social Work and is the host of the “Strong Talk” podcast.

Victor’s awards and recognitions include:

- National Association of Social Workers (NASW) 2025 National Social Worker of the Year
- Living Waters Annual Mental Health Summit 2022 “Lifetime Mental Health Champion” Award
- National Association of Social Workers North Carolina (NASW-NC) 2022 NC Social Worker of the Year
- Addiction Professionals of NC (APNC) 2021 DEI Leadership & Impact Award
- Mental Health America’s 2021 H. Keith Brunnemer, Jr. Award for “Outstanding Mental Health Leadership”
- Black Mental Health Symposium 2019 Mental Health Advocate of the Year
- East Carolina University School of Social Work 2018 Distinguished Alumni Award
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) NC, 2012 Mental Health Professional of the Year.

Victor graduated, Magna Cum Laude, from North Carolina Central University with a bachelor's degree in business management and received his MSW from East Carolina University. He is the husband of Dr. Charletta Armstrong and the father of three sons, Carter, Alonzo, and Victor Jr.

Highest Degree Earned: Master of Social Work

Field of Study: Social Work

### **Abstract**

In this presentation, the presenter will examine common misconceptions about how children experience and express grief, including those shaped by cultural differences. The session will explore how these differences can influence the ways clinicians, counselors, educators, and other professionals interpret children's behaviors, sometimes leading to the misidentification of grief responses as defiance or behavioral concerns. The presenter will also address how implicit bias can influence assessment and decision-making, ultimately shaping the course of care and support provided to grieving children.

Please explain how this session addresses and/or incorporates children's grief:

This session will explore the ways that grief can be misinterpreted or missed altogether in children, which can affect their development. Attendees will learn ways to assess their own biases that can often impact treatment for impacted children.

Learning Objectives- **After completing this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Identify one of their own biases that can impact their interaction with families and children.
2. Summarize how culture and geography can impact one's perception of grief.
3. Name at least two techniques for identifying and managing implicit and explicit bias that can impact a person's perception when working with families.
4. State at least one statistic or data point that can debunk common misperceptions.

### **Categories**

- Outreach and Community Collaboration (schools, Boys and Girls Club, etc.)
- Research, Outcomes, and Measurements
- Programming and/or Activities/Techniques
- Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)
- Marketing

### **Content Level**

Intermediate - This best describes a topic or issue that the audience likely has a theoretical foundation for understanding and/or a working knowledge

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**Social Work Content Area(s):**

- Theories and concepts of human behavior in the social environment
- Social work research, programs, or practice evaluations
- Social work practice, knowledge, and skills
- Diversity and social justice

**Counseling Content Area(s):**

**Literature References:**

- Bhatia, M. S., & Goyal, A. (2025). Grief in children and adolescents: A developmentally informed clinical review with illustrative cases. *Journal of the Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/09731342241300257>
- Lannes, S., Bieri, U., Schindelholz, B., Bergstraesser, E., & Latal, B. (2026). Prolonged grief-related symptoms among young individuals after loss of a parent or sibling to cancer: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 15(2), 482. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm15020482>
- Tang, S., & Xiang, Y. T. (2021). "In the same storm, but not on the same boat": Children grief during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12, 638866. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.638866>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). About adverse childhood experiences. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. <https://www.cdc.gov/aces/about/index.html>
- International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies. (n.d.). Grief and bereavement in children and adolescents. <https://istss.org/public-resources/friday-fast-facts/grief-and-bereavement-in-children-and-adolescents/>
- Beechwood Cemetery, Funeral & Cremation Services. (n.d.). Grief across cultures: Lessons from global perspectives on loss (Part 1). <https://www.beechwoodottawa.ca/en/blog/grief-across-cultures-lessons-global-perspectives-loss-part-1>
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2004). *Children's health, the nation's wealth: Assessing and improving child health*. National Academies Press. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK217844/>

## **A1- 8- Beyond Our Words: Integrating Grief and Loss Through Somatic Wisdom (1.5 CE)**



### **Founder Amy M Pickett-Williams**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Amy Pickett-Williams, LCSW, RYT-200, is a psychotherapist, yoga teacher, and founder of The LIGHT Movement, a nonprofit dedicated to ensuring that no one grieves alone. With more than 25 years of experience in grief psychotherapy, Amy specializes in supporting families who have experienced the death of a child, as well as losses connected to infertility, cancer and other life-threatening illness, injury, identity, and relationship changes. She also brings a passion for working with postpartum women and those navigating anxiety. Amy's work bridges evidence-informed psychotherapy with yoga and somatic practices, emphasizing the body's role in integrating grief. Through The LIGHT Movement, she and her team offer retreats, trainings, community programming, and yoga for grief support, integrating neuroscience, polyvagal theory, the window of tolerance, and Lois Tonkin's Growing Around Grief model. She has presented nationally at leading conferences including the American Psychological Association (APA), National Alliance for Children's Grief (NACG), Association of Professional Chaplains (APC), Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA), Colorado Organization for Victim Assistance (COVA), and the Colorado Society of School Psychologists Conference. Her upcoming engagements include presentations on grief and somatic healing at the APA 2025 Convention in Denver and additional workshops across professional and community audiences. Amy is committed to making grief support accessible, culturally sensitive, and developmentally responsive across the lifespan. Her work blends clinical expertise with embodied tools to help individuals and communities grow with their grief, fostering connection, resilience, and meaning.



### **Board President Katie Mattei**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Dr. Katie Mattei is a licensed Clinical Psychologist with over 30 years of experience specializing in trauma, burn injuries, child loss, child development, and adolescent mental health. She studied Infant Attachment at Columbia University and earned her Doctorate from the University of Denver. As a medical staff provider at Children's Hospital Colorado, she also maintains a private practice in Denver and consults for local schools. A sought-after national speaker, she presents on grief, development, and burn injury prevention. Her book, *An Ocean of Grief*, offers guidance to parents coping with child loss. Over the past decade, Dr. Mattei has deepened her focus on somatic healing, burnout prevention, and trauma recovery, particularly for healthcare providers and first responders. She integrates evidence-based techniques to strengthen the mind-body connection, reduce stress, and build resilience in high-pressure professions. Recognizing the toll of caregiving roles, she is passionate about equipping professionals with practical, sustainable strategies that support both patient care and personal well-being.

## **Abstract**

Grief is a universal experience that touches every stage of the developmental lifespan, yet it is too often misunderstood or addressed only through cognitive or stage-based models. Children, teens, and adults alike experience grief somatically—in the nervous system, the breath, the body, and the capacity for connection. *Beyond Words: Integrating Grief and Loss Through Somatic Wisdom* offers participants an embodied framework for understanding and supporting grief that goes beyond words alone.

This program integrates three key frameworks: Polyvagal Theory, the Window of Tolerance, and the Growing Around Grief model. Together, these theories provide a lens for recognizing how grief reshapes regulation, social engagement, and identity across the lifespan. Participants will gain practical tools to help clients, families, and communities integrate grief responses, reduce overwhelm, and foster resilience.

Evidence-informed somatic practices will be introduced, including breathwork, vagus nerve stimulation, bilateral movement, contraction/expansion exercises, and ritual. These tools are culturally adaptable and developmentally responsive—supporting children’s play and movement, teens’ identity exploration, adults’ stress and burnout, and older adults’ search for meaning.

Through case vignettes, narrative, and interactive practice, attendees will deepen their ability to support grieving individuals in ways that honor both body and mind. Participants will leave with accessible strategies for fostering safety, regulation, and growth—skills applicable in clinical, educational, faith-based, and community settings.

This program is offered through The LIGHT Movement, a nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing somatic, science-based, and accessible grief support to individuals and communities worldwide. LIGHT’s mission is to ensure that no one grieves alone by providing education, training, and embodied practices that honor belonging, somatic wisdom, and growth. Ultimately, this program reframes grief as an embodied process we grow with rather than move past, creating possibilities for connection, healing, and collective transformation.

### **Learning Objectives- After completing this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Explain how Polyvagal Theory, the Window of Tolerance, and the Growing Around Grief model provide frameworks for understanding grief across the developmental lifespan.
2. Identify the ways grief impacts the nervous system, breath, body, and social engagement systems in children, adolescents, and adults.
3. Demonstrate evidence-informed somatic practices (e.g., breathwork, vagus nerve stimulation, bilateral movement, contraction/expansion) that support regulation and integration of grief.
4. Apply developmentally responsive and culturally adaptable strategies to support grieving individuals in clinical, educational, faith-based, and community settings.
5. Evaluate how integrating somatic wisdom into grief care fosters resilience, meaning-making, and long-term growth for individuals and families.

## **Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

## **Content Level**

Basic

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills, Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Human Growth and Development, Wellness and Prevention

**Literature References**

- Guldin, M. B. (2024). *The integrated process model of loss and grief*. **Death Studies**, Advance online.
- Sillis, L., Claes, L., & Andriessen, K. (2022). *Association between Grief and Somatic Complaints in Bereaved University and College Students*. **International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health**, **19**(19), Article 12108.
- Hennemann, S. et al. (2023). *Somatic symptom distress and ICD-11 prolonged grief in a culturally diverse sample*. **Journal of Affective Disorders**, Article.
- Haeyen, S. (2024). *A theoretical exploration of Polyvagal Theory in creative arts and psychomotor therapies*: **Creative Arts in Psychomotor Therapy**.
- Porges, S. W. (2022). *Polyvagal Theory: A Science of Safety*, **Frontiers in Integrative Neuroscience**.
- Rosenberg, S. (2025). *Understanding Grief Through Polyvagal Theory: How Trauma Impacts the Body and How to Heal*, **Therapy Insights Journal** (online).

## **A2- 18- The Characteristics, Expertise, and Knowledge Needed for a Strong, Effective Staff Leadership Team (1.5 CE)**



**CEO Andy McNiel**

**The Satori Group, LLC, United States. The Compassionate Friends (TCF), United States. Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Andy McNiel, MA, is an author, trainer, bereavement support professional, and non-profit leader with three decades of experience providing support to bereaved people of all ages. He is the CEO of The Satori Group, LLC, a national education, management, and consulting company, providing education and consultation to non-profit organizations nationally. He has served as the Chief Executive Officer for The National Alliance for Children's Grief, the Executive Director for The Amelia Center at Children's of Alabama, and the Director of Grief Counseling Services and Director of Development for Hospice of Martin and St. Lucie (now Treasure Health) in South Florida. In his current work with The Satori Group, Andy serves as Senior Advisor to Youth Programs and The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing for the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) and Senior Advisor to the CEO for The Compassionate Friends. Andy travels extensively providing leadership consulting, training, strategic planning, and project management for Satori clients. He has strong experience in leadership, fundraising, business development, building key relationships, and providing education and consultation in non-profit management and bereavement support. He is the author of *Understanding and Supporting Bereaved Children: A Practical Guide for Professionals* in addition to numerous chapters related to bereavement support. He has served as a consultant to non-profits across the United States, providing strategic planning, fundraising support, board management, and organizational development. Andy has three decades of experience providing counseling, bereavement support and offering support groups to children, teenagers, and adults grieving the death of someone in their life. Andy lectures extensively on support group facilitation, grief and bereavement, non-profit management, and leadership. He is a trainer for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. He has served on the Board of Directors for the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) and is a member of the International Workgroup on Death, Dying, and Bereavement. Andy holds a Bachelor of Arts in Religion from Palm Beach Atlantic University and a Master of Arts in Counseling from The University of Alabama at Birmingham.

### **Abstract**

Hard-working, measured, creative, engaged, and happy employees lead to great service delivery to bereaved children, teenagers, and their families. Our ability to recruit the right individuals with the character, expertise, and knowledge to be successful leaders within our organization is essential to a culture that promotes a healthy, happy staff team. This presentation will present ideas on how to advertise for key leadership positions and identify positive leadership characteristics in candidates. We will discuss ways to model and promote person-centered and engaging approaches to leadership. We will discuss the different types of expertise, knowledge, and personalities needed for a well-rounded, effective leadership team.

**Learning Objectives- after completing this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. identify the characteristics of the most successful leaders in top rated non-profit organizations.
2. recognize positive leadership qualities in employees or candidates for leadership positions within their organization.
3. apply a person-centered, engaging approach to leadership by using at least three strong effective leadership behaviors.

**Categories**

Administrative

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counselor Professional Identity and Practice Issues, Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Human Growth and Development, Social and Cultural Foundations

**Literature References**

- Murcio, R., & Scalzo, G. (2021). Person-centered leadership: The practical idea as a dynamic principle for ethical leadership. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.708849>
- Lood, Q., Carlström, E., Klinga, C., & Barenfeld, E. (2024). A collaborative endeavour to integrate leadership and person-centered ethics: A focus group study on experiences from developing and realising an educational programme to support the transition towards person-centered care. *BMC Health Services Research, 24*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-024-10793-8>
- Tian, A. W., Meyer, J. P., Ilic-Balas, T., Espinoza, J. A., & Pepper, S. (2023). In search of the pseudo-transformational leader: A person-centered approach. *Journal of Business Research, 158*, 113675. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113675>

**A3- 34- The Things We Cannot Say: Supporting Grieving Kids When Rural Culture and Stigmatized Loss Collide (1.5 CE)**



**Co-founder Kris Fulkerson**  
**Coping 4 Life, United States. Coping 4 Kids, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Kris is the founder of Coping 4 Kids, started in 2007, and co-founder of the non-profit Coping 4 Life in 2016. Both organizations provide much needed social work support in low-resourced, at-risk rural communities in Southern Illinois. Kris has extensive training in grief and trauma, youth mental health needs, suicide prevention, rural mental health, and is a registered yoga teacher (RYT-200). She has presented both nationally and locally, in person and online. Most notably, Kris was invited by the National Alliance for Children’s Grief to present a national webinar on the challenges of supporting grieving children in rural America in conjunction with New York Life Foundations Day of Education. Kris volunteers with both Experience Camps and TAPS providing clinical care in a camp format to grieving children and adolescents around the country. She was honored with a 2011 NASW Social Worker of the Year award for Southern Illinois, a 2016 YWCA Woman of Distinction Award for her work helping women and children, the 2021 Horace Mann Reaching Out and Building Bridges Award by the Illinois Principals Association for her innovative mobile social work programs in rural schools, and the Dr. Phyllis Scott Leadership Fellowship Award in 2023 from Barry University. Beyond her calling to help people, Kris kayaks, travels, raises her small army, and is the main blogger on Coping’s Facebook and Instagram accounts.

**Abstract**

When stigmatized loss meets rural culture, finding support for kids can be doubly complicated. Stoicism and mental health stigma are prevalent features of rural culture around the world, which makes grieving in rural areas a complex endeavor. In addition, the current rural mental health provider shortages that exist in every state in the US severely limits access to support in the aftermath of a death, particularly for grieving children. Stigmatized losses can exacerbate this complexity by adding the taboo nature of the death into the grief process. Join me for an exploration into how to navigate rural culture while supporting kids grieving a stigmatized death. This session will include engaging activities, practical strategies, and dialogue around how best to support rural children grieving a stigmatized loss.

**Learning Objectives- after this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Define rural culture and describe how it might affect grieving children.
2. Identify stigmatized losses and how they may impact rural children.
3. Discuss ways to support rural children grieving a stigmatized loss.

**Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

## **CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

## **CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Social and Cultural Foundations

### **Literature References**

- Bottomley, J. S., Campbell, K. W., Feigelman, W., Schamber, E. L., & Rheingold, A. A. (2025). Prospective relations between stigma, guilt, shame, posttraumatic stress and prolonged grief symptoms among overdose and suicide loss survivors. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 379, 223-231. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2025.02.102>
- Dyregrov, K., & Selseng, L. B. (2021). "Nothing to mourn, he was just a drug addict" - stigma towards people bereaved by drug-related death. *Addiction Research & Theory*, 30(1), 5-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16066359.2021.1912327>
- Silvén Hagström, A. (2021). A narrative evaluation of a grief support camp for families affected by a parent's suicide. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.783066>
- Wanka, A., & Walsh, K. (2025). Place-bereavement-trajectories: Life-course experiences of loss in rural Irish communities. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 114, 103566. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2025.103566>

#### **A4- 70- From Vision to Impact: How Strategic Fundraising Can Sustain Your Mission (Non CE offering)**



**Executive Director Carly Woythaler-Runestad  
Mourning Hope Grief Center, United States**

##### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Carly Woythaler-Runestad, MHA, has served as executive director of the Mourning Hope Grief Center in Lincoln, Nebraska, for nearly 18 years. With a background in music therapy and a Master's in Health Administration from the University of Iowa, she is skilled in organizational leadership, advocacy, communication and development. During the pandemic, Carly successfully led a \$5M capital campaign, overseeing the design and construction of a 15,700-square-foot grief center. Her work emphasizes building strong community partnerships and fostering healthy communities through innovative programs. Carly has held numerous non-profit board positions, including with the American Cancer Society, Nebraska Rural Health Association, Area Health Education Statewide Advisory Board, United Way of Lincoln and Lancaster County, and Blixt Locally Grown. She also served a six-year term on the National Alliance for Children's Grief Board, including as National Board President in 2019.



**Grants and Development Director Tara Gregg  
Mourning Hope Grief Center, United States**

##### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Tara has over 15 years of professional experience working for non-profit organizations, primarily in fundraising and grant writing roles. She believes that non-profits play a vital role in creating vibrant communities, and effective fundraising can either make or break a non-profit's ability to carry out its mission. Tara received a B.A. from Southern Methodist University in Texas before earning a Master's degree in Women's and Gender Studies and a Graduate Certificate in Non-profit Management from Roosevelt University in Illinois. She served two terms as an AmeriCorps VISTA in Lawrence, Kansas, which strengthened her interest in community non-profit work. Prior to joining Mourning Hope, Tara served as a grant writer and research administrator for universities.

##### **Abstract**

Now more than ever, non-profit organizations must develop dependable yet agile approaches to funding their mission. A strong fundraising plan provides the roadmap to measure and grow financial support, even during periods of rapid service expansion and economic uncertainty.

After successfully completing a capital campaign and opening its new facility in 2021, Mourning Hope experienced a substantial increase in service utilization. The exponential growth created both opportunity and urgency: the need to diversify revenue streams, strengthen annual giving, and build financial security without placing the burden on grieving

families through program fees. At the same time, broader shifts in the fundraising landscape – declines in donor engagement, increased competition for dollars, and reliance on fewer large gifts – underscored the necessity of a strategic approach.

Mourning Hope responded by revamping its annual fundraising strategy to balance innovation with sustainability. Through data-driven decision making, intentional donor stewardship, and deeper collaboration between staff and board, the organization exceeded fundraising goals year over year. This success has allowed for the steady introduction of new programs and services while maintaining a focus on long-term stability.

This session will present Mourning Hope’s annual fundraising strategy, including the goals, tactics, and performance metrics that guide this work. Participants will learn how revenue streams such as individual giving, grants, events, and corporate partnerships are leveraged in tandem; how timelines and benchmarks keep the team accountable; and how collaboration across leadership maximizes connections and strengths.

Attendees will walk away with practical insights adaptable to organizations of any size: how to scale fundraising tactics, strengthen donor relationships, and build financial resilience even in challenging climates. By tying fundraising strategies directly to mission impact, Mourning Hope demonstrates how thoughtful planning ensures that all grieving children, adults, and families can access support at no cost.

**Learning Objectives- after this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Define and articulate the purpose and benefits of creating an annual fundraising strategy.
2. Identify and prioritize common fundraising tactics and revenue streams that can strengthen annual giving.
3. Give examples of and outline key fundraising roles for staff and board members, and demonstrate ways to leverage their skills and networks.
4. Select and apply methods to measure and sustain success, beyond revenue growth alone.
5. Apply specific strategies to deepen donor relationships and increase annual support.

**Categories**

Development/Fundraising

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

**A5- 148- Rebuilding Safety: Grief within Spanish-speaking Newcomers and Mix-Status Families (Non CE offering)**



**Community Outreach and Crisis Response Director Selina Sanchez Cristobal  
Kara**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Selina Sanchez Cristobal is Kara's Community Outreach and Crisis Response Director. For the past three years, she has provided grief support and education to communities in the San Francisco Bay Area, including schools, non-profits, private businesses, and large families. With the support of her volunteers, her program has provided grief support in the form of grief education, crisis response, and community outreach events to over 8,000 people. In aiming to build a more grief-aware community, Selina has pursued many opportunities to further her own grief education. During her time at Kara, she has earned certificates from the Institute of Critical Incident Stress Foundation in the following topics: Assisting Individuals in Crisis and Group Crisis Intervention, Understanding Suicide: Effective Tools for Prevention, Intervention, and Survivor Support, and Advanced Group Crisis Intervention. The community around her has also played a tremendous role in her training, as she has partnered with many key community members to understand the larger scope of grief services available and act as a facilitator in bringing these resources to bereaved individuals exactly where they are. Well before her work at Kara, Selina had many years of experience cultivating unconventional spaces for grief to be processed. As a defensive paralegal at a small immigration law firm, she spoke with individuals as they described the grief they had experienced due to the loss of a loved ones, homes, and their sense of identity. She also interned with the Coalición de Derechos Humanos and No More Deaths/ No Mas Muertes' Missing Migrant Hotline in Arizona before becoming the Missing Migrant Hotline Coordinator for the South Texas Human Rights Center. While working on both these hotlines, she advocated for families searching for their loved ones who disappeared while crossing the US-Mexico border. Here, she experienced firsthand the effects ambiguous loss has on a family unit and trained hotline volunteers to create compassionate spaces for families to grieve over the phone.



**Spanish Services Client Services Manager Maria Eugenia Rosas Ramirez  
Kara**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Maria Eugenia Rosas Ramirez was born and raised in Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico. She became a mental health professional in her native country, earning two bachelor's degrees and a master's in psychology, all while working in the field. In 2014, she migrated to the Bay Area, Northern California, leaving behind her familiar culture, language, and professional identity. Grieving for her language, status, and loved ones, Maria Eugenia found grief to be her guiding compass, inspiring her to support others as they start anew.

In the Bay Area, Maria Eugenia not only found a new home but also a renewed sense of purpose. She returned to academia at UC Berkeley and earned a Professional Certificate in Trauma-Informed Interventions. Driven by curiosity, she attended a Stanford lecture by Dr. Joseba Achotegui on Ulysses Syndrome, inspiring her to enroll in the Master's Degree program in Mental Health and Psychological Intervention with Immigrants, the Socially Excluded, and Minorities at the University of Barcelona. She also completed compassion training at Stanford University.

Determined not to allow borders to limit her potential for growth or that of others. She has spent the past decade supporting survivors of domestic violence, those navigating cancer, and, for three years, providing culturally competent grief services at Kara as Manager of Client Services for the Spanish Program. Her role is about offering compassion, knowledge, and respect for the dignity of monolingual Spanish speakers.

### **Abstract**

The California Department of Education defines "newcomer" as an umbrella term for students born outside the United States who have recently arrived and are new to the U.S. school system. In this session, we will discuss grief support specifically for newcomers and their families. Many of these kids are coming with more than books in their backpacks. Many are coming to the United States, fleeing for their safety and mourning the death of friends, cousins, siblings, and parents. Through our partnership with K-12 Schools and our Spanish services, we have provided workshops and school-based grief support to students in Spanish, regardless of where the death happened. This session will focus on recognizing this population's secondary, ambiguous, and suffocated losses and creating brave spaces for kids and their parents to process the grief of losing their person, home, community, and safety.

*\* We recognize that not all Newcomers speak Spanish or come from Latin American Countries; however, the experience for this session comes from working with Spanish-speaking immigrant communities, mostly from Latin American countries, in the San Francisco Bay Area.*

### **Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Recognize losses specific to the newcomer population.
2. Identify tools that promote advocacy and resilience in newcomers and their family units.
3. Facilitate conversations with newcomers about secondary losses that recognize ambiguous loss and suffocated loss within their grieving process.

### **Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

### **Content Level**

Basic

### **Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

## **A6- 96- When the Unthinkable Happens: Emergency Grief Support for Small Schools After A Student Death (1.5 CE)**



### **Executive Director and Counselor Beverly Ross**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Beverly Ross, LPC-S has extensive experience supporting children, families, and school communities through grief and loss. She is the founder and executive director of a counseling center, where she supervises a team of counselors and provides specialized counseling in grief, family, and individual therapy. She also established a dedicated grief center serving children, families, and adults, as well as a spinoff nonprofit that offers grief support in schools. Previously, she served as an elementary school counselor and teacher in Mesquite ISD, where she worked closely with students, families, and faculty to promote emotional well-being and resilience. Her expertise equips her to guide students through the challenging emotional impact of losing a classmate, providing compassionate, evidence-based support to foster healing and growth.



### **Counselor Jana Bearden**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Jana Bearden is a seasoned mental health professional specializing in supporting students and school communities through grief and loss. Through her work with school in the aftermath of a student She brings extensive experience in implementing evidence-based strategies to assist students, families, and staff in navigating the emotional and academic impacts of bereavement. Committed to fostering safe and supportive school environments, Jana collaborates with educators and administrators to develop structured, compassionate responses to student grief, ensuring that every child receives timely and appropriate support during challenging times.



### **Counselor Devon McCain**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Devon McCain MA, LPC combines her extensive background with her work as a counselor in her grief work with schools. As a teacher for many years, Devon has seen the challenges that children and young adults face growing up. Out of a desire to help these young people know that they are worthy of love and belonging, she felt led into the field of professional counseling. She is also dedicated to helping children, teachers, administrators and families deal with the sudden loss of a member of the school community. She feel strongly that her mission is to offer hope and healing to her small community.

### **Abstract**

The ripple effects of a student death are profound, leaving the entire school community grappling with confusion and immeasurable sadness. Many rural schools will deal with such

a devastating loss at some point in the year, but few are able to provide adequate grief support when that time comes.

Presented by the team from Jenny's Hope in Grief, a Texas-based mental health program devoted to guiding schools through the first stages of grief after a sudden loss, this session lays out 7 steps every small school district should take to effectively offer immediate mental health support to grieving students, staff, and families. Under-staffed and often underfunded schools will find real value in the experience our team has gleaned from our boots-on-the-ground work in school districts across the state. Gain a deeper understanding of the emotional and psychological needs of grieving students and how to empower teachers and school staff with the language, resources, and coping mechanisms to assist students on the first day of a long grief journey.

As part of the session, you will receive access to invaluable resources to use in the classroom, including age-appropriate activities and guides to facilitate communication. Feel empowered to meet grief with empathy, compassion and practical tools that will help your community through one of its very worst days.

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. identify six steps to be completed in advance of a grief crisis in the schools.
2. give examples of age-appropriate information about a school-related death that could be communicated to students, staff, and families.
3. determine a possible plan for teachers and students the day immediately following a death.
4. recognize four strategies to use with students who are affected by the death.
5. plan ways to support school staff and students in the days and weeks following a death.

**Categories**

Outreach and Community Collaboration (schools, Boys and Girls Club, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Human Growth and Development, Social and Cultural Foundations, Group Dynamics and Counseling, Wellness and Prevention

**Literature References**

- Joy, C., Staniland, L., Mazzucchelli, T. G., Skinner, S., Cuddeford, L., & Breen, L. J. (2024). *What bereaved children want to know about death and grief*. **Journal of Child and Family Studies**, **33**, 327–337. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-023-02694-x>
- Alvis, L., Zhang, N., Sandler, I. N., & Kaplow, J. B. (2023). Developmental manifestations of grief in children and adolescents: Caregivers as key grief

facilitators. **Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma**, **16**, 447–457.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-021-00435-0>

- Schonfeld, D. J., Demaria, T., Nasir, A., & Kumar, S. (2024). Supporting the grieving child and family: Clinical report. **Pediatrics**, **154**(1), e2024067212.  
<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2024-067212>

**A7- 105- Poetic Pathways: Using Poetry Prompts to Support Grieving Families Impacted by Addiction (1.5 CE)**



**Director of Learning & Content Development Evelynn Moon  
Good Grief, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Evelynn Moon has over 15 years of experience training thousands of educators and professionals on topics such as peer leadership, social emotional learning, empathy, self-care, and grief support. At Good Grief, Evelyynn works with schools and districts to enhance grief literacy through workshops, training, and curriculum. She prepares volunteers to lead peer support programs in the Family Centers, oversees virtual learning initiatives, and curates a monthly webinar series for continuing education. Evelyynn is also a key organizer of the annual Good Grief Spring Symposium and contributed as a subject matter expert in developing the Good Grief Schools eLearning platform. In addition to her role at Good Grief, Evelyynn coaches clients at BetterUp, where she focuses on clients who are experiencing a transition and would benefit from non-judgmental support and accountability. Before joining Good Grief, Evelyynn worked in Social Emotional Learning, Mentorship, Peer Leadership, DEIB in Schools, and Comprehensive Sex Education with the Center for Supportive Schools.



**Community Outreach & Training Manager Gina Kornfeind  
Good Grief, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Gina Kornfeind, MSW, M.Ed, is the Community Outreach and Training Manager for Good Grief. In addition, she facilitates several support groups on Nights of Support at the Good Grief - Princeton Center. For the past 30 years, Gina was a hospital-based Pediatric Palliative Care and Bereavement Social Worker. She is a native Californian and recent (and very happy) transplant to NJ! She holds a Dual Masters Degree in Early Childhood Special Education and Social Work. Gina is a huge advocate of providing opportunities for Post-Traumatic Growth. In her spare time, she loves to bake, hike, walk her dogs Reilly and Clover in the woods, and watch all sports!

**Abstract**

This session explores the power of poetry as a tool for families grieving the impact of addiction. Addiction-related deaths are often complicated by stigma, silence, and fractured relationships, leaving families with unique layers of pain. Poetry provides a safer container for expression, imagination, and connection.

Through interactive exercises, participants will experience how writing prompts can invite grieving families to name their emotions, share their stories, and reframe their grief. Attendees will leave with a set of practical poetry prompts designed specifically for addiction-related grief, adaptable for different ages and family dynamics.

The session combines experiential writing, small-group reflection, and facilitator-led discussion to demonstrate how creative expression supports resilience and meaning-making. Participants will also explore considerations for creating a safer space, honoring cultural differences, and using poetry in both clinical and community settings.

By the end of the session, attendees will feel equipped to integrate poetry-based activities into their practice or programming, offering grieving families impacted by addiction new language and creative pathways for expression of their experiences.

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Identify three unique challenges faced by families grieving losses related to addiction.
2. Demonstrate at least two poetry prompts that can be used to support grieving children and families.
3. Create a safe framework for incorporating poetry writing into grief support settings.
4. Compare how poetry-based approaches may differ across developmental stages or family roles.
5. Select appropriate prompts for different cultural and community contexts.

**Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

**Content Level**

Basic

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills, Diversity and Social Justice

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Human Growth and Development, Social and Cultural Foundations, Group Dynamics and Counseling, Wellness and Prevention

**Literature References**

- Thatcher, C. (2022). In dialogue: How writing to the dead and the living can increase self-awareness in those bereaved by addiction. *OMEGA – Journal of Death and Dying*, 86(2), 434–456. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222820976277>
- Jallo, N., Kinser, P. A., Eglavitch, M., & Meshberg-Cohen, S. (2024). Giving voice to women with substance use disorder: Findings from expressive writing about trauma. *Women's Health Reports*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1089/whr.2023.0173>
- Kwok I, Keyssar JR, Spitzer L, Kojimoto G, Hauser J, Ritchie CS, Rabow M. Poetry as a Healing Modality in Medicine: Current State and Common Structures for Implementation and Research. *J Pain Symptom Manage*. 2022 Aug;64(2):e91-e100. doi: 10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2022.04.170. Epub 2022 May 15. PMID: 35584740.

- Gerber, K., Brijnath, B., Lock, K., Bryant, C., Hills, D., & Hjorth, L. (2022). 'Unprepared for the depth of my feelings' - Capturing grief in older people through research poetry. *Age and ageing*, 51(3), afac030. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afac030>
- Schell Pate, Christina, "Expressive Arts Therapy and Grief: A Literature Review" (2024). *Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses*. 831. [https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive\\_theses/831](https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses/831)

## **A8- 151- Hidden Healing: What Numbers Miss and Stories Reveal in Grief Support (1.5 CE)**



**Director of Education and Innovative Programs Lane Pease  
Kate's Club, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Lane Pease, MS, NCC, is the Director of Education and Innovative Programs at Kate's Club. Kate's Club is a Georgia based non-profit that provides support to bereaved children and their families and young adults. Lane ensures the quality of all Kate's Club programming. Lane has trained thousands of professionals on topics around bereaved youth and created Kate's Club's school-based support. She led Kate's Club's initiative to support grieving youth in the juvenile justice court system. She also leads the young adult support program. In addition, she serves on the education committee of Resilient Georgia and on the Education Committee of the National Alliance for Children's Grief. Lane has created resources on helping families after a domestic violence murder/suicide for the Georgia Commission on Family Violence. She co-authored *We Come Together as One: Helping Families Grieve, Share, and Heal the Kate's Club Way*. Personally, she raised two grieving children who are now young adults. Lane holds a BA in Philosophy from Georgia State University and an MS in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Mercer University.



**Director of Outcomes and Outreach Ashlie Evans  
Kate's Club, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Ashlie Evans, MHA, is the Director of Outreach & Outcomes at Kate's Club in Atlanta. Ashlie oversees strategic data initiatives that inform and enhance programming for children and families navigating loss. With over seven years of experience in data systems optimization, community engagement, and outcome-based evaluation, she brings a unique blend of analytical rigor and compassionate leadership. She also enjoys working with the children and families directly as they navigate grief. She has a background in youth mental health and holds a Master of Health Administration from Purdue Global University and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Howard University. Her work centers on building inclusive, evidence-informed programs that drive meaningful impact in schools and communities.

### **Abstract**

How do we truly measure healing after loss? Numbers alone rarely tell the full story. This session invites participants inside a groundbreaking study that puts the Bereavement Needs Assessment (BNA), an evaluation tool designed for measuring grief distresses and screening for risk factors, such as PTSD and Depression, to the test in open-ended, peer-support groups for grieving children and caregivers. Using mixed-methods design, we compared youth self-reports with caregiver narratives, and what we found challenges the way grief organizations think about evaluation.

The research uncovered a surprising pattern: while many children’s scores remained static or even declined, caregivers described visible growth, resilience, and positive transformation. Adding qualitative questions revealed why. Behind the numbers were powerful protective factors—strengthened caregiver-child bonds, moments of validation, renewed coping skills, and restored self-esteem—that traditional tools often miss.

This session is not just about one organization’s evaluation, but about a shift in perspective for the field. Attendees will explore how grief organizations can modify programming when scores plateau, use mixed methods to capture richer data, and build trust with funders by communicating that healing unfolds at different paces. By the end, participants will leave with practical strategies to balance metrics with meaning—ensuring that their evaluations reflect not only what can be measured, but also what truly matters.

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Identify gaps between quantitative grief assessments and lived caregiver observations, and explain why these difference matter for evaluation.
2. Demonstrate how evaluation data can guide program adjustments when outcomes plateau or decline.
3. Outline practical methods for blending qualitative questions into standardized tools to capture deeper insights
4. Compare static or declining assessment scores with qualitative themes to uncover protective factors that drive healing
5. Create compelling strategies for communicating nuanced, mixed methods results to funders and stakeholders with confidence.

**Categories**

Research, Outcomes, and Measurements

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Research and Program Evaluation, Assessment

**Literature References**

- Alvis, L., Oosterhoff, B., Hoppe, R., Giang, C., & Kaplow, J. B. (2024). Measurement invariance of the Grief facilitation Inventory with respect to youth gender, race, ethnicity, and age. *Death Studies*, 1-6.
- Alvis, L. M., Dodd, C. G., Oosterhoff, B., Hill, R. M., Rolon-Arroyo, B., Logsdon, T., Layne, C. M., & Kaplow, J. B. (2022). Caregiver behaviors and childhood maladaptive grief: Initial validation of the Grief Facilitation Inventory. *Death Stud*, 46(6), 1307-1315.
- Schonfeld, D. J., Demaria, T., Nasir, A., Kumar, S., Committee On Psychosocial Aspects Of, C., Family, H., Council On, C., & Disasters. (2024). Supporting the Grieving Child and Family: Clinical Report. *Pediatrics*, 154(1).

- Wallace Chi Ho, C., Grace Suk Man, L., Miranda Mei Mui, L., Molin Kwok Yin, L., Clare Tsz Kiu, Y., & Jody Ka-Wing, W. (2022). Facing the loss of siblings in childhood: Interactions and dynamics between bereaved siblings and their parents. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*, 66, e1-e8.

## **A9- 113- Full Circle: Transforming Grief into Service (Non CE offering)**



### **Angela Melvin**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Angela Melvin is the Founder of Valerie's House, the only organization in Southwest Florida with its sole mission to help children grieve. A fourth generation native of Southwest Florida, Angela's mother, Valerie, died in a car accident in 1987 in Fort Myers when Angela was 10 years old. Angela says, "With a place like Valerie's House, I would have connected with children like me and it could have made all the difference in my life." With locations in Fort Myers, Naples Punta Gorda, and now in Northwest Florida in Pensacola, Valerie's House provides children who have lost a loved one a place where they can grieve together, connect with others their own age and learn that loss doesn't have to limit their dreams. Valerie's House opened with 20 children in 2016 and has grown to help more than 4,000 children and their caregivers find strength and resilience through their loss. A University of Florida graduate, Angela spent 10 years working as a TV reporter around the country and then on to become a Communications Director for a United States Congressman on Capitol Hill before returning to her hometown in 2013, and shortly thereafter starting Valerie's House. Angela was honored as a Women of Distinction in 2020, News-Press "Hero of the Year" finalist in 2017, a News-Press "Person of the Year" finalist in 2016, and a Gulfshore Business "40 under 40" in 2015. Valerie's House was named Rising Non-Profit of the Year by The Community Foundation in 2017 and was a finalist for the Horizon Council Non-Profit of the Year Award in 2017. Angela was also honored as a 2022 Woman of Distinction by the Republican Women of Southwest Florida.



### **Stori McDougall**

#### **Young Adult & Program Curriculum Coordinator**

Stori was born and raised in Southwest Florida and has always had a passion for mental health advocacy. In 2015, her mother died unexpectedly, and Stori found her way to Valerie's House as a teen participant. Throughout her years at Valerie's House, she gained the skills necessary to process her grief and grew to want to give back and help other grieving teens and families. After graduating high school, Stori moved to Boston, and stayed connected to Valerie's House as a participant and eventually a co-lead for the Valerie's House virtual young adults support group. Stori graduated from Boston University with a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and moved back to her hometown in 2024 to work full-time with Valerie's House. Her long-term goals are to continue her education and eventually work as a clinical psychologist, helping children and adolescents work through mental health, trauma, and grief. Stori is also currently pursuing her master's degree in Thanatology.



**Alexis Dehetre**

**Teen Ambassador and Executive Assistant**

Alexis Dehetre serves as the Executive Assistant at Valerie's House, where she combines her professional experience with personal grief experience. Alexis spent three years as a participant in the Valerie's House program as a grieving child where our CEO and Founder Angela Melvin was her group leader. This firsthand experience allows her to deeply understand the challenges families face in their grief journeys. In her current position, Alexis works closely with the CEO to ensure the smooth operation of programs that support grieving families. Alexis also fundraises alongside the CEO. She graduated from Florida Gulf Coast University with a Master's Degree in Business and a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and is now pursuing her Master's Degree in Mental Health Counseling from the University of North Florida. With a heartfelt commitment to the families she serves, Alexis is dedicated to fostering healing and connection, believing in the mission that no child grieves alone.



**Teen Ambassador Emely Calderon**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

This presenter is a participant of the grief support program. She came to our program when she was 10 years old after the death of her mom and was a consistent participant, along with her 2 sisters. She started volunteering at age 16 and now facilitates groups, is a mentor, and is currently pursuing a degree in Social Work.

**Abstract**

At Valerie's House, teens, young adults, and caregivers who have participated in our peer support program often choose to give back by supporting other grieving children and families. Through our Ambassador Program, participants step into meaningful peer support and volunteer roles that help create connection, comfort, and community.

This session explores how Valerie's House identifies, trains, and supports ambassadors in safe, developmentally appropriate ways while offering practical ideas for building ambassador programs rooted in lived experience, peer connection, and ongoing support.

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Understand the role of Teen, Young Adult, and Caregiver Ambassadors—individuals who have experienced loss, found support, and now give back by helping others in their grief journey.
2. Learn how to identify, train, and support active and past participants who are ready to step into peer leadership in a safe, developmentally appropriate way.
3. Explore the different ways ambassadors can get involved, from supporting group nights to writing donor letters, speaking at events, helping with tours, tabling in the community, and helping younger kids.
4. Recognize how peer-to-peer leadership supports healing—for both the ambassadors and the children they serve.

5. Walk away with practical ideas to build, grow, or strengthen an ambassador program within your own organization.

**Categories**

Volunteers

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

## **A10- 28- From Eruption to Expression: Guiding Children’s Grief in Big Energy Rooms & Spaces (1.5 CE)**



**Therapist Stephanie L Heitkemper**  
**Resilient Minds Counseling, United States.**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Stephanie Heitkemper, PhD, LPC, RPT-S, FT is the owner of Resilient Minds Counseling in Westminster, Colorado, where she specializes in grief and trauma. A compassionate and skilled Licensed Professional Counselor and Registered Play Therapist Supervisor, she brings extensive expertise in creating therapeutic spaces and leading bereavement trainings adaptable to diverse group sizes, age ranges, and settings. With over a decade of practice, Stephanie has developed a deep understanding of both visible and subtle behaviors in grieving children and families, emphasizing inclusion across developmental levels and abilities. She integrates play therapy, EMDR, creative expression, bibliotherapy, and sensory-based approaches to create spaces where grievers of all ages can access regulation, explore big feelings, and build resilience. Known for her dynamic energy, she weaves play, movement, and imaginative expression into her work, offering developmentally appropriate, embodied opportunities for healing. Her knowledge of grief’s impact on brain development informs interventions that provide tangible and focused ways to process loss. A published author, Stephanie contributed to *Grief in the Classroom* and multiple resources for the National Alliance for Children’s Grief, including *When Someone Dies: Activity Cards*, *Supporting Children Who Are Grieving a Death by Suicide*, and *Creating a Space for Children in a Funeral Home*. Recognized as a Fellow in Thanatology, she combines advanced training, hands-on experience, and creativity to equip professionals and communities with practical, compassionate tools to support grieving individuals.



**Therapist Meredith R Hammond**  
**Meredith Hammond Counseling, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Meredith Hammond is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Registered Play Therapist-Supervisor, and EMDRIA Approved Consultant who brings energy, creativity, and a spirit of adventure to her clinical work. She integrates play therapy, sand tray, and sensory-based approaches with an emphasis on flexibility and quick pivots, meeting clients exactly where they are in the moment. Meredith’s playful and dynamic style creates space for clients to explore big emotions, experiment with new ways of expressing themselves, and build resilience through movement, sensation, and imaginative play. As a trainer and supervisor, Meredith equips clinicians to stay present, adaptive, and attuned—embracing the unexpected turns of therapy as opportunities for deeper connection and growth.

### **Abstract**

Sensory-rich spaces such as “volcano rooms” provide grieving children with opportunities to release big energy, embody emotions, and process loss in developmentally meaningful ways.

These environments can be profoundly healing when children are supported in using their sensory systems to explore and integrate their grief.

This interactive workshop will equip participants with practical, sensory-informed tools to enhance the therapeutic potential of volcano rooms while ensuring emotional and physical safety. Drawing on current research about how grief involves learning, cultural and relational meaning-making, and creative expressive modalities, the session offers a multi-dimensional framework for integrating sensory play, movement, and symbolic expression. Research also shows that play enhances executive functioning in children—supporting their ability to regulate emotions, plan, adapt, and solve problems under stress.

Through experiential role-play and case scenarios, participants will build confidence in attuning to children’s cues, scaffolding regulation strategies, and guiding embodied grief expression. By linking sensory regulation with grief-focused interventions, this session empowers clinical professionals and volunteers to create safe, supportive opportunities for children to lean into their sensory systems as part of the grieving process.

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Describe the role of movement in supporting children’s grief expression and regulation.
2. Compare between unregulated and regulated grief responses and analyze how sensory environments impact children’s coping.
3. Identify sensory-informed strategies to guide children’s sensory and emotional regulation in big energy spaces.
4. Demonstrate at least two techniques for balancing freedom of expression with safety and containment in sensory-rich spaces.

**Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Human Growth and Development

**Literature References**

- Alvis, L., Zhang, N., Sandler, I. N., & Kaplow, J. B. (2022). Developmental manifestations of grief in children and adolescents: Caregivers as key grief facilitators. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 16(2), 447–457. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-021-00435-0>
- Burns, M., Griese, B., King, S., & Talmi, A. (2020). Childhood bereavement: Understanding prevalence and related adversity in the United States. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 90(4), 391–405. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000442>
- Chandran, S., Raman, V., & Shiva, L. (2025). Understanding grief in children: A narrative review. *Journal of Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 21(2), 122–129. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09731342251328150>

- Fraser, T. (2023). Grief walking in the sandtray. *World Journal for Sand Therapy Practice*, 1(4), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.58997/wjstp.v1i4.16>
- Gibb R, Coelho L, Van Rootselaar NA, Halliwell C, MacKinnon M, Plomp I and Gonzalez CLR (2021) Promoting Executive Function Skills in Preschoolers Using a Play-Based Program.

## **C1- 12- The Brain, the Heart, & the Human: Purposefully Building Neurodiverse Grief Camp Spaces (1.5 CE)**



### **Senior National Clinical Manager Kiri E Meyer**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Kiri Meyer is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) in Wisconsin, a Nationally Certified Counselor (NCC), a Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT-200), and has her Child Life academic certificate. Kiri has been working and volunteering at grief camps for 17 years. Kiri is also very privileged to have presented at a variety of conferences and invited events to speak on trauma, bereavement, mindfulness, and well-being.

#### **Abstract**

At first glance, this may look like a "specialty workshop" in helping individuals with neurodivergence ... but when we really take a moment, we realize that each brain that shows up at camp works in its own unique way, so in short, this is a "general workshop" to help think about *every* brain, *every* heart, and *every* human that shows up to camp. Together we will dig into specific foundational aspects of your camp process to enhance how we are setting our camp spaces up for campers and their families from the first point of contact to the final high five of the camp program - all with a neurodiverse lens. The more mindful we are about purposefully building neurodiverse grief camp spaces, the more accessible our programs become to *everyone* in our communities!

#### **Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Compose five foundational neurodiverse practices to use in building or enhancing camp processes.
2. Identify common areas of growth in camp programs that would benefit from utilization of neurodiverse practices.
3. Demonstrate three practices within the camp process that will benefit from utilizing neurodiverse practices for EVERY camper and family.

#### **Categories**

Camps

#### **Content Level**

Intermediate

#### **Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

#### **CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

#### **CE Content Information Counseling**

Wellness and Prevention

#### **Literature References**

- Black, A. (2024). Trauma-Informed Care within Neurodivergent Populations.
- Dahlstrom-Hakki, I., Chang, M. A., Breideband, T., Alstad, Z., Martin, W., Arista, A. R., ... & Hartman, C. (2025). Effective Approaches to Co-Design with Neurodivergent and Historically Minoritized Youth to Facilitate Inclusive and Accessible Learning.

In *Proceedings of the 19th International Conference of the Learning Sciences-ICLS 2025*, pp. 2399-2407. International Society of the Learning Sciences.

- Potter, J. (2025). Adjusting Your LENS: Learn and Educate with Neurodiverse Students.
- Spielvogel, B., Ricks, M., Froehly, M., Sibthorp, J., Williams, T., Friedman, W., & Hetz, T. (2023). Making Summer Camp Inclusive: Staff Perspectives from Two National Youth-Serving Organizations. *Journal of Youth Development*, 18(2), 1-24.

**C2- 156- Hidden in Plain Sight: Grief Symptoms Mimicking Mental Health and Delayed Symptom Presentation (1.5 CE)**



**Dr. Brian K Shaffer**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Dr. Brian K. Shaffer is a licensed professional counselor, certified alcohol, drug and addiction counseling practitioner, clinical chaplain, thanatologist, and approved clinical supervisor with 25 years of experience in spiritual and pastoral care, grief, loss, bereavement, trauma, and mental and behavioral health. His work has spanned both private practice and community-based settings. Dr. Shaffer's professional passions include working with homeless and disadvantaged populations as well as helping faith communities develop and implement mental and behavioral health social action programs. He currently serves as a professor in Counselor Education and Supervision while maintaining a private telehealth therapy practice. Throughout his career, Dr. Shaffer has served as mentor and clinical supervisor to numerous students and residents in counseling. His specialty areas include working with adults and families struggling with addiction issues, grief and loss, and trauma, as well as providing chaplain services. Dr. Shaffer regularly conducts workshops on death, dying, and bereavement as well as mental health and addiction topics. He is actively engaged in research within these areas to contribute to both academic and clinical knowledge. His doctoral research focused on the bio-psychosocial-spiritual needs of retired clergy. Dr. Shaffer holds a Master of Theological and Pastoral Studies, a Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Capella University, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education and Supervision from Capella University.

**Abstract**

The intersection of normal grief responses and mental health symptomatology in children and adolescents presents significant diagnostic challenges for healthcare professionals. This presentation will examine how typical grief reactions can masquerade as other mental health conditions, particularly ADHD and depression, leading to potential misdiagnosis and inappropriate treatment interventions. Additionally, we will explore the phenomenon of delayed grief symptom presentation, where manifestations may not appear until months or years after the initial loss, further complicating timely and accurate assessment.

**Background and Rationale**

Childhood bereavement affects approximately 5% of children in the United States by age 15, with higher rates observed in lower socioeconomic groups. Despite this prevalence, there remains insufficient understanding among healthcare providers regarding the complex presentations of grief in young populations. The diagnostic overlap between normal grief responses and psychiatric conditions creates a critical need for improved clinical assessment protocols and professional education.

Normal grief in youth manifests through various emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and physical symptoms that can easily be mistaken for other mental health conditions. Children experiencing grief may display concentration difficulties, hypervigilance, restlessness, and emotional dysregulation—symptoms that closely mirror ADHD presentations. Similarly, the sadness, withdrawal, sleep disturbances, and appetite changes associated with grief can be indistinguishable from major depressive episodes.

The challenge is further compounded by the potential for delayed symptom onset. Unlike adult grief, which typically follows more predictable patterns, youth grief can present with significant delays, sometimes appearing a year or more after the initial loss. This delayed presentation creates additional diagnostic complexity, as the temporal relationship between the loss and symptom emergence may not be immediately apparent to clinicians who did not treat the child at the time of bereavement.

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Differentiate between normal grief responses and psychiatric symptoms in children and adolescents
2. Identify key diagnostic markers that distinguish grief-related symptoms from ADHD and depression
3. Recognize risk factors for delayed grief symptom presentation in youth populations
4. Implement assessment strategies that account for both immediate and delayed grief responses
5. Develop appropriate intervention approaches that address grief-specific needs rather than misdiagnosed conditions

**Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

**Content Level**

Advanced

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Assessment, Human Growth and Development

**Literature References**

- **Melhem, N. M., Porta, G., Shamseddeen, W., Payne, M. W., & Brent, D. A. (2011).** Grief in children and adolescents bereaved by sudden parental death. *JAMA Psychiatry, 68*(9), 911-919.  
<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/1107280>
  - This longitudinal study examined grief reactions in 176 children and adolescents following sudden parental death, providing crucial insights into the course and manifestations of youth grief that can inform differential diagnosis.
- **Spuij, M., Reitz, E., Prinzie, P., Stikkelbroek, Y., de Roos, C., & Boelen, P. A. (2012).** Distinctiveness of symptoms of prolonged grief, depression, and post-traumatic stress in bereaved children and adolescents. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 21*(12), 673-679. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3506830/>
  - Research demonstrating that prolonged grief symptoms can be distinguished from depression and PTSD in youth populations, supporting the need for careful differential diagnosis in bereaved children.

- **Rosner, R., Comtesse, H., Vogel, A., & Doering, B. K.** (2021). CBT for prolonged grief in children and adolescents: A randomized clinical trial. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 178(4), 294-304. <https://psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ajp.2020.20050548>
  - Clinical trial evidence supporting the distinctiveness of prolonged grief disorder in youth and the effectiveness of grief-specific interventions, highlighting the importance of accurate diagnosis.
- **Alderfer, M. A., Lindahl Norberg, A., Mooney-Doyle, K., & Mendez Sanchez, R.** (2021). Developmental manifestations of grief in children and adolescents: Caregivers as key grief facilitators. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 89, 102076. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8794619/>
  - Comprehensive review of developmental considerations in youth grief, providing framework for understanding age-appropriate grief responses versus pathological presentations.
- **Liu, H., Sakolsky, D. J., Diler, R., Goldstein, T. R., Goldstein, B. I., Monk, K., ... & Birmaher, B.** (2024). The associations of complicated grief, depression, posttraumatic growth, and hope among bereaved youth. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 46(5), 690-696. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28705039/>
  - Study examining the relationships between complicated grief and depression in bereaved youth, providing empirical support for the diagnostic distinctions necessary to prevent misdiagnosis.
- **Kaplow, J. B., Saunders, J., Angold, A., & Costello, E. J.** (2010). Psychiatric symptoms in bereaved versus nonbereaved youth and young adults: A longitudinal epidemiological study. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 49(11), 1145-1154.
  - Longitudinal epidemiological study comparing psychiatric symptoms between bereaved and non-bereaved youth, providing critical data on the prevalence and nature of grief-related symptoms that may be mistaken for other disorders.

### **C3- 27- Processing Grief Through Play: Hands-On Techniques and Tools for Supporting Children Across Settings (1.5 CE)**



#### **Professor Educator Kristen Watkins**

##### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Kristen Watkins is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Registered Play Therapist Supervisor in California. She is currently an Assistant Professor at Loma Linda University in the Doctorate of Marriage and Family Therapy Program. She is the Camp Director of Camp Morning: Grief & Loss services for Children and Families and co-operator of The Morning Sunrise Foundation Inc.



#### **Professor Educator Danielle Lascano**

##### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Danielle Lascano is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Registered Play Therapist Supervisor in California. She is currently an Associate Professor at Azusa Pacific University and the Director of the MA of Counseling Psychology program. She is a certified grief professional who specializes in children & adolescent grief Therapy co-operator of The Morning Sunrise Foundation Inc.

#### **Abstract**

This intermediate-level workshop provides hands-on training in play therapy interventions designed to support children and adolescents experiencing grief and loss. Participants will explore developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive approaches that can be applied in school, office, and virtual settings. Emphasis will be placed on honoring the uniqueness of each child's grief journey while addressing the long-term risks of unprocessed loss. Through lecture, discussion, and experiential learning, participants will practice applying the therapeutic powers of play to help clients express emotions, build coping skills, strengthen resilience, and improve self-regulation. By the conclusion of the workshop, clinicians will be equipped to integrate play therapy strategies into grief work in ways that are affirming, developmentally responsive, and culturally attuned—ultimately enhancing their effectiveness in supporting bereaved children and adolescents.

Presenters Kristen Watkins, LMFT, RPT, and Danielle Lascano, LMFT, RPT, bring extensive clinical and teaching experience to this training. Kristen Watkins is an Assistant Professor in the MA in Counseling Psychology program at Azusa Pacific University and Camp Director of Camp Morning: Grief & Loss Services for Children and Families. Danielle Lascano is an Associate Professor and Program Director of the MA in Counseling Psychology program at Azusa Pacific University, as well as a Certified Grief Professional specializing in child and adolescent grief therapy. Together, they bring over a decade of experience in teaching, counseling, and play therapy practice.

#### **Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Identify and assess grief and loss in children and adolescents
2. Develop and apply developmentally appropriate play therapy interventions for children and adolescents experiencing grief and loss

3. Discuss and examine with cultural aspects of death and dying

**Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship

**Literature References**

- Doka, K. J. (2014). Children mourning, mourning children. In Taylor & Francis eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315798523>
- D'Alton, S.V.; Ridings, L.; Williams, C.; & Phillips, S. (2022). The bereavement experiences of children following sibling death: an integrative review. *The Journal of Pediatric Nursing*.66. Pgs 82-99.
- Khosravi, M. (2021). Worden's task-based approach for supporting people bereaved by Covid-19. *Curr Psychology*. 40 (11): 5735-5736.
- Klassen, K., Hamilton, A., & Peabody, M. A. (2023). *Seriously Therapeutic Play with LEGO®: The Guidebook for Helping Professionals*. Taylor & Francis.
- Sandler, I., Yun-Tien, J., Zhang, N., Wolchik, S., & Thieleman, K. (2021). Grief as a predictor of long-term risk for suicidal ideation and attempts of parentally bereaved children and adolescents. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 34(6), 1159–1170. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.22759>.
- Szuhany, K. L., Malgaroli, M., Miron, C. D., & Simon, N. M. (2021). Prolonged grief disorder: Course, diagnosis, assessment, and treatment. *FOCUS*, 19(2), 161–172. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.focus.20200052>.
- Turner, R. (2020). Playing through the unimaginable: Play therapy for traumatic loss. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 29(2), 96-103

**C4- 50- Measuring the Impact of a Family-Based Group Counseling Program Through a Randomized Control Trial (1.5 CE)**



**Director of Evaluation and Research Jeffrey Lin**  
**Judi's House/JAG Institute, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Jeff Lin, PhD, is the Director of Evaluation and Research of Judi's House/JAG Institute. He has a passion for applying research evidence to develop public policies and practices that best serve the community. With decades of experience working in partnership with public and non-profit agencies, he has seen the impact that good research can have on people's lives. Jeff was a sociology professor for 15 years, focusing his research and teaching on addressing pressing public issues such as criminal justice and youth services reforms. This experience deeply informs his commitment to producing data and evidence that can help bereaved children and families.



**Chief Executive Officer Micki Burns**  
**Judi's House/JAG Institute, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Michaelleen (Micki) Burns, PhD, is the Chief Executive Officer at Judi's House/JAG Institute (JH/JAG) and adjunct faculty at the University of Colorado. JH/JAG is a comprehensive family bereavement center in Metro Denver. She serves as the Vice President on the board of the National Alliance for Children's Grief and is an advisor to Speaking Grief, a national public media initiative seeking to the grief experience. A Licensed Psychologist with more than two decades of experience providing therapeutic assessment and support to families facing adversity, Micki has witnessed the lasting impact of unaddressed grief. Her practice is focused on supporting families who have experienced the loss of a child and specializes in working with those grieving suicide and overdose deaths. She is dedicated to ensuring appropriate care is available for all and raising childhood bereavement to a level of critical public importance. Before becoming the CEO, Micki oversaw the direct service, research, and training departments at JH/JAG, working towards a vision where no child is alone in grief.



**Assistant Director of In-House Care Alicia Carney**  
**Judi's House/JAG Institute, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Alicia Carney is a licensed professional counselor with over ten years of specialization in the field of childhood bereavement. She graduated from a CACREP-accredited university with a Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. Alicia is the Assistant Director of In-

House Care at Judi's House, a Denver-based nonprofit dedicated to helping children and families grieving a death find connection and healing. She is also a Certified Pathfinders Provider and has been trained in the Comprehensive Grief Care model through Judi's House. In her current role, Alicia is responsible for managing the daily clinical and administrative operations of direct service provision to ensure the highest quality of care. She also collaborates with the Evaluation and Research department to collect and assess data on clinical outcomes to improve programmatic efficacy. Alicia values transparency, clear communication, and operational efficiency, and she is known for her attention to detail and critical thinking skills. She is often engaged in creative problem solving to maximize the use of resources, support employee and trainee development, and curate the best possible therapeutic group experience for clients. When she is not at work, Alicia enjoys travel, live music, and the beautiful Colorado outdoors.

### **Abstract**

Pathfinders is a ten-session program that delivers grief education, coping skills, caregiving skills, and therapeutic support to bereaved children and families. The multi-family, multi-group format allows for purposeful segmentation based on developmental age and cause of death. The program aims to impact grief, depression, and anxiety, while strengthening grief literacy and coping skills. This session will report on the initial findings of a randomized control trial using a waitlist control design that compares the outcomes for an intervention group receiving services against a control group awaiting services. This design creates equivalent groups for comparison, allowing for reliable measurement of program participation on outcomes of interest across different types of clients (i.e., caregivers, children, developmental age, cause of death). Importantly, this method ensures that all study participants receive services.

The presenters will describe the rationale for this approach, including considerations related to the ethics of service provision, data reliability, generalizability of findings, and dissemination. They will also discuss the programmatic adjustments that were necessary to carry out the study. Finally, the presenters will review the results of preliminary analyses exploring the program's impacts on grief, anxiety, depression, and coping skills. The implications of the findings for clinical practice, evaluation, and policy will be discussed.

### **Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Explain how a randomized waitlist control design can effectively demonstrate program impacts.
2. Discuss the differential outcomes of a multi-family, multi-group therapeutic intervention for bereaved children and families.
3. Gain a deeper understanding of the importance of investing in rigorous research to establish an empirical evidence base that supports programming designed to serve bereaved children and families.
4. Describe the goals and structure of the family-based group therapy program being evaluated.

### **Categories**

Research, Outcomes, and Measurements

### **Content Level**

Intermediate

### **Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Research and Program Evaluation, Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship

**Literature References**

- Alvis, L., Zhang, N., Sandler, I.N. et al. Developmental Manifestations of Grief in Children and Adolescents: Caregivers as Key Grief Facilitators. *Journ Child Adol Trauma* 16, 447–457 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-021-00435-0>
- Henning E, Germann JN, Holder N, et al. The Impact of Family Bereavement Interventions: Qualitative Feedback Identifies Needs. *Clinical Practice in Pediatric Psychology*. 2021;9(3):283-295. doi:[10.1037/cpp0000416](https://doi.org/10.1037/cpp0000416)
- Kustanti CY, Fang HF, Linda Kang X, Chiou JF, Wu SC, Yunitri N, Chu H, Chou KR. The Effectiveness of Bereavement Support for Adult Family Caregivers in Palliative Care: A Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials. *J Nurs Scholarsh*. 2021 Mar;53(2):208-217. doi: 10.1111/jnu.12630. Epub 2021 Feb 5. PMID: 33547736.

## **C5- Research & Evaluation Panel (Non-CE offering)**

### **Moderator: Andy McNeil**



#### **CEO Andy McNeil**

**The Satori Group, LLC, United States. The Compassionate Friends (TCF), United States. Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), United States**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Andy McNeil, MA, is an author, trainer, bereavement support professional, and non-profit leader with three decades of experience providing support to bereaved people of all ages. He is the CEO of The Satori Group, LLC, a national education, management, and consulting company, providing education and consultation to non-profit organizations nationally. He has served as the Chief Executive Officer for The National Alliance for Children's Grief, the Executive Director for The Amelia Center at Children's of Alabama, and the Director of Grief Counseling Services and Director of Development for Hospice of Martin and St. Lucie (now Treasure Health) in South Florida. In his current work with The Satori Group, Andy serves as Senior Advisor to Youth Programs and The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing for the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) and Senior Advisor to the CEO for The Compassionate Friends. Andy travels extensively providing leadership consulting, training, strategic planning, and project management for Satori clients. He has strong experience in leadership, fundraising, business development, building key relationships, and providing education and consultation in non-profit management and bereavement support. He is the author of *Understanding and Supporting Bereaved Children: A Practical Guide for Professionals* in addition to numerous chapters related to bereavement support. He has served as a consultant to non-profits across the United States, providing strategic planning, fundraising support, board management, and organizational development. Andy has three decades of experience providing counseling, bereavement support and offering support groups to children, teenagers, and adults grieving the death of someone in their life. Andy lectures extensively on support group facilitation, grief and bereavement, non-profit management, and leadership. He is a trainer for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. He has served on the Board of Directors for the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) and is a member of the International Workgroup on Death, Dying, and Bereavement. Andy holds a Bachelor of Arts in Religion from Palm Beach Atlantic University and a Master of Arts in Counseling from The University of Alabama at Birmingham.

### **Panelists:**



#### **Chris Heiss, Good Grief New Jersey**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Chris Heiss is the Executive Director of Good Grief in New Jersey, where he leads efforts to build resilience in children, strengthen families, and empower communities to grow from loss and adversity. Chris previously served as the Executive Director of the New Jersey Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Fund and held leadership roles with Nurse-Family

Partnership and the Center for Health Care Strategies. A veteran of the U.S. Navy submarine service with deployments to Iraq and the Middle East, he is currently a reservist in the U.S. Public Health Service and has supported Afghan refugee resettlement and the 2023 Maui Wildfires relief efforts.



**Kathy Revtyak, Children’s Grief Center of El Paso**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Kathy Revtyak, LCSW-S, is the CEO of the Children’s Grief Center of El Paso, a children’s bereavement center located in far west Texas. Kathy has been serving individuals, families, systems, and communities as a clinical social worker specializing in grief and trauma for nearly 30 years. While she has worked in social work post-secondary education and the private sector (as a clinician, trainer, and consultant), she has dedicated her career to non-profit, community-based work with youth and families in the form of direct service, education & training, progressive leadership, collective impact, and advocacy. She makes her home on the US-Mexico border with her family.



**Mrittika Sen**

**Good Grief Head of Research and Evaluation**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Dr. Mrittika Sen was first drawn to nonprofit management in her late teens, when she co-founded a nonprofit in her hometown of Calcutta, India, along with five adults decades older than her. She has since worked in an international humanitarian agency, facilitated collaboration and communication between organizational representatives within a (then newly-formed) collaborative of 100+ multi-sector organizations in Chicago, and consulted with nonprofit leaders to secure buy-for implementing programs and organizational strategies. Mrittika's research work at The Ohio State University focused on interpersonal support in domestic abuse as a crisis situation. During her doctoral work at Northwestern University, she continued expanding her research to other crisis contexts, presenting papers, pursuing research internships, and teaching. At the end of her second year in the doctoral program, her daughter Raahi died in sleep to unknown causes. Mrittika was frozen in her tracks, unable to pursue research on crisis and difficult contexts anymore. She was still committed to fulfilling the requirements for the PhD, and to her intellectual interest in social psychological factors and interpersonal dynamics, but had to pivot her focus. For her dissertation, research papers, presentations, and future training and consultation work, she studied interpersonal communication in organizations, specifically that pertaining to change management, partnership effectiveness, and conflict resolution. In her current role, Mrittika has returned to researching the grief experience, and various aspects and impact of support seeking and support provision. As a social psychologist and interpersonal communication researcher, she observes and analyzes complex conversations in close relationships, groups, teams, and organizations. And she keenly studies the people in them!

**Abstract**

This year's NACG Research & Evaluation panel brings together leaders from child bereavement organizations to explore how evaluation can strengthen everyday practice and improve outcomes for children and families who are grieving. Panelists will discuss why evaluation is worth investing in, practical considerations for organizations beginning or refining evaluation efforts, and how evaluation findings can guide program improvements, inform decision making, and support more effective and equitable services. This session will offer concrete examples and actionable insights that practitioners can apply within their own programs and organizational settings.

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Explain the value of research and evaluation in strengthening child bereavement programs and improving outcomes for grieving children and families.
2. Identify practical strategies for initiating, refining, or sustaining evaluation efforts within their organizations.
3. Describe how evaluation findings can inform program improvement, organizational decision-making, and equitable service delivery.
4. Apply actionable evaluation approaches and examples shared by panelists to enhance practice within their own program or organizational setting.

**Categories**

Research, Outcomes, and Measurements

**Content Level**

Beginner

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

**C6- 83- Moving through Challenging Times: Using Dance Movement Therapy as a Restorative Practice for Children's Grief Professionals (1.5 CE)**



**Director: HEARTplay Program Jennifer Wiles**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Jennifer Wiles, MA, LMHC, BC-DMT, FT is the director of HEARTplay, a bereavement program for children, teens, and young adults at Good Shepherd Community Care in Newton, MA. Her current project, Expanding the Language of Grief, focuses on providing access to compassionate grief support services to young people of all abilities. She is the director of Camp Erin Boston, now in its 13th year supporting grieving youth and families. Jennifer has taught nationally and internationally on the topic of children's grief. She is a board-certified dance movement therapist, licensed mental health counselor and fellow in thanatology and holds a certificate in nonprofit management. She is on the adjunct faculty at Lesley University's Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences where she is also a clinical site supervisor. Jennifer is an active member of The National Alliance for Children's Grief, where she serves on the Board of Directors and chairs the Education Committee.

**Abstract**

Our work in the bereavement field can be deeply meaningful and impactful in both our personal and professional lives. The myriad challenges that our planet, nation and community face resonate with us on many levels. The suffering that we witness along with the moments of connection and compassion can find a dwelling place in our bodies and in our hearts. Using the expressive arts therapies with a focus on dance movement therapy, we will practice and explore exercises that promote reflection and calm and can be used as a vehicle for self-compassion and personal and professional growth. We will explore ways to create sanctuary in our bodies and hearts for the challenging and amazing work that we do. We will explore the concept of metaphor and its potential for meaning-making in our approach to self-understanding and restorative practices. The practical use of metaphor in grief work will also be discussed, and take-away activities will be witnessed and shared. We will practice some applicable techniques that can be used in our own work and programs. Special attention will be paid to accommodations and adaptations to use when working with young people with disabilities who are grieving. We will learn how principles of dance-movement therapy can be used to promote a sense of belonging for all our program participants. We will experience the joy of moving together in community, while we embody a circle of grief support where truly everyone is welcome. This workshop will be a continuation of our presentation at the 2025 NACG Symposium. Attendance in 2025 is not required for participation, and new activities will be shared. Please join us!

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Define the concept of metaphor and its potential for meaning-making in our approach to self-understanding and restorative practices in grief work.
2. Demonstrate exercises that promote reflection and calm and that can be used as a vehicle for self-compassion and personal and professional growth.
3. Identify principles of dance-movement therapy and name how they can be used to promote a sense of belonging for all of our bereavement program participants.
4. Demonstrate accommodations and adaptations to movement activities that can be used when working with young people with disabilities who are grieving.
5. Perform a community-based dance/movement activity that demonstrates the R.I.C.E. principles of respect, inform, connect and empower.

**Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

**Content Level**

Advanced

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, Diversity and Social Justice

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Human Growth and Development, Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Social and Cultural Foundations, Group Dynamics and Counseling, Counselor Professional Identity and Practice Issues, Wellness and Prevention

**Literature References**

- Bernstein, B. (2019). *Empowerment-focused dance/movement therapy for trauma recovery*. American Journal of Dance Therapy, 41 (2). ISSN: 0146-3721 Online ISSN: 1573-3262
- Millman, L., Merritt, T., Hunter, E., Orgs, G.(2021). Towards a neurocognitive approach to dance movement therapy for mental health: A systematic review. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*,28, 24-38.
- Serlin, I., & Zhou, G. (2022). *Dance movement therapy in the time of COVID-19*. *Creative Arts in Education and Therapy*, 8(1), 32-41.  
<https://doi.org/10.15212/CAET/2022/8/6>
- Zachou, E., Panhofer, H., & Bareka, T. (2022). Metaphor and movement: Exploring the unspoken with a group of frontline workers. *Body, Movement & Dance in Psychotherapy*, 17(4). ISSN: 1743-2979 Online ISSN: 1743-2987

## **C7- 76- Grief Has an Accent: Honoring Culture, Ritual, and Lineage in Grief Support (Non-CE offering)**



### **Training and Curriculum Manager Annette Mendez Masters Certification**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Annette Mendez is a Certified Grief Educator and Training & Curriculum Manager at a nonprofit grief organization. She designs and facilitates grief education programs for diverse audiences, blending professional expertise with personal storytelling. As a Latina shaped by generational wisdom, she integrates culture, ritual, and lineage into her work, helping others approach grief in ways that are inclusive, compassionate, and culturally alive. Annette is committed to creating spaces where grief is honored not only as an individual experience, but also as a collective, cultural one.

#### **Abstract**

In many cultures, grief is never something you carry alone. It is woven into kitchens filled with arroz con gandules, whispered in the prayers of abuelas, and remembered through music, ritual, and storytelling. Yet too often, grief support is taught and practiced as if it exists outside of culture and as if grief were a universal language without an accent.

This intermediate-level session invites participants to develop a more rooted understanding of grief: one that honors where we come from, who we belong to, and the traditions that shape how we mourn and heal. As a Certified Grief Educator trained by David Kessler, a training and curriculum manager for a non-profit grief organization, and as a Latina shaped by generational wisdom, I bring both professional training and lived experience to this conversation.

Together, we will explore how cultural identity influences how grief is expressed, silenced, or carried forward, and how grief rituals, whether inherited or newly created, become lifelines. Through storytelling and a guided experiential practice, participants will reflect on their own cultural grief narratives. This process will reveal how personal histories intersect with our professional roles, and how honoring culture can deepen presence and practice.

#### **Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Identify how cultural identity, lineage, and tradition influence the ways grief is expressed, silenced, or carried forward.
2. Differentiate between grief frameworks that assume universality and those that are culturally responsive, inclusive, and rooted in lived tradition.
3. Reflect on and articulate their own cultural grief narratives through guided experiential practice, recognizing how personal histories shape their professional roles.
4. Apply creative, culturally grounded tools—such as the “Recipe of Remembrance” activity—to support grievers in ways that honor culture, ritual, and generational wisdom.
5. Integrate culturally alive approaches into grief support practice to deepen presence, connection, and compassion when working with diverse communities.

#### **Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

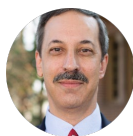
**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

## **C8- 87- Supporting Grieving High School Juniors and Seniors (Non-CE offering)**



**Dr. David J Schonfeld**

**National Center for School Crisis & Bereavement, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

David J Schonfeld, MD, FAAP established and directs the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement ([www.schoolcrisiscenter.org](http://www.schoolcrisiscenter.org)), located at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, which coordinates the Coalition to Support Grieving Students. He is Professor of Clinical Pediatrics at Keck School of Medicine. For 35 years, he's supported schools/communities after numerous crises and frequently speaks on the topics of crisis and loss. He has authored more than 150 scholarly articles, book chapters, and books. He has conducted school-based research (funded by NICHD, NIMH, NIDA, the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, William T Grant Foundation, and other foundations) involving children's understanding of and adjustment to serious illness and death and school-based interventions to promote adjustment and risk prevention. Dr. Schonfeld is Chair of the National Advisory Committee on Children and Disasters and a former member of the Executive Committee of the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Children and Disasters. He served as a Commissioner for both the National Commission on Children and Disasters and the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission in CT and was a member of the National Biodefense Science Board. Dr. Schonfeld served as President of the Society for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics from 2006-7.



**Dr. Thomas P Demaria**

**Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Thomas Demaria, Ph.D. is a Clinical Psychologist and Clinical and Trauma Fellow in the American Psychological Association. Dr. Demaria has earned numerous awards for his consultations in local and national community and school crisis responses. He is a two-time recipient of the prestigious New York State Liberty Award for community service following the World Trade Center terrorist attacks and Hurricane Katrina. Dr. Demaria was honored with a Humanitarian Award from the Center for Christian & Jewish studies and with special recognition from the International Society for Traumatic Stress for both Clinical Excellence in Service Delivery and Distinguished Mentorship of Students.

### **Abstract**

High School Juniors and Seniors may be especially challenged by grief for a family member or close friend at a time when they face heightened pressure about their future plans. Difficulties with concentrating which is common in bereavement may jeopardize their current and future academic success. Peer support may suffer due to their struggles with strong emotions and lifestyle changes because of secondary losses. Students can become more anxious about their future independence since they will be leaving friends and family behind. They may also face new obligations to assist surviving family members with

household tasks and financial demands. Schools may encounter challenges in modifying academic standards while supporting students coping with grief and equipping them for post-graduation endeavors. Commemorating the deaths of students in the graduating class or a member of the school community while not interfering with this time of celebration may also generate controversy. Ways community bereavement programs can help schools better understand the need of grieving junior and high school students and develop thoughtful ways to remember members of the school community at the time of graduation will be presented.

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of three common commemoration requests made at the time of High School graduation
2. contrast the competing objectives which schools face in supporting High School Juniors and Seniors and provide two strategies which can guide academic planning
3. construct three guidelines which can be used by schools while supporting grieving High School Juniors and Seniors

**Categories**

Outreach and Community Collaboration (schools, Boys and Girls Club, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

## **C9- 82- Finding Light in the Dungeon: Grief Processing Through D&D as Expressive Arts Role-Play (1.5 CE)**



### **Owner/Therapist Kayla Davis**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Kayla Davis is the owner and counselor at Cozy Cottage Counseling, PLLC. She received her Master of Science from the University of Texas at San Antonio in 2019. She began her career in the non-profit world where she provided grief/bereavement support with the Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas in various capacities for just over five years. In her time with the Center, Kayla became passionate in working with victims of mass violence, having supported the Sutherland Springs community during her internship and the Uvalde community upon receiving her license. Outside of grief work, Kayla has provided support within school settings with Communities and Schools of San Antonio, and became trained in Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy. Over the years, Kayla has developed a deep passion for walking alongside those who have experienced a death loss. In her current practice, she is especially drawn to expressive and creative approaches that help families navigate their healing journey with compassion and care. Some of these approaches include art, music, crocheting, Dungeon and Dragons, and more.



### **Owner/Therapist Mario Salgado**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Mario Salgado is the owner and founder of Mind Craft Counseling, PLLC. As an alumni from St. Mary's University (B.A. '17) and Texas A&M University - San Antonio (M.A. '20), Mario empowers his clients and community through a kind, trauma-informed, and person-centered approach. Previously, Mario served the San Antonio community via non-profit work with organizations such as Communities in Schools, Jewish Family Service, and the Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas. Today, Mario provides counseling services at Hawks Counseling and Assessment Services.

#### **Abstract**

Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) is a role-playing fantasy game in which creativity, choice, and chance all play a part in the outcome of the game. D&D has begun to make its way into therapy by some mental health clinicians as a form of expressive arts through role-play. This training aims to offer a synopsis of ways to be incorporated within therapy for children/adolescents navigating their grief journey. When exploring grief through the lens of Internal Family Systems (IFS), D&D can aid in integrating increased meaning of self introspection through processing the "self" protectors, and exiles. From character creation to engaging the client's character into story play, D&D can be an additional tool clinicians can use to explore external processing for their client. Additionally, we will explore the cultural and ethical considerations with implementing D&D into your practice, as it may not be the best fit for some clients. To tie it altogether, we will put to practice what we learn through curating your own character and identifying ways to explore oneself within their created character.

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Define D&D and identify two ways to implement D&D into the attendees' clinical practice with children/adults who are experiencing grief.
2. Assess Internal Family Systems (IFS) in relation to D&D as a clinical practice.
3. Describe three areas where D&D can ethically be practiced within sessions based on the client's cultural/ethnic background.
4. Create an original character that demonstrates the application of the concepts and techniques presented during the session.

**Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment  
Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship

**Literature References**

- Grove, Samuel, "Dungeons and Dragons as a Therapeutic Intervention Training" (2024). Dissertations, Theses, and Projects. 916. <https://red.mnstate.edu/thesis/916>
- Henrich, S., & Worthington, R. (2023). Let your clients fight dragons: A rapid evidence assessment regarding the therapeutic utility of 'Dungeons & Dragons'. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 18(3), 383-401.
- Nelson, K., Lukawiecki, J., Waitschies, K., Jackson, E., & Zivot, C. (2024). Exploring the impacts of an art and narrative therapy program on participants' grief and bereavement experiences. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, 90(2), 726-745.
- Scott, D. (2016). Self-led grieving: Transitions, loss and death. In *Innovations and Elaborations in Internal Family Systems Therapy* (pp. 90-108). Routledge.

## **C10- 162- More Than a Party: Designing Events with Purpose and Impact (Non-CE offering)**



**Executive Director Kris Friedman  
Billy's Place, Inc., United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Kris Friedman is the Executive Director of Billy's Place in Glendale, Arizona. With more than 35 years of experience in marketing, event planning, fundraising and design, Kris began her career in the shopping center industry as a Marketing Director. She was an active member of the Chicago Area Marketing Directors Association, where she helped shape innovative campaigns and large-scale community events. Later, she expanded her expertise by planning events for a golf group, which gave her a broad perspective on what it takes to create memorable and meaningful experiences. Fundraising has always been part of her DNA, evident in all that she has accomplished. Today, Kris blends that professional expertise with her personal passion for children's grief support. Since 2012, she has overseen the organization's growth while designing fundraising initiatives and events that not only raise money but also build community, celebrate volunteers, and keep the mission at the center of every gathering.

### **Abstract**

At Billy's Place, we don't just throw events—we create experiences that make people laugh, cry, hug, and sometimes even dance in the desert snow. (Yes, actual snow in Arizona.) They need to carry meaning, build community, and connect straight back to the mission. That's why our events are designed to raise funds, celebrate volunteers, support families, and shine a bright light on kiddos grief—all without losing their heart.

In this session, we'll share some of our favorites: **Hike for Hope**, where a fundraiser feels more like a movement; our jam-packed **Volunteer Appreciation Night**, complete with themes, music, dancing, and way too many desserts; our magical **Winter Wonderland**, where kiddos and their families receive gifts, visit with Santa, play in the snow, and offer an opportunity for families to find joy together; and our heartfelt **Children's Grief Awareness Day Candle Lighting Ceremony**, honoring loved ones in a way that leaves no dry eye. These events do more than one thing—they raise funds, build community, strengthen our brand, and leave people talking long after the night is over.

But this isn't just a show-and-tell; you'll roll up your sleeves in an interactive activity where you'll reimagine one of your own events. You will gain some fresh ideas, practical strategies, and maybe even a little inspiration to add some snow, sparkle, or sweet surprises to your own calendar. You'll leave with tools and ideas you can adapt to your own community—whether your goal is to boost fundraising, deepen volunteer engagement, or create meaningful traditions for families.

Expect a mix of practical tips, creative sparks, and a few “why didn't we think of that?” moments.

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Identify key strategies for designing events that accomplish multiple goals such as fundraising, volunteer engagement, family support, and community awareness.
2. Compare examples of mission-driven events to determine how intentional design choices increase both impact and connection.
3. Reimagine and create a plan for at least one of their own events to serve organizational objectives.
4. Select and adapt practical tools, themes, or creative elements that can enhance the purpose and impact of future events in their own communities.

**Categories**

Marketing

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

**D1- Session Cancelled**

**D2- 103- Bilingual Grief Support for Hispanic Children & Teens: Language, Access, and Cultural Competence (1.0 CE)**



**Director of Programming Julissa Reynoso  
Children's Bereavement Center, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Julissa Reynoso serves as the Director of Programming for the Children's Bereavement Center (CBC). She is also a Licensed Mental Health Counselor having received her Master's in Mental Health Counseling from Nova Southeastern University. In work with The Children's Bereavement Center, she oversees the grief support group program and program development. Her trainings and collaboration with local community agencies has expanded grief support in communities of need. As a licensed therapist, Julissa has worked with youth and adults providing individual, group and family counseling in areas of grief, traumatic loss, and other areas impacting individuals of diverse backgrounds.

**Abstract**

Grief transcends language and culture, yet many support systems fail to meet the needs of Hispanic children and teens, particularly those who are Spanish-speaking or bilingual. This session explores inclusive, culturally grounded grief support that honors Latin American mourning practices and the developmental needs of youth. Participants will examine barriers such as limited bilingual child-trained professionals, cultural stigma, immigration-related trauma, and gender norms, while gaining practical tools to provide affirming, trauma-informed support for grieving young people and their families.

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

5. Describe 3 ways developmental stage, culture, and language shape grief expression and mourning practices among Hispanic children and adolescents.
6. Identify 2 systemic and interpersonal barriers, such as language gaps and immigration-related stressors, that limit access to effective grief support for Hispanic youth and their families.
7. Demonstrate 2-3 strategies to provide culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate, and linguistically accessible grief support in school, clinical, and community settings

**Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

**Content Level**

Basic

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Diversity and Social Justice

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Social and Cultural Foundations

## Literature References

- Burns, M., Landry, L., Mills, D., Carlson, N., Blueford, J. M., & Talmi, A. (2023). COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate impact on childhood bereavement for youth of color: Reflections and recommendations. *Frontiers in pediatrics*, 11, 1063449.
- Dickinson, S., Salloum, A., Andrews, J. L., Salinas-Miranda, A., & Agazzi, H. (2025). Treating Grief and Trauma in Schools: Modifications for Middle School Youth. *Evidence-Based Practice in Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 1-14.
- Falzarano, F., Winoker, H., Burke, R. V., Mendoza, J. A., Munoz, F., Tergas, A., ... & Prigerson, H. G. (2022). Grief and bereavement in the Latino/a community: A literature synthesis and directions for future research. *Health Equity*, 6(1), 696-707.
- Kawaii-Bogue, B., Liou, C. C., Taylor-Fulton, C. K. U., Landrum, S., & Williams-Butler, A. (2025). Addressing Racial and Ethnic Disparities of Childhood Trauma, Grief, and Loss: Considerations for Mental Health and Educational Policy. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, 1-13.

### **D3- 37- Vulnerable Volunteers: Immersive Training Activities to Reduce Grief Biases and Increase Empathy (Non-CE offering)**



**School Program Coordinator Shana Sadoski  
Good Grief of Northwest Ohio, United States**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Shana graduated from The University of Toledo with a master's degree in social work in 2016. Her love of learning, particularly in the field of death education, had her continue her school journey at Bowling Green State University where she earned her master's degree in public health in 2017. Shana has made a career from her experience with end of life, death, and grief. From the many years she spent volunteering for hospice patients to her current positions, working for Good Grief of Northwest Ohio, specializing in walking along side grieving students in the school setting, helping patients and families navigate crisis as an emergency department social worker and also providing grief counseling to adults who are grieving, Shana loves every experience that she has had in this field. She takes great pride in her work as a death/grief educator, and social worker and continues to use every opportunity to remind people of the importance of social support in times of vulnerability like grief.

#### **Abstract**

Supporting grieving children requires more than good intentions. It calls for awareness, empathy, and the courage to examine our own assumptions about grief. **Vulnerable Volunteer: Immersive Training Activities to Reduce Grief Biases and Increase Empathy** proposes a hands-on approach to preparing volunteers for this fragile work. Through interactive simulations, role-playing, and storytelling, volunteers experience the many ways grief is expressed across cultures, ages, and life circumstances. These activities create space for reflection and vulnerability, helping volunteers recognize and move beyond their own biases. Attendees will leave with practical tools to strengthen empathy, ensure inclusive support, and build meaningful connections with the children they serve.

#### **Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. define grief biases.
2. recognize grief biases and the negative impact it can have on empathy and active listening.
3. develop an immersive training experience to reduce grief biases and increase empathy and active listening.

#### **Categories**

Volunteers

#### **Content Level**

Intermediate

#### **Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

## **D4- 40- Tracking What Matters: How Data Systems Drive Fundraising Strategy and Results (Non-CE offering)**



**Director of Philanthropy Emma Walker**  
**The Center for Grieving Children, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Emma Walker is the Director of Philanthropy at the Center for Grieving Children, with over seven years of experience in nonprofit philanthropy and development. Emma's priority in this field is on building strong donor relationships and creating sustainable funding strategies for nonprofits and the teams that make them possible. Over the past year, she led her small team through a comprehensive overhaul of the Center's donor data systems and reporting processes to more effectively track giving trends, streamline fundraising efforts, and build a data-informed major gifts program. This effort led to the Center for Grieving Children recently being named as a finalist in the 2025 Blackbaud Impact Awards in the Data Strategist award category. With expertise in aligning authentic relationship-building with strategic systems thinking, Emma and her team turned data into actionable strategies that increased online giving, improved donor retention, and expanded grant and sponsorship opportunities. This hands-on leadership experience provides practical insight into how organizations of any size can strengthen fundraising capacity through intentional use of donor databases and reporting tools.

### **Abstract**

Children's grief centers rely on sustainable funding to ensure families can access support at no cost. Yet, for many organizations, minimal gift-tracking processes, underutilized databases, and significant time constraints can make it difficult to see where contributions come from, what strategies are effective, or how to plan for the future. Without reliable data, fundraising can feel like guesswork, leaving small teams stretched thin and long-term sustainability uncertain.

In this session, The Center for Grieving Children will share how we transformed our development strategy by overhauling our use of Raiser's Edge NXT to create reliable, data-driven systems. By redesigning the way we tracked funds, campaigns, and appeals, and by leveraging donor insights tools, we created clear pathways to understand giving trends, lean into successful revenue channels, and meaningfully improve less effective initiatives.

With these systems in place, we moved from tracking only 56% of gift sources to identifying over 80% across all revenue channels, used findings to generate a 77% increase online giving during Spring fundraising efforts over the previous year after targeted strategy shifts, and grew grant funding by 20% through data trend-based proposals. Most significantly, we created a replicable model where data directly informed strategy, strategy produced measurable results, and results built the foundation for long-term sustainability.

The Center for Grieving Children will share lessons learned to help attendees with practical, scalable approaches to strengthen their own development work:

- How to use donor data systems more effectively, even with small teams
- How to identify trends that inform fundraising strategy and action planning
- How to translate data into results that sustain grief support programs

This session will provide concrete tools and, hopefully, inspiration for organizations seeking to deepen their fundraising capacity and help ensure every child and family can continue to access grief support at no cost.

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Identify key donor data points and tracking methods that reveal giving trends across revenue channels.
2. Define practical steps for leveraging existing donor management systems to track gifts more effectively.
3. Demonstrate how to translate data findings into strategic action plans that improve fundraising outcomes and sustainability.

**Categories**

Development/Fundraising

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

**D5- 43- Survivance & Queer Youth: Culturally Affirming Grief Support for LGBTQ2sp+ Communities (1.0 CE)**



**Bereavement & Mental Health Services Program Manager Zola Z Bruce  
The Hetrick-Martin Institute, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Zola Z. Bruce, MSSW (they/them) is the Bereavement and Mental Health Services Program Manager at the Hetrick-Martin Institute and an Adjunct Professor at Hunter College School of Social Work. A grief counselor and therapeutic arts practitioner, Zola specializes in culturally responsive approaches to loss and healing. They have presented nationally, including at the 2025 Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) and American College Health Association (ACHA) conferences. Zola earned their MSSW from Columbia University with a focus in Advanced Generalist Practice and Programming and a minor in law. With over two decades of experience leading youth-centered initiatives across New York City—including work with the Center for Family Life, McBurney YMCA, the LGBTQ Center, and The Center for Anti-Violence Education—Zola integrates clinical practice with empowerment, creativity, and community care.

**Abstract**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender non-conforming, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQ2sp+) youth experience disenfranchised grief shaped by systemic stigma, violence, and traumatic loss. Recent rollbacks in policy protections and reduced access to mental health resources have intensified rates of suicide, overdose, and targeted harm. In response, the Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI), a pioneering LGBTQ youth-serving organization, developed *Survivance & Queer Youth*—a grief support curriculum rooted in Indigenous frameworks and designed to center Black, Indigenous, and Latinx LGBTQ2sp+ experiences.

The curriculum draws on Shawn Ginwright’s Healing-Centered Engagement, a strengths-based, culturally responsive approach to trauma recovery that emphasizes identity, agency, and ancestral connection. Participants engage with histories of resilience and collective mourning, reframing grief through celebration, resistance, and community solidarity. Through storytelling, ritual, and creative expression, the curriculum fosters emotional transformation and reclaims empowerment.

HMI’s implementation demonstrates the adaptability of Indigenous healing methodologies in urban LGBTQ contexts. Facilitators guide youth in exploring *survivance*—a concept of active resistance and presence beyond mere survival—helping participants “subtly reduce the power of our destroyers” by rewriting narratives of loss and reclaiming joy. This work marks a pivotal shift from deficit-based grief models to culturally affirming, community-led healing strategies. By positioning grief as a site of cultural reclamation and transformation, *Survivance & Queer Youth* offers a replicable framework for bereavement support across marginalized communities. It contributes to the broader movement for mental health equity, challenging traditional paradigms and advocating for interventions that honor lived experience, cultural identity, and radical imagination.

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Identify the unique factors contributing to disenfranchised grief among LGBTQ2sp+ youth, including systemic stigma, policy rollbacks, and reduced access to mental health resources.
2. Describe the principles of Healing-Centered Engagement and how they inform culturally responsive, strengths-based approaches to trauma and grief recovery.
3. Explore the concept of survivance and its application in grief support as a form of active resistance, cultural reclamation, and emotional transformation.
4. Analyze the role of Indigenous healing methodologies—including ritual, storytelling, and creative expression—in fostering empowerment and community solidarity among marginalized youth.
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of community-led, culturally affirming grief interventions in shifting from deficit-based models to frameworks that honor lived experience, identity, and ancestral connection.

**Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

**Content Level**

Basic

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Diversity and Social Justice, Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Social and Cultural Foundations, Group Dynamics and Counseling, Wellness and Prevention

**Literature References**

- Ah-Fat, A. (2024). *When grief arrives: An oral history of grief and death within queer, trans and BIPOC communities*. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, (1), 1–12.
- Wilbur, R. E., & Gone, J. P. (2025). Health survivance: Decolonizing resilience for indigenous peoples in psychology. *American Psychologist*, 80(8), 1327–1338.
- Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review. (2025). Supporting queer and trans youth who hold BIPOC identities: A literature review and model. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 28(3), 345–362.

**D6- 47- Navigating Digital Grief: Equipping Caregivers for AI, Technology, and Mental Health Conversations (1.0 CE)**



**Avow Kids Manager Andrianna O Moustakas**  
**Avow Kids, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Andrianna Moustakas, MSW, RCSWI,CFLE-P leads grief-informed programming for children, teens, and families through her role as Manager of Avow Kids, where she oversees program strategy, staff training, and community outreach. Her professional experience spans direct facilitation of groups and camps, curriculum development, caregiver engagement, and organizational partnerships across schools and healthcare systems. She has also directed resilience and wellbeing initiatives for healthcare professionals, addressing burnout and organizational culture with a systems perspective. During her graduate studies, she concentrated on grief and family systems, which continues to guide her work in creating accessible, evidence-informed programs. As a Gen Z professional, she has seen firsthand the shift in technology and social media use from a young age and now observes those same digital influences shaping how today’s clients process grief. This lived perspective, combined with her professional expertise, informs her ability to translate complex challenges into engaging, practical presentations.

**Abstract**

Children and teens are turning to TikTok, online memorials, and even AI chatbots as outlets for grief, leaving many caregivers unsure how to respond. While technology can provide comfort and connection, it also poses risks of misinformation, re-traumatization, and unhealthy reliance. This session will prepare professionals to help caregivers navigate digital grief with confidence and curiosity. Participants will learn how young people are engaging with grief online, explore both the opportunities and challenges, and gain practical tools such as conversation starters, boundary-setting strategies, and co-created digital rituals. The session will also highlight how grief professionals and organizations can position themselves as resources for caregivers, bridging the gap between the digital world and family communication. Attendees will leave with a caregiver handout, the “Grief + Tech Safety Checklist,” and a framework for guiding families through this new terrain.

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Describe how children and teens are engaging with grief through social media platforms, digital memorials, and AI tools.
2. Identify risks and benefits of youth using technology to process grief, including impacts on mental health.
3. Apply practical conversation strategies and boundary-setting tools that caregivers can use to guide digital grief experiences.
4. Develop ways professionals and organizations can position themselves as resources for families navigating digital grief.

**Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

**Content Level**

Basic

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills, Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Human Growth and Development, Social and Cultural Foundations

**Literature References**

- Alvis, L., Zhang, N., Sandler, I. N., & Kaplow, J. B. (2022). Developmental Manifestations of Grief in Children and Adolescents: Caregivers as Key Grief Facilitators. *Journal of child & adolescent trauma*, 16(2), 447–457. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-021-00435-0>
- Andiloro, A.(2025).Death as design: video games and the framing of finitude. *Phenom Cognitive Science* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-025-10085-4>
- Fanti Rovetta, F., Valentini, D. (2025).Grief and virtual reality: continuing bonds with virtual avatars. *Phenom Cognitive Science* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-025-10072-9>
- Krysinska, K., Currier, D., & Andriessen, K. (2023). Evaluation of a New Online Program for Children Bereaved by Suicide: The Views of Children, Parents, and Facilitators. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 28(1), 384–398. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13811118.2023.2185559>
- Young, J., et al., 2024. The Role of AI in Peer Support for Young People: A Study of Preferences for Human and AI- Generated Response.<https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2405.02711>

## **D7- 63- Transforming Outcomes into Advocacy: Engaging School Communities in Student Grief Support (Non-CE offering)**



**Community-based Program Coordinator Hannah M McKinnon  
Calm Waters, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Hannah McKinnon is the Community-based Program Coordinator at Calm Waters, where she oversees the School-based Grief Support Group program serving around 1,000 students a year at 70+ school sites. With a B.A. in Strategic Communication and a minor in Marketing from Oklahoma State University, Hannah brings expertise in digital and print marketing and communications, research methods, and writing. She has combined this background with experience in youth programming to create impactful data-driven reports and engagement strategies that turn program outcomes into stakeholder advocacy to expand grief support in schools.

### **Abstract**

Many grief support programs excel at delivering meaningful outcomes for students but struggle to communicate the impact effectively to the stakeholders who matter most—caregivers, teachers, and school counselors.

This session will explore how to bridge the gap between programmatic outcomes and stakeholder engagement to build a network of advocates, unlocking program growth. Drawing from Calm Waters' Student Grief Support Group Program model, participants will learn strategies for collecting and analyzing data, packaging findings into branded, visually engaging reports, and sharing outcomes with teachers, school counselors, and caregivers in a way that inspires trust, advocacy, and collaboration.

This session will provide practical, actionable guidance on how to transform data points into stories that inspire trust and buy-in, track engagement through communication metrics, and position stakeholders as champions for grief support for students. Participants will leave with tools to adapt these strategies for their own school partners or program context.

For Calm Waters, sharing outcomes in a meaningful way has led to record engagement, increased trust, and a doubling of school site partners. Join us to discover how stakeholder engagement can expand your program's reach and create more grief-informed, supportive school communities.

### **Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Identify the key stakeholders in school-based grief support group programs and determine how to engage them effectively.
2. Gain ideas on basic program data outcomes to demonstrate meaningful impacts for students.
3. Create visually engaging and stakeholder-focused reports that communicate program outcomes.
4. Develop a plan to leverage stakeholder engagement to expand program reach and strengthen school-based grief support initiatives.

**Categories**

Outreach and Community Collaboration (schools, Boys and Girls Club, etc.)

**Content Level**

Basic

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

**D8- 80- When a Baby Dies: Utilizing Child Parent Psychotherapy to Address Whole-Family Perinatal Grief (1.0 CE)**



**Clinical Assistant Professor Celeste Poe  
Stanford School of Medicine, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Dr. Celeste Poe is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist certified in perinatal mental health. She is a Clinical Assistant Professor and Attending NICU Psychologist at Stanford University School of Medicine working with families facing maternal and infant critical care. Dr. Poe is also an Assistant Clinical Professor at the Yale Child Study Center where she works on the Grief-Sensitive Healthcare Project, aiming to support medical providers in improving grief-sensitive care for patients and families. She is passionate about supporting young children and their caregivers through circumstances of grief, trauma, and bereavement and has received training in grief and loss through CBUK. She is also a Resolve Through Sharing certified bereavement coordinator.

**Abstract**

"Her absence is like the sky, spread over everything." For families, the grief experience following a loss is held both individually and collectively. Unfortunately many of our healthcare institutions are ill-equipped with providing whole-family support to bereaved families. This is particularly true with perinatal loss. Each year in the U.S., 2.4 million fetal and neonatal deaths occur, which is 4x greater than the annual number of deaths from cancer. When perinatal loss resources do exist, they typically focus on the mother or birthing parent and leave partners' and siblings' bereavement unaddressed.

Contrary to popular belief, a little life does not equal a little loss and when a pregnancy or infant's viability is not guaranteed, the whole family is impacted. The collective perinatal grief experience of a family can be quite complex, often involving various forms of loss including anticipatory, ambiguous, and disenfranchised loss as well as bereavement. Many providers struggle with understanding how to meet the complex needs of the whole grieving family when there are developmental differences, differences in coping styles, and important cultural considerations. Families often struggle with how to discuss the baby they lost with others or how and when to share news of a perinatal loss with older children. Developed to address experiences of stress and trauma in young children, Child Parent Psychotherapy (CPP)'s approach to care includes holding both the parent and child's experience in mind, offering an excellent approach to supporting bereaved families. This approach offers guidance for those who support grieving individuals to help parents reflect on their own grief experience as well as the grief of their partner and children. The presenter will use a whole-family approach to discuss important considerations for perinatal loss, provide an introduction to CPP, and demonstrate CPP's applicability in grief care settings.

**Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Identify and describe the emotional and psychological challenges faced by families during perinatal loss.
2. Describe the Child Parent Psychotherapy approach to whole-family care.
3. Apply a Child Parent Psychotherapy framework to supporting parents, couples, and siblings during perinatal loss.

4. Identify strategies for communicating with and supporting bereaved families following perinatal loss.

**Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Group Dynamics and Counseling, Assessment

**Literature References**

- Bornemisza, A. Y., Javor, R., & Erdos, M. B. (2022). Sibling grief over perinatal loss—A retrospective qualitative study. *Journal of Loss and Trauma, 27*(6), 530-546.
- Jennings, O., Leitao, S., & O'Donoghue, K. (2024). Mind yourself so you can mind me; The role of parental behaviour in perinatal death on the surviving sibling's grief. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying, 00302228241239220*.
- Norlén, A., Thorén, A., & Almqvist, K. (2021). Implementing child–parent psychotherapy (CPP) in Sweden: A qualitative study exploring experiences by caregivers taking part of the intervention with their child. *Journal of Infant, Child, and Adolescent Psychotherapy, 20*(2), 152-168.

**D9- 92- Evidence-Based Assessment in Childhood Grief: Tools, Validation, and Clinical Decision-Making (1.0 CE)**



**Executive Vice President, Trauma and Grief Programs and Policy Julie B. Kaplow  
Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Julie Kaplow, PhD, ABPP, is a licensed clinical psychologist. She serves as Executive Vice President of Trauma and Grief Programs and Policy and Executive Director at the Trauma and Grief (TAG) Center at the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute in Houston. She is also Executive Director of the TAG Center at Manning Family Children’s Hospital and Professor of Psychiatry at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans. Dr. Kaplow also serves as CEO of the Lucine Center, a group practice providing teletherapy to youth who have experienced traumas and/or losses across Texas and Louisiana. In these roles, Dr. Kaplow oversees the development and evaluation of treatments for youth exposed to trauma and bereavement and disseminates trauma- and grief-informed “best practices” to providers nationwide. Dr. Kaplow and her team provided evidence-based risk screening and interventions to children impacted by Hurricane Harvey and the Santa Fe school shooting. More recently, they have been assisting in the coordinated mental health response to the Robb Elementary School shooting in Uvalde, TX and the Central Texas flooding. Dr. Kaplow has published widely on childhood trauma and grief and has served as Principal Investigator on numerous grant-funded programs focused on enhancing resilience in youth exposed to adversity. She is lead author of Multidimensional Grief Therapy and has served as a consultant to the DSM-5 Sub-Work Group on Prolonged Grief Disorder and the ICD-11 Work Group on Disorders Associated with Stress.



**Vice President of Data Analytics Benjamin Oosterhoff  
Tulane University School of Medicine, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Benjamin Oosterhoff, PhD is the Vice President of Data Analytics for the Trauma and Grief (TAG) Center at Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute. As a developmental psychologist and statistician, Dr. Oosterhoff specializes in creating tools to make data-informed decisions within community and clinically-based bereavement centers. He has provided theoretical, methodological, and analytic research support for projects focused on childhood trauma and grief and uses cutting-edge statistical techniques to examine how these experiences influence adjustment over time. Dr. Oosterhoff has published widely on the topics of positive youth development, childhood trauma, and grief, with over 90 peer-reviewed publications and book chapters. He has conducted research funded by the National Institute of Health, the National Science Foundation, SAMSHA, the New York Life Foundation, UNICEF, the Spencer Foundation, and the John Templeton Foundation. In his role at the TAG Center, Dr. Oosterhoff is responsible for overseeing data capture systems and technology, data analysis, and program evaluation across the TAG Center’s various projects, including large scale data collection on a national level.

## **Abstract**

Evidence-based assessment (EBA) emphasizes the use of research and theory to inform the selection of assessment targets, the methods and measures used in the assessment, and the assessment process itself. EBA requires having access to assessment strategies that are relevant to the organization, culturally sensitive, and scientifically sound. Using EBA within settings that serve bereaved youth can pose numerous challenges, including the selection of well-validated assessments relevant to grieving youth, ensuring cultural sensitivity and inclusivity, and creating pathways to access tools that allow for enhanced decision-making about the best course of support or intervention.

The purpose of this symposium is to provide an overview of EBA in the context of child and adolescent grief. Our first speaker (Dr. Kaplow) will discuss the core concepts of EBA in the context of childhood grief and how EBA can be utilized in various settings including bereavement support centers, schools, and medical center settings. Her presentation will also include a description of well-validated assessment tools to measure grief and grief-related constructs, as well as how to ensure cultural sensitivity and inclusivity when conducting EBA. Our second speaker (Dr. Oosterhoff) will provide an overview of how child and adolescent grief EBAs are created and validated. He will introduce the Trauma and Grief Screening toolkit that captures measures of grief, posttraumatic stress, and depression in only 13 items. He will also demonstrate advancements in EBA tools that aid in making data-informed decisions at individual and organizational levels.

Attendees of this session will leave with a better understanding of EBA within a child and adolescent grief context, be able to identify well-validated, culturally sensitive EBA tools for child and adolescent grief, and how to use EBAs to make data-informed decisions.

### **Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Define core concepts of Evidence-Based Assessments
2. Identify risk screening tools used to assess grief reactions in youth
3. Utilize assessment results to make informed decisions for youth and families

### **Categories**

Research, Outcomes, and Measurements

### **Content Level**

Intermediate

### **Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

### **CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

### **CE Content Information Counseling**

Social and Cultural Foundations, Assessment, Research and Program Evaluation

### **Literature References**

- Alvis, L. M., Dodd, C. G., Oosterhoff, B., Hill, R. M., Rolon-Arroyo, B., Logsdon, T., ... & Kaplow, J. B. (2022). Caregiver behaviors and childhood maladaptive grief: Initial validation of the Grief Facilitation Inventory. *Death Studies, 46*(6), 1307-1315.
- Kaplow, J. B., Rolon-Arroyo, B., Layne, C. M., Rooney, E., Oosterhoff, B., Hill, R., ... & Pynoos, R. S. (2020). Validation of the UCLA PTSD Reaction Index for DSM-5: A

developmentally informed assessment tool for youth. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 59(1), 186-194.

- Oosterhoff, B., Alvis, L., Steinberg, A. M., Pynoos, R. S., & Kaplow, J. B. (2024). Validation of the four-item very brief University of California at Los Angeles Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Reaction Index screening tool for children and adolescents. *Psychological trauma: theory, research, practice, and policy*, 16(8), 1338.
- Alvis, L., Oosterhoff, B., Hoppe, R., Giang, C., & Kaplow, J. B. (2025). Measurement invariance of the Grief Facilitation Inventory with respect to youth gender, race, ethnicity, and age. *Death Studies*, 49(6), 816-821.

## **D10- 139- The Dirt on Grief Rituals: Honoring Significance and Transitions (1.0 CE)**



**Executive Director Tina Barrett**

**Tamarack Grief Resource Center, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Dr. Tina Barrett has over 30 years of experience with grief and trauma support programs. Since 1994, she has specialized in family systems, strength-oriented outdoor-based support following grief and trauma. Barrett is a licensed counselor with experience in schools, psychiatric hospitals, treatment centers, group homes, and private practice. She is the Founder/Executive Director of Tamarack Grief Resource Center. Barrett serves on the Advisory Committee for the National Bereavement Camp Standards of Practice; on the Advisory Board for Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS); and on the Leadership Team of Project Tomorrow Montana. She is a past Board Member of the National Alliance for Children's Grief (NACG) and remains part of the Presidents Circle. She received the 2019 National Community Educator Award from the Association of Death Educators and Counselors.

### **Abstract**

As we work with children and families who are grieving, rituals and commemorative ceremonies can be important tools for healing, honoring significant events, and expressing a range of thoughts and emotions. Rituals can be designed to reflect the significance of a loss and/or to release big feelings and honor transition. As we design rituals, this workshop will explore ideas for bringing them outside and or to integrate natural objects. While a variety of rituals will be shared, the Grief Spiral will be used as a case-example to illuminate considerations for implementation. The Grief Spiral is a powerful ritual that can be adapted for varying sized groups of bereaved children, teens, adults, or mixed ages. The ritual integrates movement, embodied metaphor, honor and remembrance, and camaraderie.

This presentation will explore the role of rituals and commemorative group activities in camp, retreat, and group settings including logistical and ethical considerations.

### **Learning Objectives- after attending this session, attendees will be able to:**

1. Delineate three benefits of grief rituals.
2. Identify two different types of rituals.
3. Outline logistical considerations for ritual implementation.

### **Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

### **Content Level**

Intermediate

### **Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

### **CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

## **CE Content Information Counseling**

### Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship

#### **Literature References**

- Barrett, C. (2012). The grief spiral. In R. A. Neimeyer (Ed.). *Techniques of grief therapy: Creative practices for counseling the bereaved* (pp. 347-350). New York: Routledge.
- Doka, K.J. (2008) *The Power of ritual: A gift to children and adolescents*. In K.J. Doka and A.S. Tucci (eds.), *Living with Grief: Children and Adolescents* (pp. 233-251). Washington, DC: Hospice Foundation of America.
- Rides At The Door, M., & Shaw, S. (2023). The Other Side of the ACEs Pyramid: A Healing Framework for Indigenous Communities. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(5). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20054108>
- Coaston, S. C., & Lawrence, C. (2022). Self-Compassion and Support for the Wounded Healer in Counselor Education. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2022.2146027>
- Makram, O. M., Pan, A., Maddock, J. E., & Kash, B. A. (2024). Nature and Mental Health in Urban Texas: A NatureScore-Based Study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 21(2), 168. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21020168>
- Nguyen, J., MacKrell, K.I., Gould, N. & Swartz, K. (2020). *Managing Stress and Coping with COVID-19*. John Hopkins Psychiatry Guide.
- Silverman, G.; Baroiller, A; & Hemer, S. (2020). Culture and grief: Ethnographic perspectives on ritual, relationships, and remembering. *Death Studies*, 45:1, 1-8.
- Baranowsky, A. B., & Gentry, J. E. (2023). *Trauma Practice : A Cognitive Behavioral Somatic Therapy* (Fourth edition.). Hogrefe Publishing.

## **E1- 6- From Chatbots to Deadbots: Everything You Need to Know About Youth Using AI Tools for Grief (1.5 CE)**



**Chief Clinical Officer Melissa M Lunardini**  
**Help Texts, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Melissa is a leading expert in grief and loss with over 20 years of experience across various mental health settings. She holds a Ph.D. in International Psychology with a trauma focus, as well as an MBA and a Master's in Psychology. With a clinically trained background, Melissa specializes in childhood bereavement, hospice and palliative care, theory, grief technology, and trauma, and has developed innovative programs and evidence-based interventions across various industries, including healthcare, education, and non-profit. As Chief Clinical Officer at Help Texts, Melissa oversees the delivery of global mental health and grief support via text message. She ensures all content is rooted in evidence-based practices, leads subscriber support and research initiatives, and plays a key role in AI and product development. A Fellow in Thanatology, Melissa is a sought-after presenter and researcher. Her work on text-based grief support has been published in preeminent journals and presented at international conferences.

### **Abstract**

Artificial intelligence (AI) is fundamentally reshaping how we experience, process, and get grief support. This session provides childhood bereavement professionals with essential knowledge about AI's expanding role in grief care, moving beyond narrow technical applications to examine the broader landscape of opportunities and challenges in bereavement support.

As digital natives, today's young people naturally integrate AI technology into their grief experiences, making it essential for professionals to understand how these tools align with or challenge developmentally appropriate grief responses.

Participants will explore the historical evolution from simple digital memorials to sophisticated "grief tech" applications, including AI-powered grief bots that enable ongoing conversations with deceased loved ones. The presentation examines how these technologies intersect with core thanatological theories around continuing bonds, meaning-making, the dual-process model, and attachment theory.

Drawing from emerging research on digital immortality and grief technology, we'll analyze both significant benefits and concerning risks. Benefits include continuing bonds, accessible grief support, and personalized therapeutic interventions. Some risks include hallucinations, dependency, consent, commercialization, privacy protection for minors, and age-appropriate content filtering.

Current ethical and policy regulation considerations will also be explored, while practical takeaways will prepare attendees to advocate for responsible AI development and use in grief care.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Recall 3-5 specific types of AI applications being used by youth.
2. Analyze both the opportunities and risks AI presents when supporting grieving youth in the digital age.
3. Identify strategies for advocating for youth-centered, ethical AI development in bereavement care.

**Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, Social Work Ethics

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship

**Literature References**

1. Yang, N., & Khanna, G. J. (2024). AI and Technology in Grief Support: Clinical Implications and Ethical Considerations. *The Counseling Psychologist*. <https://doi.org/1352568>
2. Morris, M. R., & Brubaker, J. R. (2025, April). Generative ghosts: Anticipating benefits and risks of AI afterlives. In *Proceedings of the 2025 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 1-14). <https://doi.org/10.1145/3706598.3713758>
3. Hollanek, T., Nowaczyk-Basińska, K. Griefbots, Deadbots, Postmortem Avatars: on Responsible Applications of Generative AI in the Digital Afterlife Industry. *Philos. Technol.* 37, 63 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-024-00744-w>
4. Lindemann, N.F. The Ethics of 'Deathbots'. *Sci Eng Ethics* 28, 60 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-022-00417-x>

## **E2- 51- Moving beyond surveys: Using behavioral observations, focus groups, and interviews in evaluation (1.5 CE)**



**Evaluation Manager Maria Bartini**  
**Judi's House, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Maria Bartini, PhD is the Evaluation Manager at Judi's House/JAG Institute. With a doctoral degree in Life-Span Developmental Psychology from the University of Georgia, she has over 20 years' experience teaching research methods, statistics, and child development at the college level. In her academic career, she also conducted evaluation research in schools, colleges, and youth sports organizations with the overarching goal of improving the lives of children and adolescents. In addition to heading the organization's Childhood Bereavement Changemaker Initiative, Maria contributes to the evaluation and research activities at Judi's House. Her work focuses on building evaluation/data utilization capacity in the field of childhood bereavement and evaluating the impact of Judi's House services. She can be reached at [mariab@judishouse.org](mailto:mariab@judishouse.org).



**Evaluation Associate Maddy Saunders**  
**Judi's House, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Madeline (Maddy) Saunders works as a Research Associate at Judi's House/JAG Institute. In her role she helps lead the Childhood Bereavement Changemaker expansion, collaborating with organizations across the country to support implementation of data-informed strategies in decision-making, program implementation, and evaluation. Maddy holds a Master's Degree in Applied Psychology with concentrations in Evaluation Research and Industrial/Organizational Psychology from the University of Wisconsin-Stout. She can be reached at [maddys@judishouse.org](mailto:maddys@judishouse.org).

### **Abstract**

Have you ever looked at your evaluation surveys and wondered how you could dig a little deeper? Or measure outcomes for young children? Or gather data about how your programs are working without the bias of self-report surveys? If any of these questions have crossed your mind, this session is for you!

Collecting surveys from the children and families we serve is an efficient and valid means of measuring processes and impact. However, not all evaluation questions can be answered through surveys. Sometimes we would like information in an open-ended format to get a more in-depth view of our programs or services. Or we need to measure impacts for clients unable to complete surveys because of their developmental levels or other challenges. In this interactive workshop, we will discuss when you should consider using interviews, focus groups, or behavioral observation to support your evaluation efforts. Based on our

work with *Childhood Bereavement Changemakers (CBC)*, our evaluation of the *CBC Initiative*, and our professional training, we will share guidance on best practices for implementing these approaches in ways that maintain fidelity to program impact maps (or logic models) for evaluation. We will particularly focus on behavioral observation and the creation of checklists that can be integrated as part of regular evaluation practice. During this session, you will get the opportunity to create and use an abbreviated behavior checklist to conduct practice observations of simulated young children’s behavior in a grief center. We will share the dos and don’ts of collecting observational data and consider approaches for establishing sustainable and cost-effective processes. Our goal is for you to walk away from this session empowered to explore new ways to measure your impact and tell your stories.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Compare the pros and cons of focus groups and interviews to determine their appropriate use.
2. Create definitions of observable behavior in a childhood bereavement space.
3. Demonstrate how to develop and implement an observational checklist for evaluation practice.

**Categories**

Research, Outcomes, and Measurements

**Content Level**

Advanced

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Research and Program Evaluation

**Literature References**

- Avent, C. M., Teasdale, R. M., Yan, X., Serrano-Abreu, M. B., & Moore, C. L. (2025). Toward racial equity: Navigating diverse conceptualizations and perspective in social justice-oriented evaluation practice. *American Journal of Evaluation, 46*(2), 287-308.
- Chafouleas, S. M., Weiner, M. A., & Koslouski, J. B. (2025). Effects of Feel Your Best Self mini-lessons during morning meetings on kindergarten classwide behaviors. *School Psychology*. Advance online publication. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/spq0000707>
- Gunawam, M. A., Hamzh, S., & Hadiwinarto, S. D. (2023). Observation methods in evaluating early childhood learning in kindergarten. *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan, 15*(4), 6803-6813.
- Rubin, A. (2020). *Program Evaluation: Pragmatic Methods for Social Work and Human Service Agencies*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Sadri, A. & Yates, T. M. (2024). Maternal support in preschool and child behavior problems: The mediating role of childhood emotion knowledge. *Developmental Psychology, 61*(4), 665-678.

- Velez, G. & Power, S. A. (2024). Teaching field social psychology: An action orientation to pedagogy of methods and methodologies. *Qualitative Psychology*, 11(2), 197-212.

### **E3- 54- Lost in Translation: Incarcerated Youth and Grief Misunderstood (1.5 CE)**



**Senior Clinician Samantha Anthony**  
**Uplift Center for Grieving Children, United States**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Samantha Anthony, MS, LPC, is a grief clinician at the Uplift Center for Grieving Children in Philadelphia. She holds an M.S. in Clinical and Counseling Psychology with a concentration in Child and Adolescent Therapy. Her professional experience includes facilitating group-based therapeutic grief interventions with incarcerated youth, youth involved in the legal system, school-based populations, and their caregivers. As an immigrant to the United States, Samantha brings both personal and professional insight into the ways grief shapes lives, and how some forms of grief are not always recognized or given permission to exist. Her work is driven by the tenet that grief is a social justice issue.

#### **Abstract**

In this session, it is proposed that grieving youth who have experienced incarceration belong to a distinct cultural community. This culture, marked by survival languages and trauma-shaped rituals, has not been integrated into mainstream grief discourse. This session further defends this position by juxtaposing these expressions of grief through vignettes and case examples, and by comparing them with frameworks such as ICG and PGD diagnostic criteria. We highlight how dominant grief models erase the realities of incarcerated youth instead of recognizing their grief expressions as part of the universal human experience with cultural nuance. In doing so, systems lean toward criminalizing coping as maladaptive, perpetuating cycles of punishment and recidivism.

To support this theoretical examination, the session will also offer practical tools for practitioners working with grieving youth who are incarcerated. These tools include strategies for normalizing grief, applying a trauma-informed lens, and introducing what we call a survival lens to better understand expressions of grief. These tools additionally aim to reduce misinterpretation, strengthen practitioner response, and create conditions for healing over punishment. The session will also focus on translating behavior into grief language and equipping systems to respond with support and empathy rather than punishment

#### **Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. recognize language for engaging incarcerated youth in conversations that normalize grief
2. apply a trauma-informed lens to translate behaviors into grief language and will be introduced to the proposed survival lens as a supporting framework for understanding grief expression
3. gain an understanding of how the intersection of childhood grief and juvenile incarceration functions as a unique cultural location shaping how youth experience the world
4. identify at least one way grief expressions in incarcerated youth are often misinterpreted, and describe an alternative grief-informed response

**Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Diversity and Social Justice, Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Social and Cultural Foundations, Human Growth and Development, Wellness and Prevention

**Literature References**

- Clow, S., Olafson, E., Ford, J., Moser, M., Slivinsky, M., & Kaplow, J. (2023). Addressing grief reactions among incarcerated adolescents and young adults using trauma and grief component therapy. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 15(Suppl 1), S192–S200. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001364>
- Erdem, G., Yücesoy, Z. B., & Ersayan, A. E. (2024). Daily experiences and close relationships of incarcerated youth: Perspectives of inmates and prison staff. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 156, 107286. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107286>
- Ewenson, L. (2024). Lived experiences of youth justice detention in Australia: reframing the institution in a decarcerated state. *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, 30(1), 41–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1323238X.2024.2412386>
- Hilberdink, C. E., Ghainder, K., Dubanchet, A., Hinton, D., Djelantik, A. A. A. M. J., Hall, B. J., & Bui, E. (2023). Bereavement issues and prolonged grief disorder: A global perspective. *Cambridge Prisms: Global Mental Health*, 10, e28. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2023.28>

#### **E4- 91- Impact of Preexisting Mental Health Diagnoses in Grieving Children & Strategies for Support Groups (1.5 CE)**



**Licensed Clinical Social Worker Amy L Strom**

##### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

With over 30 years of experience in the field of social work, Amy Strom has dedicated her career to supporting children, adolescents, and families through private practice and community-based work. Her expertise includes the treatment of children with anxiety, learning and behavioral disorders, neurodivergent individuals, and those coping with grief and loss. Amy holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Miami University, a master's degree in social science administration from Case Western Reserve University, and a master's degree in special education from Ursuline College. She also holds a Level 1 Clinical Training Certificate in Social Thinking™, further enhancing her ability to support children with social-cognitive challenges. For nearly a decade, Amy has played integral role at Valerie's House in Fort Myers, Florida—a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting grieving children and their families. She began her involvement in 2016 as a volunteer group facilitator and was later hired full-time in 2018. Over the years, she served in multiple leadership roles, culminating in her position as Vice President of Partnerships and Operations. In October 2025, Amy will join the Senior Leadership Team at the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in Collier County, Florida. As the Director of Children's Mental Health Programs (HUGS), she will focus her talents on program development and expansion, therapeutic interventions, and ensuring a robust continuum of care for children with mental health diagnoses and their families. Amy's compassionate approach, leadership experience, and clinical insight continue to make a lasting impact on the lives of children and families across Southwest Florida.



**Coordinator of Data Collection and Volunteer Training Melody Madigan  
National Alliance of Mental Illness, United States.**

##### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Melody Madigan is no stranger to helping the youth of Southwest Florida. She served students as a School Counselor in the Lee County School District for nearly 40 years. After retiring from education, Melody began volunteering at Valerie's House shortly after the program opened in 2016 as a Group Support Facilitator. Realizing that Valerie's House is the perfect place to satisfy her passion for helping youth, she readily accepted a position to help children. Throughout her years at Valerie's House her role and responsibilities have varied and have touched on almost all areas of the organization. Presently she is the Data Collection Coordinator, Volunteer Training Coordinator as well as a Group Facilitator. Melody has a Master's Degree in School Counseling from the University of Akron, a Master's Degree in Instructional Technology from the University of South Florida, and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Mathematics from Kent State University. Melody's years as a school counselor have shown her that there is a tremendous need for grief support, and she is thrilled to be a part of Valerie's House.

**Abstract**

Grief is a personal experience, shaped by individual circumstances. However, when a child is already dealing with a preexisting mental health diagnosis—such as depression, anxiety, ADHD, PTSD, or autism spectrum disorder—prior to the loss of a family member, their grief process becomes more complex and thus requires a more specialized treatment approach. Providing an individualized approach that includes a combination of intervention strategies works best to help these children grieve. Peer support groups can be considered an effective intervention for some individuals with a prior diagnosis with careful planning and structure to support inclusivity, validation of one’s feelings and encompass best practices for grief and trauma-informed care. In addition, these groups must provide an atmosphere that not only makes connections among the participants but also allows for the sharing of strategies to manage their emotions. By creating a compassionate and flexible environment, peer support groups can help children navigate both their grief and the emotional and behavioral challenges that arise from their diagnoses, ultimately supporting their overall emotional well-being.

Presenters will draw on decades of experience in both clinical and educational settings to examine how these diagnoses interact with grief responses, often leading to increased emotional dysregulation, behavioral concerns, and difficulties in peer relationships and communication. In addition to highlighting key developmental and diagnostic considerations, this session will offer practical strategies for adapting grief support groups to meet the needs of these children.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. identify and describe common preexisting mental health conditions in children and explain how these conditions may influence grief responses.
2. recognize common grief responses in children.
3. apply strategies and tools to help grieving children with preexisting mental health conditions express grief when language or emotional regulation is limited.
4. implement modifications to a support group structure, environment and facilitation techniques to create safe, inclusive spaces.

**Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Group Dynamics and Counseling

**Literature References**

- Gaines, A. G. (2022). The grief experiences of children with developmental disabilities: A narrative literature review. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 003022282211245. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228221124520>
- Haider, N., & Zaman, N. I. (2022). Bereavement among adolescents with intellectual disability: A qualitative study. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 0030222822110652. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003022282211065275>
- Heitkemper, S., & Lopez, M. (2025). Establishing Grief Groups Due to a Death Loss in K-5 School Setting. *Play Therapy*, 20(3), 22–25.
- Komischke-Konnerup, K. B., Zachariae, R., Johannsen, M., Nielsen, L. D., & O'Connor, M. (2021). Co-occurrence of prolonged grief symptoms and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress in bereaved adults: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders Reports*, 100140. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadr.2021.100140>
- Layne, C. M., Kaplow, J.B., Oosterhoff, B., Hill, R., & Pynoos, R.S. (2017). The interplay between posttraumatic stress and grief reactions in traumatically bereaved adolescents: When trauma, bereavement, and adolescence converge. *Adolescent Psychiatry*, 7, 220-239.

## **E5- Leading in a Field Built on Lived Experience (Non-CE offering)**



**Brennan Wood**  
**Dougy Center**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Brennan Wood walked through the doors of Dougy Center: The National Grief Center for Children & Families for the first time in 1987, after her mother, Doris, died just three days after Brennan turned 12. Her life came full circle when she became Dougy Center’s Executive Director in 2015, after serving in various roles since 2004. Brennan is the author of A Kids Book About Grief and delivered the TEDxPortland Talk, “Grief is to Feel, Not Fix.” She serves on the National Advisory Council for The Children’s Collaborative and is an immediate past member of the Board of Directors of the National Alliance for Children’s Grief. She is the recipient of the 2020 Light-a-Fire Award for Extraordinary Executive Director and a 2022 Women of Influence Award. As a grieving child herself, Brennan knows firsthand the importance of a community of support and has dedicated her career to providing that same opportunity to other children and families who are grieving. She is committed to making the world a more grief-informed place – one that acknowledges grief as a natural and normal response to loss, interwoven into a sociocultural context. Brennan loves honoring her mother’s legacy by making every day a celebration.



**Debbie Meyer**  
**Erin’s House**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Debbie Meyer has extensive background in leading nonprofits as the present executive director for Erin’s House for Grieving Children the past 15 years and, prior to that, the leader of Children’s Hope Hospital Hospitality House. She also spent time as the marketing director for a winning Indianapolis 500 race car driver and has over 20 years’ experience as an executive in corporate marketing.

Debbie is an adjunct professor at Huntington University since 2014 teaching classes in grant writing, nonprofit management, and leadership. Most recently, she participated in the Foellinger Foundation Leadership Lab—a one-year program comprised of twelve Northeast Indiana leaders and designed to develop adaptive leadership skills.

Debbie is proud of her time as former board member and secretary on the executive committee for the National Alliance for Children’s Grief (NACG). She has also served as a

board member for Cancer Services of Northeast Indiana, Visiting Nurse, and Leadership Fort Wayne.

She has a bachelor's degree in business management from Indiana Wesleyan University and a master's degree in nonprofit administration from University of Central Florida—obtaining these while working full-time and raising a family. In April 2021, Debbie became a Certified Leadership Coach through the International Coaching Federation and Certified Coaches Alliance.

In her spare time, she loves to read, travel, cheer on Indiana University basketball and Notre Dame football with her family, and help at her church.

**Abstract**

In a field rooted in lived experience, personal stories can be powerful tools for connection, advocacy, and leadership. This session explores how leaders and staff can thoughtfully and intentionally use their own stories—the good, the challenging, and everything in between—while maintaining appropriate boundaries and professional identity. Participants will examine how to foster a culture where storytelling is meaningful, ethical, and supportive for both individuals and organizations. The session will also address the balance between vulnerability and overexposure, and the broader organizational implications of story-driven leadership. Attendees will leave with practical strategies for navigating storytelling in ways that honor personal experience while strengthening organizational impact.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Identify key considerations for using personal lived experience in professional leadership roles.
2. Describe strategies for supporting others in sharing their stories in ways that are meaningful and appropriate.
3. Differentiate between vulnerability and overexposure in professional settings.
4. Examine the organizational impact of story-driven leadership, including benefits and potential challenges.

**Categories**

Administration

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

## **E6- 71- Caring for the Caregivers: Empowering Our Youth's Most Influential Allies (1.5 CE)**



**Camp Erin Online Program Manager Kelly Petersohn**  
**Camp Erin**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Kelly Petersohn is the Camp Erin Online Programs Manager at Eluna, a non-profit organization with a mission to support youth and families impacted by grief or addiction. Kelly is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) with nearly 15 years of service in the field of childhood bereavement; 9 years as Camp Director for Camp Erin Indy! Kelly has a passion for coming alongside families who have experienced grief with special focuses on validating unique grief experiences, providing creative outlets for healthy grief expression, and incorporating opportunities for families to continue the bonds they have with the person(s) who died by remembering, together. Kelly has an innate gift for developing collaborative partnerships focused on bridging the gaps and breaking down the barriers that often prevent families from receiving the support they need and deserve.

### **Abstract**

We know that the number one protective factor against adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is the presence of a caring, loving relationship with a parent or caregiver. Let's come alongside our youth's most influential ally and empower them with the skills they need to promote adaptive family grief processing. Caring for the caregiver strengthens the family foundation, creating a nurturing environment for the family to lean into the development of protective factors such as self-compassion, secure attachments, and continued bonds with the person they are remembering. Come expand your toolbox with 10+ activities focused on strengthening the caregiver-child relationship, fostering meaningful family grief expression, and promoting resiliency for the entire family in the midst of grief.

### **Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Describe the key caregiver behaviors of self-compassion and emotional regulation that promote secure attachment and adaptive family grief processing following the death of a significant person in their life.
2. Identify a variety of components to incorporate in family grief support interventions that aim to strengthen the caregiver-child relationship, foster grief expression, maintain continued bonds, and promote resiliency for youth and families participating in grief support programming.
3. Develop an expanded collection of 10+ family grief support activities that facilitate adaptive grief processing.

### **Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

### **Content Level**

Intermediate

### **Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

### **CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills, Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment

### **CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Social and Cultural Foundations

### **Literature References**

- Alvis, L., Zhang, N., Sandler, I. N., & Kaplow, J. B. (2023). Developmental manifestations of grief in children and adolescents: Caregivers as key grief facilitators. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma, 16*(2), 447-457.
- Sochos, A., & Aleem, S. (2022, February). Parental attachment style and young persons' adjustment to bereavement. In *Child & Youth Care Forum* (Vol. 51, No. 1, pp. 161-179). New York: Springer US.
- Sperandio, K. R., Gutierrez, D., Kirk, M., Lopez, J., & Nathaniel Mason, W. (2022). Post-traumatic growth after the drug-related death of a loved one: Understanding the influence of self-compassion and hope. *The Family Journal, 30*(3), 390-400.
- Zhang, N., Sandler, I., Tein, J. Y., & Wolchik, S. (2023). Reducing suicide risk in parentally bereaved youth through promoting effective parenting: Testing a developmental cascade model. *Development and psychopathology, 35*(1), 433-446.
- Zhang, N., Sandler, I., Thieleman, K., Wolchik, S., & O'Hara, K. (2023). Self-compassion for caregivers of children in parentally bereaved families: A theoretical model and intervention example. *Clinical child and family psychology review, 26*(2), 430-444.

**E7- Session Cancelled**

## **E8- 115- Principles of Fund Development for Grief Support Organizations (Non-CE offering)**



### **Development and Communications Manager Laurel Neitling**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Laurel Noelle joined New Hope in July 2023 as the Circles of Hope Program Manager and transitioned to the role of Development and Communications Manager in 2025. She earned a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in management from Central Michigan University and completed her MBA at Western Governors University in 2024. Before joining the staff team, Laurel volunteered with New Hope as a support group facilitator and has presented at numerous conferences and outreach events, including the 2024 and 2025 NACG National Symposium on Children's Grief. She is grateful for the opportunity to work alongside New Hope's dedicated volunteers and staff to provide compassionate grief support services to the community.



### **Assistant Director Susan Arnould**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Susan Arnould is the Assistant Director at the New Hope Center for Grief Support in Northville, Michigan. With a college background in counseling and early childhood education, she brings a compassionate, developmentally informed approach to supporting individuals through loss. Susan oversees programming for adults, teens, and children, guiding her staff as they deliver meaningful support groups, programs, and resources to those who have experienced loss. She also plays a key role in coordinating New Hope's events and marketing efforts, helping the organization expand its reach and strengthen its connection to the community.

#### **Abstract**

Sustainability is a common challenge for many grief support organizations. This session introduces core principles of fund development with a focus on donor engagement, strategic planning, and aligning mission with fundraising. Participants will learn practical approaches to building diversified revenue streams, cultivating relationships with donors, and developing a strategic fund development plan. Examples will be tailored to small-to-mid-sized grief organizations seeking to expand their fundraising capacity.

#### **Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. describe at least three principles of effective fund development.
2. identify two strategies to engage and retain donors.
3. develop an outline for a strategic fund development plan.
4. evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum based on engagement and feedback.

#### **Categories**

Development/Fundraising

#### **Content Level**

Basic

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

**E9- 102- Con Corazón: Honoring Grief in the Latino Community Through Culturally Informed Practices (1.5 CE)**



**Program Coordinator for Outreach School & Community-Based Services Corina L Garcia Reyes**

**The Children's Room, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Corina is a bilingual (English/Spanish) Licensed Mental Health Clinician in Massachusetts and she is a Program Coordinator for Outreach, School, and Community-Based Services at The Children's Room. In her role, she coordinates and facilitates school and community-based programs, including peer support groups for children and adolescents who are grieving. Corina also leads social and emotional learning curricula in collaboration with local systems, after-school programs, and community-based agencies. Corina provides culturally sensitive and grief-informed interventions in both English and Spanish. She holds a Master of Education in Mental Health Counseling from Cambridge College in Massachusetts and a Bachelor's in Psychology from San Carlos University in Guatemala. She is currently pursuing a Thanatology Certification in Marian University (WI). Corina worked as a mental health clinician at The Good Grief Program at Boston Medical Center, where she developed a strong foundation in working with bereaved populations. Additionally, she has experience providing in-home therapy to Latino communities. Corina hopes to use her cultural humility approach and bilingualism to expand accessibility for Latino families.

**Abstract**

This session offers a thoughtful exploration of duelo y luto (the experience of grief) through a multilayered, culturally informed perspective. Participants will examine how cultural values influence the way grief is experienced, expressed, and supported in the Latino community. Understanding the cultural context of grief is essential to providing compassionate, effective care. In Latino cultures, grief is often shaped by deep-rooted values such as Familismo (familism), Fatalismo (fatalism), Respeto (respect), Orgullo (pride), Tradicionalismo (traditionalism) among others. This session will highlight how these values manifest in the grieving process and why culturally informed approaches are vital when supporting bereaved children and families.

Through discussion and reflection, participants will learn how to identify key cultural elements that influence mourning and how to adapt interventions in ways that are both respectful and relevant. The session will also address the importance of cultural sensitivity and the need for ongoing self-awareness and reflection when working across cultural lines. Participants will leave with a better understanding of how to engage with Latino children and families who are grieving in ways that honor their experiences and cultural identity. This session is ideal for professionals who work with diverse populations and seek to deepen their cultural humility in providing grief support.

This session aims to strengthen the foundation for more inclusive and effective bereavement care by fostering empathy, knowledge, and cultural responsiveness.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Compare and contrast grief, duelo, and luto by identifying at least one key characteristic of each as understood in the Latino community.
2. Identify and list at least four types of losses that a Latino individual may experience following migration, when applicable.
3. identify and define at least two cultural values and apply them to understanding duelo and luto in the Latino community.
4. identify at least two culturally informed practices that can be applied when developing interventions for Latino individuals or families.
5. Identify at least two strategies for practicing cultural humility as an ongoing professional commitment when working with the Latino community.

**Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Diversity and Social Justice, Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Social and Cultural Foundations, Counselor Professional Identity and Practice Issues, Group Dynamics and Counseling

**Literature References**

- Chamra, J., Garcia, C., Lamadrid, J., Ortiz, V., & Rubiano, J. (2023). Starting a Spanish program guide. National Alliance for Children's Grief. <https://indd.adobe.com/view/ae32c5c6-2176-4589-8440-7418d4e3329c>
- Falzarano, F., Winoker, H., Burke, R. V., Mendoza, J. A., Munoz, F., Tergas, A., & Prigerson, H. G. (2022). Grief and bereavement in the Latino/a community: A literature synthesis and directions for future research. *Health Equity*, 6(1), 696-707. <https://doi.org/10.1089/hec.2022.0031>
- Mayfield, V. (2020). Cultural competence now: 56 exercises to help educators understand and challenge bias, racism, and privilege. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.
- Servaty-Seib, H. L., & Chapple, H. S. (Eds.). (2021). *Handbook of Thanatology: The essential body of knowledge for the study of death, dying, and bereavement* (3rd ed.). Association for Death Education and Counseling.

**E10- 159- After the Storm: Lessons learned from providing bereavement support after natural disasters (1.5 CE)**



**Program Director Marian Mankin**

**Bo's Place, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Marian Mankin is the Program Director of Bo's Place, a non-profit bereavement center in Houston, TX where she has worked since 2004. Ms. Mankin oversees the grief support programming at Bo's Place and the Information and the Referral Line that provides bereavement support and grief related resources to inquiries. Marian presents on topics related to bereavement both locally and nationally and has represented Bo's Place on local television and radio programs. Marian is an active member of the National Alliance for Children's Grief and served on the board of directors from 2007-2013, including a year as board president. Marian is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker-Supervisor and previously worked as a therapist in a psychiatric hospital and in therapeutic foster care. Marian has been part of support efforts Bo's Place provided after Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Harvey, and the 2025 Texas Hill Country Floods.



**Volunteer Manager Courtney Reynolds**

**Bo's Place, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Courtney Reynolds, LCSW – Volunteer Manager – Courtney Reynolds recruits, trains and retains volunteers at Bo's Place. She also manages our Internship Program for graduate and undergraduate interns. Courtney joined Bo's Place in June of 2015 and has been part of bereavement support efforts after disasters since that time. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and Religious Studies from Austin College and a Master of Social Work from The University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. Courtney is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with over eleven years of experience in the social work and mental health fields.

**Abstract**

Natural disasters leave behind devastated communities urgently in need of support and recovery, leading both to a great desire and great pressure to do more, provide more, offer more. This can lead to difficult decisions for bereavement centers. Funders and other constituents are often simultaneously incredibly active and supportive, while also adding to the call for organizations to expand how they work in affected communities. This presentation will focus on lessons learned at Bo's Place while supporting the Houston community through recovery from hurricanes and flooding. In the midst of vast needs and competing expectations, clarifying our role and staying true to our mission has been crucial. We'll cover descriptions of support provided, community partnerships that developed, navigating conflicts of interest, and supporting staff and volunteers who are also impacted by the disaster. Attendees will be provided with examples of activities used by Bo's Place in groups after a disaster, our Crisis Response Protocol, and other disaster related resources.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Differentiate the varying needs of community members and constituents who may be impacted by a disaster in many different ways.
2. Identify key community partners and stakeholders able to help provide support after a disaster.
3. Describe specific considerations for designing and creating support activities provided after a disaster.
4. Utilize disaster related resources as well as the sample activities.

**Categories**

Outreach and Community Collaboration (schools, Boys and Girls Club, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills, Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Wellness and Prevention, Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Social and Cultural Foundations

**Literature References**

- Alto, PhD, M. E., Nicasio, PhD, A. V., Stewart, PhD, R., Rodríguez-Sanfiorenzo, PhD, T. D., González-Elías, PhD, G., & Orenco-Aguayo, PhD, R. (2021). Provision of mental health services immediately following a natural disaster: Experiences after Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. *Journal of Emergency Management*, 19(8), 167–175. <https://doi.org/10.5055/jem.0634>
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- Heanoy, E. Z., & Brown, N. R. (2024). Impact of Natural Disasters on Mental Health: Evidence and Implications. *Healthcare*, 12(18), 1812. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare12181812>
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- Kaplow, J. (2025, July). *How to Help Children After a Natural Disaster*. Trauma & Grief Virtual Learning Library - MMHPI - Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute. <https://mmhpi.org/work/trauma-grief-center/virtual-learning-library/>
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (2025). *Coping with disasters*. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/coping-disasters>
- National Association of School Psychologists. (2017). *Large-scale natural disasters: Helping children cope* [handout]. Bethesda, MD: Author.
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**F1- 30- Cultural Attunement: Curating Grief Spaces for Caregivers Navigating Limited English Proficiency (1.0 CE)**



**Dr. Polett Coss**

**Children Bereavement Center of South Texas, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Polett Coss, Ph.D., LPC, PSC (she/ella) is the director of grief support services who oversees grief camps, peer-led support groups and center-based services at the Children’s Bereavement Center of South Texas. With a background in in-patient care, higher education and school counseling, Dr. Coss has worked in both group and individual settings, helping clients navigate LGBTQIA+ and grief-related issues. Drawing from both professional scope and lived experience, Dr. Coss brings an engaging and practical perspective to grief education and training.

**Abstract**

This semi-interactive session explores how cultural attunement and language justice can shape supportive spaces for grieving children and families. Children who grieve in homes where English is not the primary language often face barriers to support and added role strain. Together, we will examine “lost in translation” moments, the stress of code-switching, and the civil rights protections that guarantee meaningful language access. Participants will leave with practical tools for recognizing the shifting dynamics in Limited English Proficiency (LEP) households, applying culturally responsive approaches, and developing strategies to advocate for language inclusivity in grief support.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Describe shifting dynamics that influence the grief experience of children who speak a language other than English at home
2. Identify civil rights driven culturally responsive approaches to interactions with caregivers who speak English as a second language
3. Describe at least two intervention strategies to foster counselor empowerment in advocating for language inclusivity

**Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

**Content Level**

Basic

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Diversity and Social Justice

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Social and Cultural Foundations

## Literature References

- Yeboah, D., McDaniel, C., & Lion, C. K. (2022). Language matters: Why we should reconsider the term “limited English proficiency.” *Hospital Pediatrics*, *13*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1542/hpeds.2022-007014>
- Boelen, P. A., & Spuij, M. (2024a). Individual and systemic variables associated with prolonged grief and other emotional distress in bereaved children. *PLOS ONE*, *19*(4). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0302725>
- Falzarano, F., Winoker, H., Burke, R. V., Mendoza, J. A., Munoz, F., Tergas, A., Maciejewski, P. K., & Prigerson, H. G. (2022). Grief and bereavement in the Latino/a community: A literature synthesis and directions for future research. *Health Equity*, *6*(1), 696–707. <https://doi.org/10.1089/heq.2022.0031>

## **F2- 49- Expressing Big Energy: Simple Techniques for Drum Circle Facilitation in the Grief Space (Non-CE offering)**



**Independent Professional Development Consultant Debbie Beninati  
The Sharing Place, United States. Village Music Circles (drum circle facilitation), United States. Utah Music Educators Association, United States. National Association for Music Education, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Debbie Beninati earned a Bachelor of Music Education from the University of Colorado, and a MAT-FA from the University of Utah. She has over twenty-five years' experience teaching elementary general music, elementary orchestra, and early childhood music. Currently an Independent Professional Development Consultant, she provides workshops for music specialists and general educators throughout Utah. She believes in the importance of joyful musical learning and its effect on the social-emotional development of children: through music, children have the opportunity to work collaboratively and create something beautiful and uniquely human. Her volunteer work with The Sharing Place allows her to bring skills from her music education career into the grief support space. Through drum circles and other musical activities, Debbie provides a safe space for children, teens, and adults to process big energy in a creative and productive way.

### **Abstract**

Come drum with us! Coping with big energy and feelings are essential to the grief process. In this session, we will use simple drum circle facilitation techniques to help our support group participants—and their adult caregivers—experience big energy and feelings in a fun, positive, and creative way. No musical experience necessary!

The goal of the session is to learn simple drum circle facilitation techniques that foster community connectedness and creative expression. In addition, ways to make small percussion instruments using everyday items and utilizing “found sounds” from the surrounding environment will be explored, shared, and discussed.

Conference participants will learn to classify musical percussive sounds into categories and make a small percussion instrument to take home. Using our newly made instruments, we will experience a facilitated drum circle that requires no previous musical experience. Through a series of musical games and exercises, participants will practice focused listening while making music together. We will explore ways to talk about the subtleties of human emotion, using our instruments as the catalyst. Techniques learned can be applied to school-age, pre-teen, teen, and adult groups in a variety of grief support programs (peer-to-peer, summer camps, etc.).

### **Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Define the term “found sounds.”
2. Identify and categorize percussive musical instruments and found sounds into the following categories: tap, jingle, ring, scrape/rattle, and boom.
3. Create a simple percussion instrument out of everyday objects.
4. Demonstrate how to use their created instrument in a facilitated drum circle through a series of musical games and exercises.

5. Identify ways in which a facilitated drum circle--and the techniques demonstrated--can be used in grief support groups to encourage creative expression of big energy.

**Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

**Content Level**

Basic

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

### **F3- 59- Death in the Lives of Adolescents: Schools as a Holding Environment for Grieving Students (1.0 CE)**



**School Counselor Shannon R Lanoue  
Independent/Consultant, United States**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Shannon Reilly Lanoue I have recently completed a Master of Science degree in thanatology from Marian University. My previous education at Lesley University and professional experience as a high school guidance counselor have given me the ability to bring a fresh perspective to your organization. After pausing my career to raise my children, I am eager to re-enter the workforce with a renewed and unwavering focus on adolescent grief and bereavement. Moreover, I aspire to educate those working with adolescents in a school environment on research-based postvention strategies. The focus of my graduate Applied Capstone Project at Marian University was to conduct an in-depth literature review and research project entitled “Death in the Lives of Adolescents: The Role of Schools as a Holding Environment for Grieving Students and Fostering Posttraumatic Growth.” I intend to present a targeted review of grief in adolescents and the developmental tasks that make it unique, and research-based interventions and postvention that foster posttraumatic growth.

#### **Abstract**

Adolescents are no strangers to death, grief, and bereavement. They experience loss throughout their development, and since this is a period of significant physical, social-emotional, cognitive, and spiritual change, they face unique challenges. Any death—traumatic or non-violent—can be a profound event capable of disrupting adolescents' core beliefs.

Middle and high school students spend most of their days at school. Schools serve as the main environment for both learning and social interactions, where students regularly connect with teachers, counselors, paraprofessionals, administrators, coaches, and peers. Schools also promote growth and positive experiences, helping adolescents develop physically, academically, socially, and emotionally, while fostering a sense of achievement and enabling them to reach key developmental milestones. Additionally, ensuring a safe school environment after traumatic death events is crucial for their mental health, social-emotional, and physical well-being. Understanding the adolescent grief and bereavement experience is essential for everyone involved in their lives, whether raising, teaching, coaching, working with, or caring for them.

This presentation will review and explore the literature and developmental considerations of adolescence, the types of losses they experience, traumatic loss, and non-violent loss. It will also discuss how school systems can serve as supportive environments and channels for positive expressions of grief and foster posttraumatic growth. Contemporary concepts and frameworks related to grief and bereavement, such as the Dual-Process Model, continuing bonds, and meaning reconstruction, will be explored, along with research-based strategies to support schools during times of grief in response to death events.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. identify, explain and give examples of the unique challenges experienced by grieving adolescents.
2. Recognize and interpret research-based data about the needs of adolescents following student death in the school community.
3. Name and summarize the domains of posttraumatic growth.
4. Demonstrate how schools can create a holding environment for bereft and grieving students.
5. Evaluate and explore ways school communities can best support adolescents throughout the grieving process, particularly in the wake of a traumatic death event involving students.

**Categories**

Outreach and Community Collaboration (schools, Boys and Girls Club, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Human Growth and Development, Wellness and Prevention

**Literature References**

- Andriessen, K., Snir, J., Kryszynska, K., Rickwood, D., & Pirkis, J. (2024). Supporting adolescents bereaved by suicide or other traumatic death: The views of counselors. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 00302228241246031. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228241246031>
- Kuhnke, J. L. (2024). A Call to Journal: Grief work and poetry—A reflection. *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Advancing Theory and Professional Practice through Scholarly and Reflective Publications*, 78(1–2), 51–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15423050231219748>
- Linder, L., Lunardini, M., & Zimmerman, H. (2024). Supporting childhood bereavement through school-based grief group. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 89(2), 741–758. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228221082756>
- Matthews, D., Finney, N., Owens, D., Gordon, F., & Morgan-Swaney, C. (2022). Creative counseling strategies for adolescents working through grief. *The Family Journal*, 30(3), 261–267. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10664807221090946>
- Mirick, R. G., & Berkowitz, L. (2022). Adolescents' experiences with school-based postvention services: Needs, supports, and recommendations. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 00302228221134830. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228221134830>
- Pappas, S. (2023). More than 20% of teens have seriously considered suicide. Psychologists and communities can help tackle the problem. *American Psychological Association*, 54(5), 1–12.

#### **F4- 14- From TikTok to Digital Shrines: Shifting Memorial Culture and Implications for Clinical Practice (1.0 CE)**



**Clinical Director Dr. Kailey Bradley**  
**Refuge Counseling LLC, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Dr. Bradley is a licensed professional counselor, nationally certified counselor, and fellow in thanatology. She also holds a doctorate in counselor education and supervision from Ohio University. Dr. Bradley has a background in hospice work and feels that companioning and advocating for griever is her life's passion. Currently, she is an adjunct professor at both Marian University and Marshall University where she teaches a wide range of counseling courses including childhood bereavement and pediatric hospice care. Dr. Bradley is the clinical director at Refuge Counseling LLC and the co-founder and executive director of the Ohio Bereavement Collaborative, a non-profit grief organization. Moreover, her professional leadership can be seen in her dedication to conducting over 100 peer-reviewed conference presentations and 10 peer-reviewed publications on topics related to: counselor education, grief and loss, and development of neurodiverse affirming learning environments.



**Clinical Counselor Nancy Baur**  
**Refuge Counseling LLC, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Nancy Baur is a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor with Supervision designation and a Licensed Independent Chemical Dependency Counselor. Nancy has a background working as a Mobile Response Stabilization Service (MRSS) therapist for Hopewell Health Centers in Southeastern Ohio. Nancy specializes in trauma therapy for children, adolescents, and people struggling with addiction. Nancy is an adjunct instructor for the University of Rio Grande and completed studies at the University of Vermont where she completed her certification as a Death Doula

**Abstract**

The ways teens grieve are shifting in the digital age. Social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and online memorial spaces have allowed and encouraged young people to create, share, and sustain memories of those they've lost in unique and innovative ways. This training explores the rise of digital memorial culture among grieving adolescents, examining both the opportunities and challenges it presents for meaning-making, identity, and peer support. Participants will gain insight into the role of digital spaces in grief expression and learn strategies for supporting teens as they navigate mourning in online worlds.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Describe 4 current trends in how adolescents are using digital platforms in the grieving process
2. Explore 3 strategies for integrating awareness of digital grief practices into therapeutic, educational, and community-based support for bereaved adolescents.

3. Identify 5 potential benefits and 3 risks associated with online grieving.

**Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship

**Literature References**

- Rolbiecki AJ, Washington KT, Bitsicas K. Digital Storytelling as an Intervention for Bereaved Family Members. *Omega (Westport)*. 2021 Mar;82(4):570-586. doi: 10.1177/0030222819825513. Epub 2019 Jan 24. PMID: 30678536; PMCID: PMC7819462.
- King R, Carter P. Exploring Young Millennials' Motivations for Grieving Death Through Social Media. *J Technol Behav Sci*. 2022;7(4):567-577. doi: 10.1007/s41347-022-00275-1. Epub 2022 Aug 26. PMID: 36043161; PMCID: PMC9411041.
- Wortman, C. B. (2022). Internet resources for the bereaved: Facebook's influence on the grieving process. In L. A. Burke & E. K. Rynearson (Eds.), *The restorative nature of ongoing connections with the deceased: Exploring presence within absence* (pp. 151–162). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003105077-17>

**F5- 78- Grief Behind Locked Doors: Creative Activities for Youth Who Are Grieving in a Detention Center (1.0 CE)**



**Director of School Programs and Spanish Services Chris Seminario  
Ryan's Place, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Chris Seminario has over ten years of experience working with youth, including 3.5 years with the Department of Child Services for the State of Indiana. For the past five years, she has facilitated grief support groups with youth in juvenile detention centers, using creative, activity-based approaches to help youth who are grieving explore their feelings and strengthen coping skills. As Director of School Programs and Spanish Services at Ryan's Place, she oversees school-based grief support programs (approximately 50 groups each school year) and Spanish-speaking adult groups, and provides individual counseling in both English and Spanish. She also supervises BSW and MSW interns, bringing a broad perspective on grief support across settings. Her work focuses on practical, hands-on approaches that can be adapted for secure and nontraditional environments.

**Abstract**

Adolescents in juvenile detention facilities often carry layered grief: the death of people they love alongside the loss of freedom and disrupted relationships. In short-term detention, youth may only attend a group once or twice, making it essential to build trust quickly and provide interventions that are meaningful and standalone. This session will highlight three activity-based approaches designed for secure environments with limited time, space, and safety flexibility. Participants will be introduced to each activity with step-by-step guidance and discussion of adaptation for their own programs. Drawing on her experience facilitating grief groups inside a juvenile detention center, the presenter will provide practical strategies that can be implemented immediately with youth who are grieving. While examples are drawn from short-term detention settings, the tools can be applied in other secure or nontraditional environments, including longer-term juvenile justice centers, shelters, or alternative schools.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Identify grief themes unique to youth in detention, including the overlap of death-related grief and loss of freedom.
2. Outline three activity-based approaches that address grief and incarceration themes.
3. Describe how to adapt grief support activities to settings with safety restrictions and limited space.
4. Select strategies to build trust quickly with youth who may only attend one or two sessions.
5. Apply at least one activity or strategy within their own grief support programming.

**Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Group Dynamics and Counseling

**Literature References**

- Clow, S., Olafson, E., Ford, J., Moser, M., Slivinsky, M., & Kaplow, J. (2022). Addressing grief reactions among incarcerated adolescents and young adults using trauma and grief component therapy. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 15(S1), S192–S200. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001364>
- Gottlieb, M., Naidu, A., Neimeyer, R. A., & Boerner, K. (2025). A scoping review of evidence-based grief interventions for parentally bereaved children. *OMEGA – Journal of Death and Dying*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228251334249>
- Zhang, M. J., Sutherland, A., Arditti, J., & Few-Demo, A. (2024). How do children describe their experiences of parental incarceration? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 156, 107488. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2024.107488>

## **F6- 84- Unlocking Support: Strategies to Ensure Families Receive Survivor Benefits (Non-CE offering)**



**Chief Program Officer Emma Trout  
The Children's Collaborative for Healing and Support, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Bio pending

### **Abstract**

Social Security Survivor Benefits are designed to be a lifeline, reducing child poverty and providing financial stability during times of loss. Yet fewer than half of eligible children receive these benefits, leaving billions of dollars untapped by grieving families. This session, led by the Children's Collaborative for Healing and Support, explores why so many families miss out and how schools, healthcare providers, community organizations, and states can play a vital role in closing the gap. Participants will learn from Utah's groundbreaking model—which uses school enrollment forms, vital-records checkboxes, and United Way case management to identify bereaved children—and consider practical steps to replicate and scale these approaches across states and communities.

Through a mix of research insights, case studies, and interactive discussion, attendees will walk away with concrete strategies for helping families navigate the survivor benefits system.

### **Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Explain the role of Social Security Survivor Benefits in reducing poverty for grieving families.
2. Identify the systemic barriers preventing families from accessing these benefits.
3. Explore the Utah model and the Children's Collaborative's role in scaling solutions nationwide.
4. Develop actionable strategies for supporting families in their own states or communities.

### **Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

### **Content Level**

Intermediate

### **Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

**F7- 106- Children’s Grief and Posttraumatic Growth: Research Findings and Practice Considerations (1.0 CE)**



**Clinical Psychology PhD Student Kimberly Ecker**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Kimberly Ecker is a clinical health psychology PhD student at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She is the project coordinator of a multi-site community study investigating grief peer support groups and posttraumatic growth in children and caregivers. Kimberly is a graduate assistant and clinical intern at KinderMourn, a non-profit grief center located in Charlotte. Kimberly is a member of NACG and the student and intern workgroup. She received her master’s degree in Counseling and Human Development from the University of Rochester.



**Clinical Psychology PhD Student Noa Leiter**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Noa Leiter is a clinical health psychology PhD student at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She collaborates on a multi-site community study investigating peer support group interventions for bereaved children and caregivers, and their experiences of posttraumatic growth. She received her B.A. in psychology and organizational sciences from George Washington University, after which she worked for a year as a data operations research analyst at Westat and completed a two-year post-bac at the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.



**Professor and Chair, Department of Psychological Sciences Ryan P. Kilmer**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Ryan Kilmer, PhD is a Professor of Psychology and Chair of the Department of Psychological Science at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He is also co-Editor-in-Chief of the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry. A child clinical-community psychologist, his work focuses on (1) understanding factors influencing the development of children at-risk for emotional, behavioral, and/or academic difficulties, particularly risk and resilience and youngsters’ adjustment to trauma; and (2) using evaluation to refine programs, improve service delivery, support organizational development, and guide system change and local policy. Of relevance to NACG, he has: (a) led a partnership focused on children’s and caregivers’ experience of grief peer support groups, including factors influencing their well-being, adjustment, and posttraumatic growth (PTG); and (b) developed measures of PTG in children and youth and examined growth and adaptation in those who have experienced mass trauma events (e.g., natural disasters) and diverse adversities (e.g., grief loss). A former President of the Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice, he is a Fellow of the

American Psychological Association (APA), the Society for Community Research and Action, the Society for Child and Family Policy and Practice, and Trauma Psychology (APA's Division 56).

### **Abstract**

The death of a special person can have a profound impact on children's well-being. As children navigate grief and its challenges, some may also experience posttraumatic growth (PTG) — positive psychological changes experienced as a result of a stressful event and its aftermath. Professionals in the child bereavement field have observed children's expression of growth; however, research on grief and PTG (and factors that may be associated with growth) remains limited. This presentation will (a) review the current literature on children's grief and PTG, (b) present findings from a multi-center research project, and (c) discuss practice recommendations. Data were collected with children and caregivers participating in grief support groups at two time points from nine grief centers across the U.S. This presentation focuses on baseline data from 148 children ages 6-12 years old (around 50% boys), from diverse racial and ethnic groups. Analysis examined relationships among child PTG, adjustment challenges, and key child and loss characteristics. A path analysis model explored the interrelationships of child self-system resources (hope, coping competency belief, and future expectations), PTG, and adjustment challenges. Findings indicate that children reported moderate levels of PTG, adjustment challenges, and coping competency, and high levels of hope and future expectations. PTG was marginally correlated with child age; there were no differences in PTG associated with gender, time since loss, relationship with the deceased, and cause of death. Overall, children who reported higher hope, future expectations, and coping competency tended to report higher PTG and fewer adjustment challenges. The path model highlighted that hope, across all variables, had the strongest positive effect on PTG. Overall, findings complement previous studies on the potential protective role of self-system resources and their contribution to children's growth. Understanding PTG and related processes can help inform support services for grieving children, such as strengthening self-system resources.

### **Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. define children's posttraumatic growth, broadly and in the context of loss.
2. summarize findings from a research study on children's grief, PTG, adjustment challenges, and self-system resources.
3. Identify at minimum three examples of PTG-based practice recommendations.

### **Categories**

Research, Outcomes, and Measurements

### **Content Level**

Intermediate

### **Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

### **CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills, Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment

### **CE Content Information Counseling**

Human Growth and Development, Research and Program Evaluation, Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship

## Literature References

- Fung, A. O.-L., & Browne, W. V. (2025). Post-traumatic growth following bereavement among children and adolescents: A systematic review. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 30(5), 614-641. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2024.2430238>
- Arslan, B. S., Özer, Z., & Buldukoğlu, K. (2020). Posttraumatic growth in parentally bereaved children and adolescents: A systematic review. *Death Studies*, 46(1), 111–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2020.1716886>
- Giang, C., Alvis, L., Oosterhoff, B., & Kaplow, J. B. (2024). Protective factors in the context of childhood bereavement: Youth gratitude, future orientation, and purpose in life. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 0, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228241246919>
- Jernslett, M., Kilmer, R. P., Avraam, D., & Anastassiou-Hadjicharalambous, X. (2025). Growing through adversity: A meta-analytic and conceptual elucidation of the relationship between posttraumatic stress and posttraumatic growth among youth. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 120, 102617. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2025.102617>

**F8- 111- Unique Themes, Lasting Impact: Creative Camp Approaches for Supporting Grieving Children (Non-CE offering)**



**Music Therapist Madison Weeks**  
**Avow, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

I graduated in the Spring of 2022 with my bachelor's in music therapy from Florida Gulf Coast University. I became a board-certified music therapist in September of 2022 and then began working at Avow in October of 2022, working with pediatrics and children's bereavement. In 2023, I became certified in hospice and palliative care music therapy, which involves courses on child and adolescent grief and loss. Currently, I am completing my master's in social work and have been focusing on collaborating with the Avow Kids team to provide unique camp experiences that are supportive, engaging, and fun.



**Avow Kids Coordinator Ashley Hibbard**  
**Avow, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

I graduated with my Master of Social Work degree (MSW) from Florida Gulf Coast University in May 2024. I started my clinical internship at Avow Hospice in the adult bereavement and Avow Kid's programs from June 2023 until April 2024. I started working for Avow Kids part time in April 2024, then full time once I graduated the next month. Working for Avow Kids, I have collaborated with the team on creating new and engaging camps, groups, and activities for youth dealing with change and grief in their lives. I am currently working towards becoming a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and Registered Play

**Abstract**

Join Avow Kids, a children's grief center for ages 5–17, for an engaging and insightful presentation on utilizing creative camp themes and interventions to support children experiencing grief and ambiguous loss. In this session, we will explore how unique camp themes, such as "Exploring Grief Through STEAM" and grief around the world, can foster healing, resilience, and cultural understanding through non-traditional interventions supported by grief psychoeducation. Through a combination of discussion and hands-on activities, attendees will learn how to craft meaningful camp experiences that incorporate equity, diversity, and inclusion, ensuring accessible and culturally responsive programming for all children. We will showcase two detailed camp outlines, highlighting the process of theme development, activity planning, and how to adapt interventions to different age groups. Additionally, we will share strategies for documenting camp outcomes and gathering feedback to inform continuous improvement. This presentation is designed for grief support specialists seeking practical guidance and innovative ideas to enhance their work with grieving children. Attendees will leave equipped with actionable frameworks for developing impactful summer camp themes, engaging children in meaningful activities, and strengthening inclusive environments that address the unique needs of diverse populations.

Ultimately, this session emphasizes the importance of intentional, culturally responsive programming in promoting healing and resilience through creative interventions that honor each child's identity and experiences.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Identify and describe outlines for at least two unique grief camp themes and highlight 4 other unique camp themes
2. Demonstrate how to adapt grief interventions and activities for children of varying ages and developmental stages within a camp setting
3. Select non-traditional interventions supported by grief psychoeducation to enhance engagement for children
4. Demonstrate how to integrate multiple modalities into camp programs that address diverse grief experiences and emotional needs.
5. Develop strategies for documenting camp outcomes and gathering participant feedback to evaluate and improve programming effectiveness

**Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

**Content Level**

Basic

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

**F9- 134- Growing Your Mission: Marketing Made Simple with Storytelling & AI (Non-CE offering)**



**Founder Erica R Noll**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Erica Noll is a marketing and communications executive turned leadership coach and keynote speaker with 25 years of experience helping people and brands lead with clarity, authenticity, and impact. Over the course of her career—including 12 years in a senior leadership role at a global real estate firm—Erica became known as the calm in the chaos: a trusted advisor, a team builder, and a voice of grounded wisdom during change. Now, Erica brings a fresh and necessary perspective to leadership in times of change. She speaks candidly about her own journey through professional disruption, offering practical tools for leaders. Her message is especially resonant with women in leadership and people-first organizations navigating a season of uncertainty. Whether on stage or in one-on-one conversations, she brings a powerful blend of empathy, insight, and straight talk—reminding us that leadership isn't about titles; it's about how we show up when the ground shifts.

**Abstract**

*Running a nonprofit grief center often means wearing every hat, including marketer and fundraiser, without the benefit of a big budget or a marketing team. In this session, you'll learn how to define your brand voice, craft an elevator pitch that sticks, and use storytelling to connect donors to your mission. We'll also explore free and low-cost AI tools that can generate press releases, social posts, donor thank-yous, and more. Walk away with practical strategies and prompts you can start using immediately to amplify your impact, even with limited resources.*

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Define their organization's brand voice and distill their mission into a clear, repeatable elevator pitch.
2. Identify and repurpose participant and program stories into donor-facing narratives that drive engagement and giving.
3. Demonstrate how to apply free and low-cost AI tools to create press releases, donor thank-yous, and social content on limited budgets.

**Categories**

Marketing

**Content Level**

Basic

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

## **F10- 136- Beyond Sympathy: Why Widow Support Must Evolve from Crisis Response to Comprehensive Family Care (Non-CE offering)**



**Founding CEO Carolyn C. Moor**

**Modern Widows Club | The Movement for Widow Care® (MWC), United States.**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Carolyn Moor founded Modern Widows Club® | The Movement for Widow Care™ after becoming a young widow with two daughters, transforming personal tragedy into a 509(a)(2) public health charity pioneering comprehensive family grief support. National Recognition: 2025 New York Life Foundation Bereavement Advisory Council Member TEDx Speaker featured on TED.com Published Author of 3 widow support centric books. Media Expert featured on CBS Sunday Morning, The Oprah Winfrey Show, NPR, Wall Street Journal, and Psychology Today Expertise in Family Systems: Her Hope–Heal–Grow–Lead® framework directly addresses how parental grief impacts children's outcomes, making her uniquely qualified to present on protective factors for grieving families. Measurable Impact: MWC has delivered over 1.3 million services, achieving 90% reduction in participant depression with 4x increases in confidence—outcomes that directly benefit children of supported widowed parents. Vision: Creating a world where every widow and their children receive comprehensive support for healing and thriving across generations.



**Guest Speaker: Dr. Mari Marquez, PhD**

Dr. Mari Marquez is a personal growth educator specializing in personal development and post-traumatic growth following the loss of loved ones. She holds a Ph.D. in psychology with an emphasis in performance psychology, and is an international-selling bilingual author that provides research-backed tools for adaptation and personal growth in both English and Spanish through workshops, materials, and her Growth After Loss Podcast. She is a member of Psi Chi, the International Honor Society in Psychology, and is a facilitator for the Resilient Parenting Program through Arizona State University. Dr. Mari also co-leads a Spanish-speaking support group with the Modern Widows Club. She holds specialized training in post-traumatic growth, grief support, and prolonged grief disorder, and has supported individuals affected by traumatic losses.

### **Abstract**

For too long, support for grieving families has been limited to short-term crisis response—cards, casseroles, brief check-ins—before communities move on. But when a parent dies, children don't just lose a caregiver—they often lose their surviving parent to overwhelming grief, creating cascading family trauma spanning generations.

In this essential session, we explore comprehensive, multi-year family support that honors not just loss, but resilience. Drawing from Carolyn Moor's lived wisdom as founder of Modern Widows Club | The Movement for Widow Care® (MWC), we examine how supporting surviving parents directly impacts children's healing and long-term outcomes.

You'll discover MWC's signature Hope–Heal–Grow–Lead™ pathway and Seven Pillars of Healthy Widowhood, emphasizing how parental stability, emotional regulation, and community connection create protective factors for grieving children. When we support widowed parents' journeys from crisis to leadership, we prevent additional childhood trauma and foster family resilience.

The statistics reveal the urgency: over 2,800 women become widows daily in America. Without proper support, families often fragment, leading to substance abuse, mental health crises, foster care placement, and generational trauma cycles. MWC's holistic approach shows remarkable results—90% decrease in overwhelm and depression among participants, with fourfold increases in confidence and purpose. When surviving parents stabilize and thrive, children maintain security and continue healthy development.

This conversation transcends crisis intervention. It's about keeping a larger promise—ensuring that when tragedy strikes families, both surviving parents and children access tools, care, and community support needed to heal together and thrive across generations. Join us to learn how supporting one generation prevents trauma in the next, creating stronger families and more resilient communities through intentional, sustained care.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Identify the four phases of the Hope–Heal–Grow–Lead® pathway and apply specific interventions for each stage when supporting grieving families by supporting their surviving parent where they today.
2. Define the interconnection between surviving parent wellness and children's grief outcomes, using this knowledge to advocate for comprehensive family support.
3. Demonstrate how to assess a widowed parent's position within the Seven Pillars of Healthy Widowhood to create targeted support plans.
4. Create protective factor strategies that address parental stability, emotional regulation, and community connection for grieving children.
5. Demonstrate how to integrate widow-specific support into existing child grief programs to address whole-family healing.

**Categories**

Outreach and Community Collaboration (schools, Boys and Girls Club, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

**Plenary Session- Rooted and Responsive: Designing Bereavement Care That Belongs to the Community (1.5 CE)**



**Presenter #1 Name, Title, Credentials:**

Adriana McKinnon, MS  
Chief Program Officer  
Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas

Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic:

Adriana is a bilingual licensed professional counselor with more than 17 years of experience in mental health and social services.

Adriana's experience includes advocacy work with survivors of family and sexual violence, migrant unaccompanied refugee children and survivors of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking. Currently, Adriana serves as the Chief Program Officer for the Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas in San Antonio, Texas where she continues her mission of supporting children and families through their healing journey.

Adriana received a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Houston-Victoria and a Master of Science in Counseling from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

Highest Degree Earned: Master of Science in Counseling  
Field of Study: Counseling  
License: LPC



**Presenter #2 Name, Title, Credentials:**

Kristina Hernandez, BA, MS  
Chief Executive Officer  
Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas

Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic:

Kristina Hernandez is the Chief Executive Officer for Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas, an agency that has been providing grief and trauma counseling services for 28 years. Kristina's personal connection to the Center as a former client fuels her commitment to ensuring that its vital services are accessible to all grieving children and families. Her leadership is driven by a deep understanding of the transformative impact of compassionate support during times of profound loss.

Kristina transitioned to the nonprofit sector in 2013 after nearly two decades in banking and financial marketing. Her passion for making a difference led her to hold key fundraising leadership roles at both a national cancer prevention nonprofit and the San Antonio Food Bank—where her heart for service remains strong ("once a food banker, always a food banker!").

She holds a Bachelor of Business Administration with a concentration in marketing and a Master of Science in Nonprofit Management and she is also a proud alumna of the Leadership Texas Class of 2021.

Highest Degree Earned: Master of Science in Nonprofit Management  
Field of Study: Business

### **Abstract**

This plenary will feature leaders from the Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas, Kristina Hernandez and Adriana McKinnon, who will explore what it truly means to recognize a need for bereavement support and respond in ways that meet that need over time. Drawing from their work following the Robb Elementary School shooting, the floods in the Texas Hill Country, and the Rio Grande Valley they will examine how community needs evolve across stages — from initial presence and stabilization, to sustained grief support, to long-term strengthening of local capacity. Rather than presenting a single model, they will reflect on how effective bereavement care requires continual reassessment: identifying gaps at each phase, understanding cultural context, and aligning efforts with existing community networks and strengths. Through reflections from two distinct roles within their organization, the speakers will invite participants to consider how perspective shapes decision-making, how responsibility shifts over time, and how to ensure that bereavement support remains rooted in and led by the community itself.

### **Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Identify two concrete strategies for aligning bereavement services with existing community networks and cultural context, including how to assess local strengths and avoid duplicating or displacing community-led efforts.
2. Analyze one community response example from the session and identify at least two decision points where approach or responsibility shifted, explaining how those shifts supported sustainable, community-led bereavement care.
3. Articulate two potential risks of misalignment in community-based bereavement response (e.g., cultural disconnect, overextension, dependency) and propose one strategy to mitigate each risk within their own organizational context.
4. Analyze their own organizational role and readiness for community response by naming two potential strengths and two potential risks or blind spots that may impact their approach in high-profile or culturally complex settings.
5. Develop one actionable strategy for engaging local partners and existing community networks in the aftermath of a tragic event, including identifying who should be consulted first and how to ensure alignment with community-led efforts.

### **Content Level**

Basic

### **Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

- Social work practice, knowledge, and skills
- Diversity and social justice

**CE Content Information Counseling**

- Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship
- Social and Cultural Foundations

**Literature References**

- Maccallum, F., McLean, L., Bryant, R. A., & Nickerson, A. (2025). Prolonged grief reactions and help-seeking following bereavement: A systematic review. *Journal of Affective Disorders*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2025.01.XXX>
- Pelacho-Ríos, L., et al. (2025). Healing through support: Beneficial and detrimental practices in parental grief. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(4), 535. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15040535>
- Weathers, E., O'Connor, M., & Breen, L. J. (2025). A public health model for bereavement care: Building capacity and responding to need. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 13, 1611824. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2025.1611824>

## **H1- 19- From Fog to Flow: Movement-Based Strategies to Companion Grieving Kids and Teens (1.5 CE)**



### **Therapist Stephanie L Heitkemper**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Stephanie Heitkemper, PhD, LPC, RPT-S, FT is the owner of Resilient Minds Counseling in Westminster, Colorado, where she specializes in grief and trauma across the lifespan. An EMDRIA EMDRIA-approved therapist and as a Registered Play Therapist–Supervisor, Stephanie integrates play therapy, EMDR, creative expression, and bibliotherapy in her practice. She emphasizes the transformative role of bilateral movement, somatic regulation, and expressive modalities in helping children, teens, and families restore balance, reconnect with their bodies, and process the pain of death and loss in developmentally responsive ways. A published author, Stephanie contributed to *Grief in the Classroom* and multiple resources for the National Alliance for Children’s Grief, including *When Someone Dies: Activity Cards*, *Supporting Children Who Are Grieving a Death by Suicide*, and *Creating a Space for Children in a Funeral Home*. Through clinical work, writing, and training, she is dedicated to equipping schools, grief centers, and community programs with practical tools that harness the healing potential of movement, creativity, and somatic awareness to companion grieving and traumatized youth.



### **Counselor Kailey Bradley**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Dr. Bradley is a licensed counselor, thanatologist, educator, and passionate about the field of thanatology. She is currently the Clinical Director of Refuge Counseling LLC, the Co-Founder of the Ohio Bereavement Collaborative. Moreover, she has taught over 12 different courses related to death, dying, and bereavement particularly surrounding children’s bereavement (including pediatric hospice care, childhood bereavement, and expressive arts in counseling). She is the host of the *Death and Sex Podcast* where she passionately advocates for the importance of having difficult conversations. Her volunteer work is prolific as she is currently a board member of ADEC (Association for Death, Educators, and Counselors), and the National Home Funeral Alliance. She brings all of these skills and passions to under-served populations and hopes to introduce doula services to her small rural community through her grief-non profit. She is currently training through the Home Hospice Association and hopes to take the NEDA proficiency exam in late summer. She has undergone vigil training through Hospice, and believes deeply in the supportive role of doula services.

#### **Abstract**

Human development begins with movement. From rocking and crawling to walking and dancing, early motor patterns form the foundation for emotional regulation, social engagement, and neural integration. These rhythms of the body are deeply entwined with attachment relationships, where caregiver attunement fosters safety and trust. When loss occurs, especially during childhood or adolescence, the rupture not only shakes relational bonds but also disrupts somatic rhythms, leaving young grievers vulnerable to disconnection, numbness, or “body fog.”

Emerging neuroscience demonstrates that bilateral movement—whether through walking, drumming, dance, or creative art-making—strengthens communication across brain regions, supporting regulation and integration. Somatic perspectives further highlight how grief is carried in the body: in restlessness, tightness, or collapse. By engaging the body in creative, rhythmic practices, children and families can gently approach painful emotions while finding renewed pathways of connection. These embodied approaches restore balance, reduce overwhelm, and create opportunities for continued bonds with loved ones.

This session introduces participants to the intersection of bilateral movement, somatic expression, and attachment-informed care in grief support. Through experiential activities, clinical case examples, and current research, attendees will explore how rhythmic, body-based practices can be integrated into school, community, and clinical settings. Participants will not only experience these activities themselves but also leave with practical, developmentally appropriate bilateral tools they can immediately facilitate in their own work.

By choreographing compassion through body and movement, professionals in schools, grief centers, and community programs can companion griever with strategies that honor developmental needs, foster resilience, and cultivate belonging. This integrative approach empowers practitioners to meet grief not only with understanding but with embodied pathways for healing and growth.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. apply at least two creative, bilateral activities to clinical or community settings to enhance expression and healing in grieving individuals.
2. identify the neurobiological impact of grief on inter- and intra-brain functioning and describe how bilateral movement supports reintegration.
3. explore embodied practices (dance, art, drumming, walking) as accessible interventions for grief.

**Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

**Content Level**

Basic

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship

### **Literature References**

Kearney, B. E., & Lanius, R. A. (2022). The brain-body disconnect: A somatic sensory basis for trauma-related disorders. *Frontiers in neuroscience*, *16*, 1015749.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fnins.2022.1015749>

Danielle Sellick, Christoper Holt. A Reconnection Protocol for Grief: When the Love Lives on. *J EMDR Pract and Res.* 2025;19:0006.DOI:10.34133/jemdr.0006

Basso JC, Satyal MK and Rugh R (2021) Dance on the Brain: Enhancing Intra- and Inter-Brain Synchrony. *Front. Hum. Neurosci.* 14:584312. doi: 10.3389/fnhum.2020.584312



## **H2- 125- Show, Don't Just Tell: Creative Strategies to Demonstrate Impact in Grief Organizations (Non-CE offering)**



### **Development and Communications Manager Laurel Neitling**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Laurel Noelle joined New Hope in July 2023 as the Circles of Hope Program Manager and transitioned to the role of Development and Communications Manager in 2025. She earned a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in management from Central Michigan University and completed her MBA at Western Governors University in 2024. Before joining the staff team, Laurel volunteered with New Hope as a support group facilitator and has presented at numerous conferences and outreach events, including the 2024 and 2025 NACG National Symposium on Children's Grief. She is grateful for the opportunity to work alongside New Hope's dedicated volunteers and staff to provide compassionate grief support services to the community.



### **Assistant Director Susan Arnould**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Susan Arnould is the Assistant Director at the New Hope Center for Grief Support in Northville, Michigan. With a college background in counseling and early childhood education, she brings a compassionate, developmentally informed approach to supporting individuals through loss. Susan oversees programming for adults, teens, and children, guiding her staff as they deliver meaningful support groups, programs, and resources to those who have experienced loss. She also plays a key role in coordinating New Hope's events and marketing efforts, helping the organization expand its reach and strengthen its connection to the community.

#### **Abstract**

Donors, partners, and the community want to see impact, not just hear about it. But how do grief organizations communicate outcomes in a way that is engaging, ethical, and clear? This session explores creative strategies for demonstrating impact across platforms, including annual reports, impact reports, social media, websites, and presentations. Participants will learn how to balance quantitative data with powerful stories, use visuals (infographics, testimonials, photos), and adapt messaging for different audiences. The session will also address challenges unique to grief work, such as protecting confidentiality and avoiding retraumatization while still showcasing outcomes. Attendees will leave with a toolkit of creative ways to make their organization's impact both visible and compelling.

#### **Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. describe at least three methods to creatively demonstrate impact.
2. design at least one visual or narrative-based tool for communicating outcomes.
3. apply strategies to highlight impact ethically across multiple platforms.
4. implement at least two strategies that strengthen engagement and reduce chaos in group settings.

**Categories**

Marketing

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

### **H3- 62- Developing demographic-inclusive trauma-responsive skills for youth emotionally dysregulated (1.5 CE)**



**Senior Grief Clinician Lamya K Broussard**  
**Uplift Center for Grieving Children, United States**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Lamya Broussard, LCSW, MSS, MLSP, CCTP, CAGCS is a dedicated Certified Trauma Informed Senior Clinician at Uplift Center for Grieving Children who has been in the field for almost two decades. She's honored to have worked with and to continue providing therapeutic healing support to marginalized communities including youth in foster care, Black & Brown Immigrants, LGBTQIA+ homeless youth, BIPOC front line advocates and juvenile justice involved youth impacted by compounded grief & trauma and marginalized communities. She's earned her Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Tuskegee University and her Master's in Social Services and Law & Social Policy from Bryn Mawr Graduate School of Social Work & Social Research with a specialization in Child & Family Wellbeing. Some certifications and trainings include Certified Clinical Trauma Professional, Certified Clinical Advanced Grief Counselor, Certified Theraplay & MIM Philadelphia Level I, Perinatal Death & Grieving, EMDR, CBT & Somatic-Based Interventions. Social Services is Lamya's life purpose, as she enjoys helping others navigate their healing process. As a School & Community Services Senior Clinician, Lamya facilitates weekly grief groups to students grieving within Philadelphia schools (including public, charter, private and parochial) and has also co-developed and implemented Uplift's curriculum and activities for Justice Involved Youth. Additionally, she's represented Uplift on Dougy Center's Grief Out Loud podcast (episode downloaded <1,500 x's in 24 hours), radio stations, national symposiums, panels, and school district trainings including NACG, Philly Trauma Conference, Central Texas Grief Symposium and Board of Education of Fayette County Kentucky's school district. Lamya continues to provide grief and trauma healing advocacy to Uplift children, families, and students. She's been a member of the Alliance of Black Social Workers since 2010 and is the practice owner of Lamya K. Broussard Psychotherapy Practice where she specializes in grief and trauma and provides culturally responsive individual & group therapy, community workshops, professional development trainings and engages with other community-based organizations.

#### **Abstract**

Facilitating grief groups or supporting children & youth who are grieving in any context requires effective skill building in several areas. Some areas include multi-tasking, assessment, emotional attunement, social-emotional learning practices, structured flexibility and de-escalation. For some, these skills come naturally and for others grow with experience. Depending on the demographics, be it urban, non-traditional schools, rural or city settings, the level of skills needed vary. Additionally, the grief & trauma responses exhibited and the level of emotional dysregulation in each setting is changeable. As a Senior Grief Clinician in Schools & Community in the Philadelphia region, such skill building is especially significant when according to research, "The National Child Traumatic Stress Network stated that two out of three school-aged children in the United States (U.S.) had experienced at least one traumatic event ranging from chronic bullying to racism, abuse, neighborhood violence, sudden or violent loss of a loved one, natural disaster, homelessness, or terrorism" (J. Avery et al, 2022, p.1). Children's grief centers located in or

near urban settings often work with the same trauma impacted youth, making trauma responsive practices paramount to grief group's healing process.

In efforts to enhance demographic-inclusive grief groups skill building, this experiential presentation will include my experiences of facilitating our program's six-week peer-based in-school grief group in an urban setting, where most youth (K-12<sup>th</sup> graders) have reported positive outcomes from attending our program's grief groups. Specifically, at the end of group 98% of youth reported being likely to share our grief group with other students. Transferable trauma responsive practices to be demonstrated include culturally responsive & healing centered opening & closing rituals, brain breaks, body-based movement and de-escalation techniques. Additionally, attendees will have the opportunity collectively discuss effective demographic-inclusive trauma-informed approaches they've used in grief groups to support their youth's emotional regulation.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. engage in a demographic inclusive discussion on trauma responsive skills.
2. identify at least two trauma responsive skills applicable to their youth demographics.
3. demonstrate at least 1 culturally responsive technique to support youth emotionally dysregulated.

**Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills, Diversity and Social Justice, Social Work Ethics

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Human Growth and Development, Social and Cultural Foundations, Group Dynamics and Counseling, Wellness and Prevention

**Literature References**

- Al-Hroub, A., & Al-Hroub, R. (2024). Empowering the vulnerable: the impact of SEL on traumatized children's academic and social outcomes in crises. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 26(12), 777-781.
- Avery, J., Deppler, J., Galvin, E., Skouteris, H., de Galarce, P. C., & Morris, H. (2022). Changing educational paradigms: Trauma-responsive relational practice, learnings from the USA for Australian schools. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 138, 106506.
- Barrett, T. F. (2025). Loss and Mourning in Early Childhood: The Role of Emotional Attunement in the Treatment of Complex Trauma. *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 78(1), 26-44.

#### **H4- 100- "We Need to Talk": Psychological Factors in and Communication Strategies for Difficult Conversations (Non-CE offering)**



**Head of Research and Evaluation Mrittika Sen  
Good Grief, United States**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Dr. Mrittika Sen was first drawn to nonprofit management in her late teens, when she co-founded a nonprofit in her hometown of Calcutta, India, along with five adults decades older than her. She has since worked in an international humanitarian agency, facilitated collaboration and communication between organizational representatives within a (then newly-formed) collaborative of 100+ multi-sector organizations in Chicago, and consulted with nonprofit leaders to secure buy-for implementing programs and organizational strategies. Mrittika's research work at The Ohio State University focused on interpersonal support in domestic abuse as a crisis situation. During her doctoral work at Northwestern University, she continued expanding her research to other crisis contexts, presenting papers, pursuing research internships, and teaching. At the end of her second year in the doctoral program, her daughter Raahi died in sleep to unknown causes. Mrittika was frozen in her tracks, unable to pursue research on crisis and difficult contexts anymore. She was still committed to fulfilling the requirements for the PhD, and to her intellectual interest in social psychological factors and interpersonal dynamics, but had to pivot her focus. For her dissertation, research papers, presentations, and future training and consultation work, she studied interpersonal communication in organizations, specifically that pertaining to change management, partnership effectiveness, and conflict resolution. In her current role, Mrittika has returned to researching the grief experience, and various aspects and impact of support seeking and support provision. As a social psychologist and interpersonal communication researcher, she observes and analyzes complex conversations in close relationships, groups, teams, and organizations. And she keenly studies the people in them!

#### **Abstract**

Nonprofits have important missions, and they are brought to life by people – the board, leadership, employees, volunteers. Operating on limited resources, nonprofit leaders need to be efficient, agile, and creative in problem-solving, managing conflict and fostering collaboration between people. Awareness and strategizing can often make the difference between impact and its absence at the community level, between growth and stagnation at the organizational level, and between fulfillment and frustration at the individual level. Using experiential examples and scenarios, and drawing from organizational psychology, communication, and nonprofit management research, this presentation by Dr. Mrittika Sen aims to equip nonprofit leaders with awareness of social-psychological concepts and communication goals relevant to individuals in nonprofits. This will empower them to better understand where their people “are coming from,” and develop strategies that foster trust and collaboration between individuals and within teams, and resolve conflict sustainably. Affiliation to a common mission can result in smoother sharing of resources and cooperative behavior. At the same time, strong dedication can result in people being proud and sensitive. This session will take attendees “behind the scenes” of nonprofit minds, exploring motivation, different levels of identification, sensitivity to face loss, and framing, as factors that play roles in behavior.

The presentation will then examine communication as a purposeful process, whether one is aware of it or not. Communication researchers have long examined the multiple goals people pursue simultaneously in a situation, especially one involving disagreement, debrief, feedback sharing, or conflict resolution. This can happen between employees, and also apply to the work they do with constituents. Such conversations are considered “complex,” since they can contain multiple goals for each individual, likely conflicting ones. Moreover, one person’s goals can be incompatible with another’s.

Finally, the presentation will identify some strategies that can help ease difficult conversations and mitigate conflicts.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Identify key social-psychological concepts that are inherent in how individuals show up to nonprofit work.
2. Compile and classify communication goals in difficult conversations (such as feedback sharing, debrief, disagreements, or conflict resolution).
3. Determine research-based communication strategies that can be helpful in managing difficult conversations.

**Categories**

Administrative

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

**H5- 97- Advancing Culturally Responsive Grief Care Through Art, Community Collaboration, and Systemic Change (1.5 CE)**



**Executive Director Shay V Jacobs**  
**Adam's Purpose, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Shainika “Shay” Jacobs is the Founder and Executive Director of Adam’s Purpose, a Colorado-based nonprofit dedicated to providing culturally responsive grief and mental health support for Black families and BIPOC communities grieving the loss of a child. Inspired by her own lived experience as a bereaved mother, Shay has pioneered innovative programs that integrate art, culture, nature, and community voice into the healing process, including Family Healing Circles, peer-led support groups, and youth grief initiatives. She is the visionary behind the Black Grief Task Force, a collaborative effort to elevate community voices through listening sessions, collective advocacy, and systems-change work aimed at dismantling inequities in bereavement care. Shay’s leadership combines personal passion with professional expertise, using an assets-based community development approach to build resilience and empower families. A recognized leader in culturally responsive grief work, Shay has shared her story and insights on platforms such as The Moth and Caring for Denver, and her work has been featured in the Urban Spectrum. Through her commitment to creating spaces where no one grieves alone, Shay continues to champion healing that is rooted in cultural identity, shaped by community, and driven by justice and equity.



**CEO Micki Burns**  
**Judi's House, United States.**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Michaeleen (Micki) Burns, PhD, is the Chief Executive Officer at Judi’s House/JAG Institute (JH/JAG) and adjunct faculty at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. JH/JAG is a comprehensive family bereavement center in Metro Denver. She serves as the Vice President of the board of the National Alliance for Children’s Grief and is an advisor to Speaking Grief, a national public media initiative seeking to amplify the experiences of the bereaved. A Licensed Psychologist with more than two decades of experience providing therapeutic assessment and support to families facing adversity, Micki has witnessed the lasting impact of unaddressed grief. Her practice is focused on supporting families who have experienced the loss of a child and specializes in working with those grieving suicide and overdose deaths. She is dedicated to ensuring appropriate care is available for all and raising childhood bereavement to a level of critical public importance. Before becoming the CEO, Micki oversaw the direct service, research, and training departments at JH/JAG, working towards a vision where no child is alone in grief.



**Clinic Director Gwen Bonilla**  
**Denver Family Institute, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Gwen Bonilla, LSW (she/her) is a social worker, instructor, and therapist and currently serves as Clinic Director at Denver Family Institute. Gwen holds a masters degree in social work and a post-graduate certificate in marriage and family therapy. She served as Chair of DFI's Social Justice Advisory Board from 2019-2024. In addition to her role as Clinic Director, Gwen also serves as an instructor at DFI and at University of Denver in the Graduate School of Social Work. Gwen has 20 years of experience in the human services field and specializes in working with adults with disabilities and their families, with immigrants, and with families.



**Pediatric Critical Care Medicine fellow at the University of Colorado School of Medicine**  
**Kathryn Kalata, MD**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Kathryn Kalata, MD is a Pediatric Critical Care Medicine fellow at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. She is passionate about working toward health justice, elevating the voices of community members to create more equitable outcomes and experiences for children and adolescents, and providing exceptional clinical care in a compassionate, culturally-effective manner. After completing her undergraduate degree at Northwestern University, she completed her medical degree, Pediatric Residency, and Chief Residency at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. In her career thus far, she has developed a Health Justice Elective for medical trainees, a simulation curriculum for health professionals to address implicit bias and microaggressions in clinical care, and an interdisciplinary case conference to address aspects of biases and structural inequities while highlighting practices that promote equity in clinical care for multiple subspecialties throughout Children's Hospital Colorado. She has presented locally and nationally on these initiatives and published her work in academic journals. Kathryn is committed to bringing community-based participatory research and collaborative community engagement practices to Pediatric medicine. More specifically, she is currently collaborating on a local community-based research initiative to better characterize and develop culturally-responsive grief support among Black families. She is also involved in a national project to characterize bereavement support for surviving siblings. Through working with community members to better understand their experiences, strengths within their communities, and opportunities for additional support, she is dedicated to furthering culturally-responsive grief support practices within healthcare systems and the broader community throughout her career.

**Abstract**

Black families experiencing grief and loss face unique challenges shaped by historical trauma, racial inequities, and systemic barriers to care. Traditional grief support models often fail to meet these needs, resulting in communities that are under-resourced and underserved. This session will share findings from the Black Grief Task Force (BGTF), a collaborative initiative co-led by Adam's Purpose, Judi's House, Denver Family Institute, University of Colorado partners, and community leaders. Together, the BGTF is working to transform grief care by elevating Black voices, advocating for systemic change through academic, community, and

healthcare partnerships, and integrating culture, art, and intergenerational healing into grief support frameworks for caregivers and children.

Drawing on listening sessions, direct service programming, and community education events such as the Grieve Gracefully Symposium, this presentation will explore the multi-layered impact of grief, loss, and trauma on Black children and families. Presenters will share how valuing both lived experience and data can be used to design culturally relevant programs like Family Healing Circles, peer-led support groups, and youth initiatives. Uniquely, the examples provided will highlight how integrating creative arts, nature, and cultural practices fosters trust, resilience, and connection for children, individuals and families navigating grief.

Participants will leave equipped with practical strategies to engage communities in co-creating healing spaces, along with actionable insights for reimagining grief care through systemic and community-led approaches. This session will be relevant for grief professionals, educators, mental health practitioners, and policymakers seeking to build equitable, culturally responsive grief support systems.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Describe at least three barriers or systemic inequities that impact grief support access and quality for Black families and BIPOC communities.
2. Identify a minimum of three culturally responsive strategies that emerge when lived experiences are processed through art, nature, and cultural practices in multigenerational healing spaces to guide grief-support frameworks.
3. Explain two ways that anti-racism and anti-oppression education can be incorporated into clinical training to strengthen practitioners' ability to recognize and respond to systems of power affecting Black families' grief experiences.
4. Outline three methods by which community-based participatory research and collaboration between community partners, academic/healthcare professionals, and individuals with lived experience can deepen understanding of Black children's and families' grief.
5. Articulate two mechanisms through which cross-sector community collaborations can mobilize shared resources and expertise to advance culturally responsive grief support, emphasizing mutual learning, collective impact, and sustainability to honor the diverse needs of BIPOC communities.

**Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Diversity and Social Justice

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Social and Cultural Foundations

## Literature References

- Adams, L., Athey, A., Brook, K., Lazarud, K., DeVinney, A., & Leaf, P. J. (2023). "When death hits you in the face, you have to listen": A qualitative investigation of peer bereavement support volunteers in Black American communities. *OMEGA Journal of Death and Dying*, 91(3), 1628-1641. doi.org/10.1177/00302228231161816.
- Burns, M., Landry, L., Mills, D., Carlson, N., Blueford, J. M., & Talmi, A. (2023). COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate impact on childhood bereavement for youth of color: Reflections and recommendations. *Frontiers in Pediatrics*, 11:1063449. doi.org/10.3389/fped.2023.1063449.
- Smith-Greenawar, E., Verdery, A. M., & Carr, D. (2025). The new sociology of bereavement. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 51, 357-375. doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-090324-035534.
- Mayland, C. R., Powell, R. A., Clarke, G. C., & Allsop, M. J. (2021) Bereavement care for ethnic minority communities: A systemic review of access to, models of, outcomes from, and satisfaction with, service provision. *PLOS ONE* 16(6): e0252188. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0252188.

## **H6- 99- Culturally Sensitive Considerations for Bilingual Programming (1.5 CE)**



**Volunteer Manager Courtney P Reynolds  
Bo's Place, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Courtney Reynolds, LCSW – Volunteer Manager – Courtney Reynolds recruits, trains, and retains volunteers at Bo’s Place. She also manages our Internship Program for graduate and undergraduate interns. Courtney joined Bo’s Place in June of 2015 and led bilingual special programming for 8 of the 10 years she has been on staff. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and Religious Studies from Austin College and a Master of Social Work from the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. Courtney is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with over eleven years of experience in the social work and mental health fields.



**Bilingual Group Coordinator Donna Olson-Salas  
Bo's Place, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Donna Olson-Salas, LCSW – Bilingual Group Coordinator – Donna Olson-Salas coordinates and facilitates designated bilingual family groups, adult groups, school groups and the pregnancy loss groups. Donna joined Bo’s Place in 2016 as a part-time clinician and became a full-time clinician in 2021. Donna earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Washington University and a Master of Social Work from The University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with 35 years of experience in the social work and mental health fields.

### **Abstract**

As the diversity of the United States continues to grow, grief support programs are increasingly called to serve participants across many languages and cultures. A common response has been to separate groups by “heart language,” yet this approach can unintentionally limit connection between diverse clients, stretch already limited staffing resources, and overlook client choice. In this session, participants will discover practical strategies for creating culturally sensitive bilingual programming that welcomes and integrates families across languages. Drawing on first-hand experiences at Bo’s Place, we will share successes, challenges, and replicable approaches for bilingual support groups, retreats, camps, and one-time events.

Through interactive activities, attendees will experience what it feels like to build inclusive spaces where language is not a barrier. Participants will leave with concrete tools, new perspectives, and fresh ideas for enhancing grief programming and honoring client autonomy, regardless of linguistic background.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Describe the bilingual programming offered at Bo's Place.
2. Describe 2-3 benefits of cross-cultural interactions.
3. Discuss ways to integrate clients of multiple languages.
4. Understand the importance of InterStaff collaboration in creating or modifying programming.

**Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills, Diversity and Social Justice

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Social and Cultural Foundations, Group Dynamics and Counseling, Counselor Professional Identity and Practice Issues

**Literature References**

- Falzarano, F., Winoker, H., Burke, R.V., Mendoza, J.A., Munoz, F., Tergas, A., Maciejewski, P.K. & Prigerson, H.G. (2022) Grief and Bereavement in the Latino/a Community: A Literature Synthesis and Directions for Future Research. *Health Equity*, 6 (1), 696–707. Retrieved September 18, 2025 from <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9536343/>
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## **H7- Navigating Suicide Loss with Children and Teens: Strategies for Families and Professionals (1.5 CE)**



### **Pamela Gabbay**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Pamela Gabbay, EdD, FT - Dr. Pamela Gabbay is a nationally recognized author and trainer who has served the bereavement field in many capacities during her nearly 30-year career. Dr. Gabbay is part of the Youth Programs team at TAPS - The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, and a member of the TAPS Advisory Board, as well as working closely with Coping After Suicide. Additionally, she is a National Trainer for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) and is the co-author, along with Andy McNiel, of *Understanding and Supporting Bereaved Children: A Practical Guide for Professionals*. Dr. Gabbay has served in a variety of roles in her career, including being the Director of Operations and Training for The Compassionate Friends, the Director of The Mourning Star Center for Grieving Children, and the Camp Director for Camp Erin-Palm Springs. Additionally, she served as Vice President on the Board of Directors of the National Alliance for Children's Grief (NACG). Dr. Gabbay holds a Fellow in Thanatology from the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) and earned a Master of Arts degree in Cognitive Psychology from Claremont Graduate University. She earned her Doctor of Education degree in Organizational Leadership from Brandman University/UMass Global.

#### **Abstract**

How do we best support children and families when someone in their life has died by suicide? Explaining a suicide death to children and teens is often a daunting task for grieving parents, guardians, and caregivers. While adults may want to protect children from painful truths and emotions, honest, developmentally appropriate conversations can reduce confusion, isolation, and stigma.

This presentation explores the unique impact of suicide loss on children, teens, and families, including common grief reactions such as guilt, shame, anger, and unanswered questions. Participants will learn best practices for talking with children about suicide, supporting grief across developmental stages, and helping families navigate the challenges that often accompany a suicide death. Practical guidance, suggested language, and examples of what to say—and what not to say—will be provided.

The program will also examine how children continue to understand and revisit a loss as they grow, and ways to support ongoing connections with the person who died. Because supporting families bereaved by suicide can affect helpers as well, this session will address the impact of suicide loss on professionals, educators, clinicians, and support staff. Participants will learn strategies to cultivate mutual support among colleagues, promote emotional well-being, and create a culture of care for both those grieving and those providing support.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Describe the grief and loss experience of children and teens who have been impacted by the death of someone in their life due to suicide.
2. List practical tips and tools for supporting grieving children and teens affected by a suicide death.
3. Discuss examples of what to say and what not to say as when talking with children and teens about a death due to suicide.
4. Discuss societal stigmas and their impact on bereaved children and teens.
5. Describe the unique challenges that families face after a death due to suicide.

**Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills, Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, Diversity and Social Justice

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Human Growth and Development, Social and Cultural Foundations, Wellness and Prevention

**Literature References**

Andriessen, K., Krysinaka, K., Rickwood, D., & Pirkis, J. (2020). "It changes your orbit": The impact of suicide and traumatic death on adolescents as experienced by adolescents and parents. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(24), 9356.

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Regehr, L. J., Heath, M. A., Jackson, A. P., Nelson, D., & Cutrer-Párraga, E. A. (2021). Storybooks to facilitate children's communication following parental suicide: paraprofessional counselors' perceptions. *Death Studies*, 45(10), 795-804.

## **H8- Grief Groups and Growth Plans: Managing the Business of a Grief Organization (Non-CE offering)**



### **Leila Salisbury, Kentucky Center for Grieving Children**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Leila W. Salisbury is the executive director of The Kentucky Center for Grieving Children and Families (KCGCF), which she founded in 2020. She currently serves on the Board of Directors and the Membership Committee of the National Alliance for Children's Grief. She is trained on the Peer Healing Curriculum as part of a pilot program with the University of Chicago Medical School; the KCGCF is one of two pilot sites in the country for this teen-led, evidence-based grief support curriculum. She also serves on two national working groups looking at the SSA Child Survivor's Benefit and bereavement impacts and policies for college students. She has volunteered with the McClean Fletcher Center (a children's grief center in Jackson, MS), where she began her experience as a client. Prior to founding the KCGCF, she spent 25 years in scholarly publishing, directing two university presses. She is a graduate of Davidson College (NC) and has a MA from the University of Kentucky.



### **Lisa Aman, Kate's Club**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Lisa joined Kate's Club as its Executive Director in March of 2021. Kate's Club resonates with Lisa both personally and professionally. When three years old, Lisa's brother died suddenly and her family did not have the tools to understand, share or process their grief. This single event continues to shape all their lives, both individually and collectively. Professionally, Lisa joined Kate's Club with a vision for growth – to lead this 20-year-old non-profit based in Atlanta to a statewide organization serving the hundreds of thousands of bereaved young people in all of Georgia.

Lisa currently serves on the Board of Directors and the Finance Committee of the National Alliance for Children's Grief as well as the Board of Directors for the ACLU of Georgia. She grew up in Stamford, CT and received her B.A. in Economics from Yale University and her M.B.A. from Stanford University. Lisa moved to Atlanta in 1996 to open the southeastern office of Bain & Company, a strategy consulting firm.

#### **Abstract**

Grief organizations are built on compassion, connection, and community — but sustaining and growing that work also requires strong operations, thoughtful leadership, and sound business practices. From start-up organizations to growing and mid-sized nonprofits, grief support leaders are often balancing mission-driven care with budgets, staffing, fundraising, partnerships, systems, and strategy.

This session will explore the realities of building and leading a grief organization at different stages of growth. Participants will gain practical insights into scaling programs, strengthening infrastructure, supporting staff well-being, building sustainable funding models, and maintaining mission alignment while navigating increasing demand for services.

Through candid discussion and shared lessons learned, this session will offer both emerging and established leaders tools and perspectives to help their organizations grow with intention — while staying grounded in the heart of the work: creating safe, supportive spaces for grieving children, families, and communities.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Identify key financial, operational and leadership strategies that support sustainable growth and mission alignment within grief support organizations.
2. Describe practical approaches for strengthening organizational infrastructure, supporting staff well-being, and developing sustainable funding models across different stages of growth.
3. Apply lessons learned and shared perspectives to navigate growth challenges while maintaining compassionate, community-centered services for grieving children and families.

**Categories**

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

**H9- 164- Black Mothers Experiences Supporting Children through Loss within a Bereaved Parenting Program (1.5 CE)**



**Researcher & Consultant Tashel C Bordere**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Tashel C. Bordere, PhD, CT, is an internationally known scholar of trauma, loss, suffocated grief (a term she coined), and coping among grieving youth and young adults, with specialization in Black youth, family, and community life, loss, and grief. She is a researcher, educator, consultant, and offers grief programming through the Center for Family Policy & Research, University of Missouri. Dr. Bordere is a proud Immediate Past President of the National Alliance for Children’s Grief and New Orleans native.



**Clinical Associate Professor Liza Hita**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Liza Hita, PhD, is a clinical associate professor at Arizona State University. She conducts community-based participatory research focused implementing preventive interventions for families experiencing major life transitions, including high-conflict families (Family Transitions Guide), separating and divorced parents (New Beginnings Program), bereaved caregivers (Resilient Parenting for Bereaved Families), and families impacted by incarceration (Caring for the Caregivers).



**Faculty Associate Katie Blaine**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Katie Blaine, M.S., is a faculty associate at Arizona State University with a research focus on childhood trauma, resilience, and the long-term impacts of stress. She earned her bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of South Florida in 2019 and went on to obtain a master’s degree in psychology from Arizona State University in 2024. During her time at ASU, Katie worked with the Resilient Parenting for Bereaved Families (RPBF) program as a graduate research student within the REACH Institute.



**Psychology Student Emilia Berkes**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Emilia Berkes is an M.S. Psychology student at Arizona State University. She also obtained her B.S. in Psychology from ASU in Fall 2023. Her research interests primarily focus on dissemination and implementation strategies to increase engagement and accessibility of preventive parenting interventions for underserved populations.

## **Abstract**

Black women's experiences coping with loss and grief while parenting and grand-parenting bereaved children are largely understudied in research and under-addressed in clinical services. This phenomenological study was designed to bridge this gap in the literature through an examination of Black mothers' and grandmothers' life-world experiences supporting their bereaved children through loss in multiple contexts, with focus on their experiences participating in an evidence-based parenting bereavement program. Descriptive phenomenological theory and method guided the study. Consistent with phenomenological methods, in-depth, one-on-one, face-to-face interviews were conducted with five participants two to three times across and following their participation in the RPBF program. We examined their contextual experiences, intentions, behaviors, and the cultural resonance of the parenting tools offered to participants through the Resilient Parenting Bereavement Families Program (RPBF). Two major themes include: cultural perceptions of self-care among caregivers and the intergenerational transmission and disruption of cultural coping strategies to children. Implications for clinical practice, research, programming, and education will be provided.

## **Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Describe patterns of loss for Black youth and parenting in Black families
2. Explain tools offered through the Resilient Parenting Bereavement Program
3. Examine the experiences of mothers and grandmothers participating in the program and its cultural resonance among participants in the broader life-world contexts and familial contexts.
4. Delineate culturally-rich approaches to informal and formal support for caregivers supporting children coping with loss.

## **Categories**

Research, Outcomes, and Measurements

## **Content Level**

Intermediate

## **Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

## **CE Content Information Social Work**

Diversity and Social Justice

## **CE Content Information Counseling**

Research and Program Evaluation, Social and Cultural Foundations

## **Literature References**

- Arnold, K. T., Mandell, D. S., & Hankerson, S. H. (2025). Implementing a grief support program in a Black church to support the mental health needs of people in bereavement.
- *Psychiatric Services*, 76(1), 105–105. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.20240259>
- Castelin, S., Sáenz Jiménez, A. P., Soto, D., Daniels, L. D., Brown, A. D., & Fehrenbach, T. (2025). Voices that matter: A community-driven intervention framework for Black women who have experienced traumatic loss. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 95(2), 153–165. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000771>
- Douglas, R. D., Alvis, L. M., Rooney, E. E., Busby, D. R., & Kaplow, J. B. (2021). Racial,

ethnic, and neighborhood income disparities in childhood posttraumatic stress and grief: Exploring indirect effects through trauma exposure and bereavement. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 34(5), 929–942. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.22732>

- Moore, S. E., Jones-Eversley, S. D., Tolliver, W. F., Wilson, B., & Harmon, D. K. (2022). Cultural responses to loss and grief among Black Americans: Theory and practice implications for clinicians. *Death Studies*, 46(1), 189-199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2020.1725930>

## **H10- 165- Creating Support for Each and Every Student: School and Community-Based Grief Awareness Events (Non-CE offering)**



**Director, School & Community-Based Services Christine M Lambright  
The Children's Room, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Christine Lambright, LMHC is the Director of School & Community-Based Services at The Children's Room (TCR) in Arlington, Massachusetts. Since 2015, Christine has acted in multiple programmatic roles at TCR. She oversees the development of school & community partnerships to provide grief-related groups, social & emotional learning curricula, grief awareness events, and professional development. She has presented training sessions at district, state, and national levels. Christine is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in state of Massachusetts and has received a Master's in Clinical Psychology, Master's in Art Therapy. She has nearly 10 years of prior experience as a clinician in a non-profit foster care program.



**Coordinator, Outreach and School & Community-Based Services Corina L Garcia  
The Children's Room, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Corina is a bilingual (English/Spanish) Licensed Mental Health Clinician in Massachusetts and she is a Program Coordinator for Outreach, School, and Community-Based Services at The Children's Room. In her role, she coordinates and facilitates school and community-based programs, including peer support groups for children and adolescents who are grieving and social and emotional learning curricula in collaboration with local systems. She holds a Master of Education in Mental Health Counseling from Cambridge College in Massachusetts and a Bachelor's in Psychology from San Carlos University in Guatemala. She is currently pursuing Certification in Thanatology in Marian University (WI). Corina worked at The Good Grief Program at Boston Medical Center, where she developed a strong foundation in working with bereaved populations. Additionally, she has experience providing in-home therapy to Latino communities. Corina hopes to use her cultural humility approach and bilingualism to expand accessibility for underserved populations.

### **Abstract**

For 15 years, The Children's Room has been bringing National Children's & Teens' Grief Awareness into schools and community agencies during the month of November. This program has grown to engage over 3,000 students annually in events that are centered on grief and inclusive of the entire student population within each school/center. Using simple, approachable materials and interactive activities, each youth has the opportunity to represent anyone in their life who has died, to show compassion and support to their peers who are grieving, and to see on a broader level that they are not alone in their grief. In smaller, collaborative Teen Workshops, participants learn how to become advocates for

others, as they gain understanding about how grief affects each of us in different ways and specific ways to be a supportive friend and classmate.

During this hands-on, experiential session, you will learn and explore ways to bring these important initiatives into your own schools and communities, offering events that are inclusive of any/all students and responsive to cultural needs. Participants will have an opportunity to step into the role of students and teen workshop participants, engaging in collaborative activities and creating collaged posters and installations that spread awareness about the prevalence of childhood and adolescent bereavement and ways to be supportive of others who are grieving.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Identify 3+ benefits of creating a grief-supportive culture within schools and community settings.
2. Learn 5 aspects of a community-wide initiative that makes it approachable, inclusive, and effective.
3. List 3+ ways to incorporate cultural sensitivity and language needs within a school-based event.
4. Identify 5+ reasons for the importance of collaboration and partnership within school and community settings.
5. Develop, create, and implement 3+ activities in schools and communities that spread awareness about childhood and adolescent bereavement.

**Categories**

Outreach and Community Collaboration (schools, Boys and Girls Club, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

**I1- Fostering wellbeing and resilience in bereaved Latino families at a holistic, community summer camp (1.0 CE)**



**Tiffany Mihelish, MS/CC, NCC, LPC**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Tiffany Mihelish, MS/CC, NCC, LPC (she/her/ella) is a board-certified Licensed Professional Counselor through the State of Arizona and a National Certified Counselor. She is certified in CBT, Domestic Violence counseling, EMDR, ADHD, Hypnosis, and Eating Disorders, and specializes in other areas as well. Since 2021, she has been a vital and beloved volunteer for Child Health & Resilience Mastery (CHARM), a nonprofit aimed at empowering children and families to strengthen their resiliency in health-promoting ways, especially families grieving the death or extended separation of a close family member. Tiffany is a member of the American Counseling Association.



**Judith Burrola, BA**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Judith Burrola, BA (she/her/ella) is a student at the University of Arizona earning her Master's degree in Education Leadership. She has volunteered for CHARM and Camp Druzy since 2022. In 2023, Judith completed her Public and Applied Humanities internship with CHARM as part of her degree in Business Administration. As a Co-Director for Camp Druzy, Judith works closely with our parents/guardians to enroll families in camp, and has also been instrumental in the fundraising, planning, implementation, and evaluation of CHARM's Camp Druzy since 2023. She recently also earned her Community Health Worker (CHW) certification and is excited to implement this knowledge and skillset to better serve CHARM families.



**Ayla Ruben, M.Ed.**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Ayla Ruben, M.Ed. (she/her/ella) is a Co-director for CHARM's Camp Druzy, a certified coach for our eResilient Parenting for Bereaved Families offerings, through our partnership with the Arizona State University REACH Institute, and a member of CHARM's Advisory Board. Ayla also has over a decade of experience as an elementary school teacher. She earned her Master's degree in Curriculum & Instruction (with an emphasis in Behavioral Science) and is a certified Organic Intelligence coach specializing in nervous system healing and post-traumatic growth. Ayla is also a certified Sound Healer and Reiki practitioner.



**Dr. Heidi Lee Pottinger, DrPH, MPH, MA**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Dr. Heidi Lee Pottinger, DrPH, MPH, MA (she/her/ella) is CHARM's Founder & Executive Director and a research assistant professor at the University of Arizona Department of Pediatrics. Prior roles include: research faculty at the Arizona State University Global Center for Applied Health Research, an instructor and director of clinical investigations at the University of Arizona College of Public Health, and her time as national director of clinical research for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. As a proud mother of two, and propelled by her lived experiences and training, Heidi has a great passion for strengthening resilience in children and families. Her direct experiences with love, healing, and interconnectedness were her inspiration for creating CHARM and offering Camp Druzy to grieving families with children in her hometown, along the US-Mexico border region.

**Abstract**

This session introduces the Child Health & Resilience Mastery (CHARM) nonprofit and its work with families along the U.S.–Mexico border region in Santa Cruz County, Arizona, highlighting Camp Druzy, a culturally responsive, family-based bereavement intervention for children and their caregivers. Participants will explore the program’s core approaches to grief and wellness support, including experiential and relational techniques designed to strengthen resilience and wellbeing for the entire family. The session presents key evaluation findings from the 2021–2024 cohorts, focusing on child and adult outcomes in resilience, well-being, and participant satisfaction among predominantly Hispanic/Latino bereaved families. Lastly, the presenters will touch upon ways to expand access and tailor Camp Druzy for other communities.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Describe Child Health & Resilience Mastery (CHARM) nonprofit offerings to families along the US-MX border region of Santa Cruz County.
2. Summarize CHARM’s Camp Druzy model - a culturally responsive, bilingual, family-based, resiliency-focused community summer camp intervention for predominantly bereaved Hispanic/Latino families with children.
3. List two examples of approaches/techniques offered to grieving families with children at CHARM’s Camp Druzy.
4. Interpret key evaluation findings from Camp Druzy 2021-2024 cohorts for bereaved primarily Hispanic/Latino families on resiliency, well-being, and satisfaction.
5. Explore ways of collaboratively expanding access using an appropriate, feasible strategy to tailor the Camp Druzy model and curriculum for other Hispanic/Latino communities nationwide.

**Categories**

Camps

**Content Level**

Basic

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

### **CE Content Information Social Work**

Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

### **CE Content Information Counseling**

Human Growth and Development, Group Dynamics and Counseling, Social and Cultural Foundations

### **Literature References**

Ginsburg, K. R. (2020). Building resilience in children and teens: Giving kids roots and wings (3rd ed.). American Academy of Pediatrics.

Liebenberg, L., Ungar, M., & van de Vijver, F. (2021). Exploring the factor structure of the CYRM-12 for young children in a disadvantaged community. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 120, 105746. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2020.105746>

Lipscomb, S. T., Mercurief, A., & Phelps, B. (2025). Measuring resilience in young children: The Child and Youth Resilience Measure—Early Childhood (CYRM-EC). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 70, 347–357. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2024.11.004>

Pineros-Leano, M., Parchment, T. M., & Calvo, R. (2023). Family interventions to improve mental, emotional, and behavioral health outcomes among Latinx youth: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 145, 106756. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2022.106756>

Sandler, I., Wolchik, S., Sandler, J., Tein, J.-Y., Gaffney, D., Zhang, N., & Porter, M. (2025). Feasibility, acceptability, and effectiveness of adding an evidence-based parent/caregiver program for bereaved families to usual community-based services. *Omega—Journal of Death and Dying*, 91(1), 82–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228221132910>

Scholtes, C. M., & Cederbaum, J. A. (2024). Examining the relative impact of adverse and positive childhood experiences on adolescent mental health: A strengths-based perspective. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 157, 107049. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.107049>

Yıldırım, Ö., & Çelikkol, A. (2025). Family resilience in the face of grief and loss: A systematic review. *Humanistic Perspective*, 7, 73–89. <https://doi.org/10.47793/hp.1608181>

## **I2- 22- Transitions, Trust, and Transformation: What Grief Can Teach Organizations About Adaptation (Non-CE offering)**



**Consultant / Facilitator Jessica K Porte**  
**Wayfinder Family Co, United States**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Jessica Porté, MA, is a grief educator, consultant, and trainer with over 14 years of experience supporting children, families, and communities through loss and transition. She holds a Master's degree in Leadership and is a certified Lego® Serious Play® facilitator, integrating creative problem-solving and reflective practices into leadership development. Jessica has worked alongside communities navigating crises—including natural disasters, substance use–related deaths, and large-scale displacements—helping organizations strengthen resilience and sustain care. Her expertise lies at the intersection of bereavement, organizational health, and adaptive leadership, supporting systems to recognize grief as both an individual and organizational reality. By applying evidence from grief research, neuroscience, and change management, she equips nonprofits, schools, and community programs to foster healthier, more adaptive cultures that can better serve grieving youth and families.

### **Abstract**

Children's grief organizations sit at the intersection of human need and systemic responsibility. As our field responds to shifting landscapes, whether through evolving models of care, funding pressures, or community crises, our organizations are not only serving grieving children but also navigating transitions that carry their own layers of loss and adaptation that impact the structures and people that support missions. Research demonstrates that up to 70% of organizational change efforts fail, often because the human dimensions of loss and identity disruption go unaddressed (Higgs & Rowlands, 2011). This presentation draws from emerging research that integrates grief-informed principles into organizational leadership and change practices. Participants will explore how applying evidence from grief theory, neuroscience, and adaptive leadership can strengthen organizational health, foster resilience, and ensure more sustainable systems of support for youth. By reframing organizational adaptation through a bereavement-informed lens, we can create cultures that are not only responsive to the needs of children and families but also resilient in the face of ongoing change.

### **Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Recognize and understand how grief experiences and responses can emerge within organizational settings, including during transitions, restructuring, or leadership changes, to inform more supportive practices.
2. Apply evidence-based grief principles to strengthen organizational resilience and staff well-being
3. Evaluate strategies for fostering healthier, more adaptable organizations that can sustain long-term support for grieving children and families in a changing care landscape.

### **Categories**

Administrative

**Content Level**

Basic

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

### **13- 67- Grief Humility: Grief Groups within Juvenile Detention Centers (1.0 CE)**



**Director of Child and Family Service Cassandra Niedhammer  
Fox Valley Hands of Hope, United States**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

LSW, Licensed Social Worker with a master's degree in social work from Baylor's Garland School of Social Work in Waco, TX. Cassie serves as the current Director of Child and Family Grief Services at Fox Valley Hands of Hope in Geneva, IL. With years of experience working with children in different capacities, she honed her focus on children's grief support during graduate school. With her training in Multidimensional Grief Therapy (MGT), and the incorporation of play, sand, art, and clay field therapies, Cassie integrates modalities that best address a child's biological, psychological, social, and spiritual needs. Her current suite of programming at FVHH includes Project Hope, a school grief group program that has served over 50 schools as well as the county juvenile justice center since its inception; Grief Outdoors, a series of outdoor-based family grief retreats; Family Grief Circles, a six-week family group program; and individual grief counseling. She presented a CE webinar on the topic of grief support for youth through the Kane County Health Department in 2024.

#### **Abstract**

This presentation explores the concept of "grief humility" as it emerges in grief support groups within juvenile detention centers. Grief humility refers to the compassionate, nonjudgmental acknowledgment of one's own and others' profound losses, fostering an environment where vulnerability is met with respect and understanding. Incarcerated youth often experience complex layers of death related grief, as well as ambiguous grief stemming from family separation, trauma, community violence, and the loss of normal adolescent experiences. Traditional approaches to grief support may not fully address the unique needs of this population, making humility and peer connection essential components of effective group work.

Drawing on experience, observations, and case examples, the presentation examines how grief groups in juvenile detention centers can cultivate this humility among participants and facilitators alike. The groups provide a space for youth to share their stories, witness each other's pain, and practice empathy, all while navigating the constraints and challenges of the detention environment. The presentation highlights practical strategies for building trust, encouraging open dialogue, and honoring diverse cultural and individual expressions of grief. Attendees will gain insights into the transformative potential of grief humility, both as a therapeutic stance and as a lived practice within the context of juvenile justice. The session will offer recommendations for practitioners seeking to implement or enhance grief groups, emphasizing the importance of humility, cultural sensitivity, and trauma-informed care. Ultimately, the presentation advocates for grief support models that humanize and empower detained youth, supporting their healing journeys and fostering resilience in the face of adversity.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. define grief humility within the context of the juvenile detention center.
2. differentiate between competence and humility within the grief context.
3. apply 5 independent, juvenile detention center grief group examples to be implemented within local juvenile detention center.
4. compare the nuances between pretrial juvenile grief diversion groups curriculum and juvenile detention group curriculum.

**Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Diversity and Social Justice, Social Work Ethics

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Group Dynamics and Counseling, Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship

**Literature References**

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#### **I4- 16- A Multigenerational Grief Retreat after Pediatric Loss (1.0 CE)**



**Program Manager Elizabeth Boring**  
**Riley Children's Health, United States**

##### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Elizabeth Boring, MSW, LSW leads Riley Grief Services at Riley Children's Health. Since 2010, she has offered grief support to thousands of bereaved parents and siblings. She has co-authored articles exploring negative health outcomes for bereaved parents and was the content expert for the development of the Riley Grief Guide app, the first mobile tool designed specifically for families experiencing child loss. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Child Development from Indiana State University, a Master of Social Work from Indiana University, and she is a licensed social worker in the State of Indiana.



**Program Coordinator Cassie Dobbs**  
**Riley Children's Health, United States**

##### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Cassie Dobbs is the Program Coordinator for Riley Grief Services at Riley Children's Health and has supported grieving families through hospital and community programs for over 15 years. A licensed professional counselor with an MBA in healthcare management and a registered art therapist, she specializes in working with bereaved parents and siblings, program development, and creative interventions. Cassie has presented nationally on grief, loss, and art therapy, and is dedicated to fostering resilience through compassionate, interdisciplinary care.



**Medical Director Jayme Allen**  
**Riley Children's Health, United States**

##### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Jayme D. Allen, MD is the Founder and Medical Director of Riley Grief Services and has promoted comprehensive care for grieving families since the program inception in 2009. She has a passion for supporting the emotional needs of NICU families, including compassionate end-of-life care. She has published work regarding provider perceptions of a Palliative Care-based debrief in the NICU and has lead research exploring the experience of NICU families suffering the loss of a multiple in the NICU. Dr. Allen earned B.S. in Biology at Indiana University followed by a M.D. at Duke University School of Medicine and completed her Pediatrics residency at University of North Carolina and a Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine fellowship at Indiana University School of Medicine. A neonatologist since 2001, she is an

Associate Director of the VanDyke NICU and an Assistant Professor of Clinical Pediatrics at IU School of Medicine.

**Abstract**

Over the past three decades bereavement camps and retreats have been developed as a supportive intervention for bereaved youth and adults. Despite the popularity of these camps, few are offered for the entire family to experience together. Using the lens of family-systems theory, Riley Grief Services will present a review of the Riley Grief Retreat: a multigenerational family retreat offered after the death of a child. For the past three years, Riley Grief Services has piloted an overnight retreat for bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents to gently explore their grief as a family unit.

Retreat breakout sessions are designed to meet the unique grieving aspects for each role within a family (Parent, Sibling, or Grandparent), while traditional camp activities experienced together provide mental respite, bonding opportunities, and normalization. Art therapy, music therapy, and pet therapy are woven into the retreat, along with traditional models of bereavement care.

Drawing from our experience developing and facilitating this retreat, which has served over 120 individuals thus far, the presenters will explore the successes and challenges with this specific grief intervention. The presentation will include foundational knowledge on the benefits of grief camps, the frameworks used to address the unique needs of multigenerational grievers and examples of interventions and activities used within the retreat. In addition, presenters will address considerations including location, camp structure, accessibility, safety, and other challenges. Pictures and videos, participant feedback, and staff reflections will be used to compliment the learning.

By sharing this case study, the presenters hope to emphasize the importance and feasibility of offering interventions that support multiple generations within a bereaved family.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Name at least two theoretical frameworks for consideration in the development of a grief retreat.
2. Differentiate the grief needs of bereaved parents, bereaved siblings and bereaved grandparents.
3. Identify the benefits and barriers when implementing multigenerational support.

**Categories**

Camps

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Human Growth and Development, Group Dynamics and Counseling, Social and Cultural Foundations

## Literature References

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**15- 123- From Clinical to Compassionate: Insights from Healthcare Providers to Inform Program Development (1.0 CE)**



**Assistant Professor Amanda Chiapa**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Dr. Chiapa is a clinical psychologist with appointments as assistant professor at Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU) and adjunct assistant professor at the Yale Child Study Center. She serves as consultant on the Yale Child Study Center's Grief Sensitive Healthcare Project, which is funded by the New York Life Foundation. Dr. Chiapa directs the inpatient pediatric psychological consultation/liaison service at Doernbecher Children's Hospital. In this role, Dr. Chiapa provides psychosocial support to patients and families impacted by a medical illness. Dr. Chiapa has clinical training working with pediatric populations navigating a range of acute and chronic medical illnesses and has had formal training related to providing grief-sensitive healthcare related to the healthcare setting (e.g., CBUK, Education in Palliative and End-of-Life Care). Dr. Chiapa is also volunteering with the Dougy Center to help facilitate grief support groups for children and caregivers navigating bereavement.



**Clinical Assistant Professor Celeste Poe**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Dr. Celeste Poe is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist certified in perinatal mental health. She is a Clinical Assistant Professor and Attending NICU Psychologist at Stanford University School of Medicine working with families facing maternal and infant critical care. Dr. Poe is also an Assistant Clinical Professor at the Yale Child Study Center where she works on the Grief-Sensitive Healthcare Project, aiming to support medical providers in improving grief-sensitive care for patients and families. She is passionate about supporting young children and their caregivers through circumstances of grief, trauma, and bereavement and has received training in grief and loss through CBUK. She is also a Resolve Through Sharing certified bereavement coordinator.



**Assistant Professor Nancy Borstelmann**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Dr. Borstelmann is an Assistant Professor in the Yale School of Medicine, and Chief of Family Behavioral Health Services for Hematology/Oncology at the Yale Child Study Center. She is the co-director of the Grief-Sensitive Health Care Project and co-leading the development and implementation of the Yale Cancer Center/Smilow Cancer Hospital Early Onset Cancer Program which is focused on addressing the needs of patients and their families diagnosed with cancer at younger ages. Prior to starting her position at Yale, Dr. Borstelmann was the Senior Director of Social Work at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston and Chief of the Division of Social Work in the Department of Psychosocial Oncology and Palliative Care. She is a licensed clinical social worker whose career has been focused on interdisciplinary

psychosocial oncology and behavioral health care of patients and families coping with the multiple impacts of serious illness through direct clinical roles, education, and leadership. Dr. Borstelmann has a long-standing interest in clinical research and program development to improve care delivery and expand understanding of the psychosocial impact of cancer on patients, their families, and children. Her research experience includes qualitative and quantitative approaches specific to early onset cancer patients and their caregivers' stress and adjustment, parenting partners' coping with cancer, emotional well-being of young cancer survivors, and communication challenges in end-of-life care and bereavement. Her community engagement includes membership on the advisory board of Infinite Strength, a non-profit organization targeting the needs of single mothers with metastatic breast cancer.

**Authors:**

**Lindsey Whissel Fenton, MEd, CT**

**Speaking Grief**

Lindsey Whissel Fenton, MEd, CT (she/her) is an Emmy award-winning filmmaker, international speaker, and grief educator. In her current role as a senior producer/director and instructional designer at PBS/NPR affiliate WPSU, Lindsey focuses on projects related to grief, trauma, and mental health. She is the creator of Speaking Grief and Learning Grief, founder of Empathic Media, and serves on the Board of Directors for the National Alliance for Children's Grief (NACG). She's also an instructional designer and content creator for the Yale Child Study Center's Grief-Sensitive Healthcare Project. Lindsey earned her bachelor's degree in Cinema and Digital Arts from Point Park University, her master's degree in Learning, Design, and Technology from Penn State, and is Certified in Thanatology through the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC). She's a dog mom, avid reader, and rock climber.

**Sandra Gossart-Walker, LCSW**

**Yale School of Medicine**

**Assistant Clinical Professor**

Sandra Gossart-Walker, LCSW, is a clinical social worker specializing in child and adolescent psychiatry, with a focus on supporting individuals and families affected by HIV/AIDS. She provides counseling and guidance to help patients manage the emotional and psychological impacts of chronic illness, including stigma, grief, loss, anxiety, depression, and trauma. Her work emphasizes compassionate, family-centered care that addresses both mental health and complex social challenges.

An assistant clinical professor at Yale School of Medicine, Gossart-Walker also co-directs the Grief-Sensitive Healthcare Project, a national initiative that equips healthcare providers with tools and training to better support patients and families experiencing loss. Her work bridges clinical practice and education, helping to foster more empathetic, grief-informed care across healthcare systems.

**Abstract**

Patients and families keenly remember their interactions with clinical staff when navigating death and dying in the healthcare setting (Fenton et al., 2023; Snaman et al., 2016). Yet there remains a significant gap in provider knowledge and skills related to providing grief-sensitive care. In a survey of grieving individuals, just over half (55%) rated the support they received from nurses as good or excellent, while only 35% gave the same rating to physicians and social workers (Cacciatore et al., 2021). The Grief-sensitive Healthcare Project (GSHP) was created in recognition of patients' and caregivers' unmet grief-related needs and with awareness of the minimal support for healthcare professionals dealing with exposure to death and dying (Phillips et al, Health Svcs Insights, 2025). Trainings within healthcare systems tend to focus more specifically on communication about medical prognoses and end

of life care (e.g., Benesch et al., 2022) or are institution-specific and thus less generalizable. In order to hear directly from intended learners (healthcare professionals), guided by an evidence-based approach (e.g., Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research; Damschroder, 2022), a needs-based survey was developed and disseminated electronically in the spring of 2025 to healthcare providers and clinical team members across specialties and levels of experience. Results include quantitative and qualitative data from 123 completed surveys. Themes related to interest in specific types of training content and systems-level improvement opportunities were identified. The results from our needs-assessment survey will inform program development and highlight approaches that can help address needs in diverse settings and populations. These findings not only guide program development, but also offer compelling evidence through concrete data to share with administrators and decision-makers to underscore that investment in grief-sensitive training is both needed and actionable.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Summarize key findings from a needs-based survey reflecting providers' perspectives on improving grief-sensitive healthcare.
2. Describe how grief affects both patients and providers within healthcare settings.
3. Discuss potential barriers to implementing grief-sensitive practices within their own clinical or organizational context.
4. Outline 2-3 strategies to address key challenges reported by providers related to grief-sensitive care.

**Categories**

Research, Outcomes, and Measurements

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Research and Program Evaluation

**Literature References**

- Cacciatore, J., Thieleman, K., Fretts, R., & Jackson, L. B. (2021). What is good grief support? Exploring the actors and actions in social support after traumatic grief. *PLOS ONE*, 16(5), e0252324. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0252324>
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**I6- 133- Creating Safe Spaces for Queer Grief: Exploring Barriers and Needs of Grievors in LGBTQ+ Community (1.0 CE)**



**Clinical Supervisor and Program Coordinator Jodi Flesner  
Heartlinks Grief Center, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Jodi Flesner, Ph.D., LPC, is a clinical supervisor, licensed therapist, and program coordinator at Heartlinks Grief Center. Jodi completed her master's degree in Community Counseling at Loyola University Chicago in 2007 and her doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision from the University of Missouri-St. Louis in 2015. She is a Licensed Professional Counselor in both Illinois and Missouri. Jodi has worked at Heartlinks for nine years where she conducts individual and family counseling, group counseling, community outreach to support those grieving in the community, and various grief support groups at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Prior to that she worked as a doctoral intern at BJC Hospice for two years where she conducted individual and family bereavement support services, group counseling, and counseling at multiple grief/bereavement retreats and camps. Jodi's passion for working in the field of grief is born out of personal loss she experienced as a teenager when her oldest sister was killed in a car crash. She learned firsthand the importance of a safe place to connect with a community of grievors. She has presented on a variety of topics in the field of grief including exploring microaggressions experienced by those grieving in a loss in the LGBTQ+ community and most effective ways to support grieving individuals in the LGBTQ+ community.

**Abstract**

While grief is a universal human experience, it is important to acknowledge that how individuals encounter, express, and process grief is unique. In this presentation, we will explore some of the unique needs of those grieving a loss who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. Many factors play a role in how LGBTQ+ youth and adults navigate grief, including discrimination, societal stigma, disenfranchised grief, and both individual and collective trauma. Those who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community often face many barriers to accessing compassionate, understanding grief support services which can leave vulnerable individuals feeling more isolated and hopeless. The importance of creating queer affirming spaces for those grieving a loss cannot be understated, particularly as LGBTQ+ youth and adults may already be hesitant in seeking support services for fear of being met with cultural incompetence, judgement, or prejudice, often rooted in previous life experiences. A better understanding of some of the challenges and barriers faced by grieving LGBTQ+ individuals is vital in working to create safe spaces and effective grief support for queer grievors. We will explore various strategies to increase training and education for grief support providers in order to better understand the unique needs within the LGBTQ+ community. We will discuss the importance of using LGBTQ+ inclusive language in addition to directly speaking to social stigma and discrimination. Diverse representation, LGBTQ+ friendly resources, and specific LGBTQ+ grief support groups will also be highlighted as additional ways to create safe spaces for this population. LGBTQ+ inclusive grief counseling strategies will be discussed, providing an important roadmap for grief providers in order to understand best practices in supporting grieving LGBTQ+ youth and adults.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. define the unique grief needs of individuals who identify within the LGBTQ+ community.
2. identify at least three specific challenges or barriers to grief support experienced by grieving individuals who are part of the LGBTQ+ community.
3. identify at least five strategies for creating safe spaces for grieving individuals within the LGBTQ+ community.
4. demonstrate two effective grief counseling approaches that are considered best practices to support grieving individual in the LGBTQ+ community.

**Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Diversity and Social Justice

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship, Social and Cultural Foundations, Counselor Professional Identity and Practice Issues

**Literature References**

- Nolan, R., Kirkland, C., & Davis, R. (2019). LGBT after loss: A mixed-method analysis on the effect of partner bereavement on interpersonal relationships and subsequent partnerships.\* *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 82(4), 646-667.  
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<https://doi.org/10.1089/jpm.2019.0639>
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<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20126129>

**17- 144- Understanding and Supporting Dissociation in Bereaved Youth: Research, Theory, and Practice (1.0 CE)**

**Presenters:**



**Director of Community-Centered Strategy Oscar Widales-Benitez**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Oscar Widales-Benitez, PhD, NCSP, LSP, is a licensed psychologist, a Nationally Certified School Psychologist, and a bilingual (English/Spanish) clinician. He serves as Director of Community-Centered Strategy at the Trauma and Grief (TAG) Center at Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, where he leads training, consultation, and community engagement initiatives designed to expand access to culturally responsive, evidence-based trauma and bereavement care. In this role, Dr. Widales-Benitez has developed and delivered trainings for school- and community-based providers across the state and nationwide, including Spanish-language programs. Dr. Widales-Benitez has specialized training in trauma- and grief-informed assessment and intervention and is rostered in Trauma and Grief Component Therapy for Adolescents and Multidimensional Grief Therapy. His research focuses on risk and protective factors influencing bereaved and traumatized youth, with particular emphasis on belonging, acculturative stress, and the development of culturally responsive assessment and intervention for Latinx, immigrant, and LGBTQ+ youth. Guided by a strong commitment to social justice, he prioritizes centering youth and community voice and integrates strength-based approaches that promote positive youth development and resilience in his work. He has contributed to national initiatives to improve trauma- and grief-informed care through his work with the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). Prior to joining the TAG Center, Dr. Widales-Benitez served as an Assistant Professor and Pediatric Psychologist at The University of Texas Dell Medical School and Dell Children’s Medical Center in Austin, where he provided outpatient and telehealth services, trained future psychologists, and conducted research as part of the Texas Childhood Trauma Research Network. He began his career as a high school mathematics teacher in Laredo, Texas, before pursuing graduate training in child and adolescent psychology. Dr. Widales-Benitez earned his BA in Mathematics from Texas A&M International University, his M.Ed. in School Psychology from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and his PhD in School Psychology from Texas A&M University. He completed his internship at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles and a postdoctoral fellowship at UT Southwestern Medical Center/Children’s Medical Center Dallas.



**Senior Director of Research Lauren Alvis**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Lauren Alvis, PhD, is a developmental psychologist and applied researcher dedicated to advancing equity in youth mental health. As Senior Director of Research at the Trauma and Grief Center at Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, Dr. Alvis provides methodological and statistical oversight for projects that expand access to and improve the quality of culturally responsive, evidence-based care for youth impacted by trauma or bereavement. Her research examines structural inequities contributing to mental health disparities while highlighting cultural and community strengths that promote positive youth development.

Her work aims to reduce mental health disparities, improve resilience and positive adaptation, and increase access to data-informed, culturally responsive care, particularly for families of color exposed to adversity. Dr. Alvis has conducted research funded by the National Science Foundation, SAMSHA, the New York Life Foundation, UNICEF, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the John Templeton Foundation. Dr. Alvis has experience investigating the effectiveness of various approaches to supporting youth exposed to trauma and loss; program evaluation of nationwide trauma- and grief-informed trainings for school- and community-based providers; data collection and analysis of national multisite, longitudinal research studies; and expertise in advanced statistics and mixed methods.



**Executive Director, Trauma and Grief Center, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute Julie Kaplow**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Julie Kaplow, PhD, ABPP, is a licensed clinical psychologist, board certified in Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology. She serves as Executive Vice President of Trauma and Grief Programs and Policy and Executive Director of the Trauma and Grief (TAG) Center at the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute in Houston. Dr. Kaplow is also Executive Director of the TAG Center at Manning Family Children’s Hospital in New Orleans and Professor of Psychiatry at Tulane University School of Medicine. She is also CEO of the Lucine Center for Trauma and Grief, a group practice that provides teletherapy to youth exposed to traumas and losses across the states of Texas and Louisiana. In these roles, she oversees the development, evaluation, and dissemination of trauma- and bereavement-informed “best practices” nationwide. Following tragedies such as Hurricane Harvey and the Santa Fe school shooting in Texas, Dr. Kaplow and her team provided evidence-based risk screening and interventions to impacted children and families. More recently, they have continued to conduct trainings and provide ongoing consultation to the Uvalde school district following the Robb Elementary School shooting. Dr. Kaplow has published widely on the topics of childhood trauma and grief and has served as Principal Investigator on numerous grant-funded programs focused on enhancing resilience in youth exposed to adversity. She is lead author of *Multidimensional Grief Therapy*, co-author of *Trauma and Grief Component Therapy for Adolescents*, and co-author of *Trauma Systems Therapy*. Dr. Kaplow has served as a consultant to the DSM-5 Sub-Work Group on Prolonged Grief Disorder, the ICD-11 Work Group on Disorders Associated with Stress, the National Academy of Medicine (Scientific Advisory Council on Child Death), and the Mass Violence and Children Working Group of the FBI. Prior to joining the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, Dr. Kaplow served as Chief of Psychology and Vice Chair for Behavioral Health at Texas Children’s Hospital/Baylor College of Medicine. She received her BA in Psychology from the University of Michigan and her PhD in Clinical Psychology from Duke University. She completed her internship at Boston Children’s Hospital/Harvard Medical School followed by postdoctoral training at the Center for Medical and Refugee Trauma at Boston Medical Center.

**Authors:**

**Priscilla Mendez, PsyD**

**Director of Cross-Cultural Programs**

**Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute**

**Bio:** Priscilla Mendez, PsyD, is a bilingual licensed clinical psychologist at the Trauma and Grief Center in Houston, Texas. She provides trauma- and bereavement-informed care to youth and families of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Her interests include

ambiguous loss among immigrant youth and families, with an emphasis on exploring assessment and treatment practices to best support them. She also trains schools, community organizations, and medical centers on childhood trauma and bereavement, and works to expand the center's trainings and workshops for Spanish-speaking communities.

### **Abstract**

Dissociation is a common experience in trauma-exposed youth, with data indicating that approximately one-quarter of children and adolescents exposed to trauma exhibit dissociative symptoms. Dissociation can involve detachment, altered awareness, or disruptions in memory and identity, and its detrimental impact on functioning is well documented, ranging from difficulties with attention and learning to a fragmented sense of identity. Given its unique clinical presentation, treating dissociation often requires modifications to traditional therapeutic approaches. Although well-documented in trauma-exposed youth, far less is known about the role of dissociation in the context of grief and loss. Emerging evidence suggests that dissociative symptoms may be especially prevalent following sudden, violent, or multiple losses. Yet this continues to be an understudied area with limited guidance for those supporting bereaved youth.

This session will integrate research evidence and clinical perspectives to advance understanding of dissociation in bereaved youth and offer practical tools for support and intervention. Our first speaker (Dr. Alvis) will review extant research and present original data on prevalence rates, bereavement-related risk factors, and how dissociation intersects with the primary dimensions of grief as conceptualized in Multidimensional Grief Theory. Our second speaker (Dr. Kaplow) will provide an overview of Multidimensional Grief Therapy (MGT) – a grief-focused, assessment-driven intervention – as an approach to support bereaved youth, including those experiencing dissociative symptoms. Our third speaker (Dr. Widales-Benitez) will present a clinical case study illustrating the impact of dissociation on youth functioning, with strategies for assessment, treatment planning, and intervention. Attendees will leave with an understanding of the clinical presentation of and risk factors for dissociation in bereaved youth, screening and assessment tools to identify these experiences, and strategies for adapting grief-focused interventions to support bereaved youth with dissociative symptoms.

### **Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Describe the prevalence, clinical presentation, and bereavement-related risk factors for dissociation among bereaved children and adolescents.
2. Explain how dissociative symptoms intersect with grief reactions as conceptualized by Multidimensional Grief Theory.
3. Identify strategies for assessing dissociation in bereaved youth.
4. Apply practical tools and intervention strategies including adaptations to Multidimensional Grief Therapy to support bereaved youth experiencing dissociation.

### **Categories**

Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

### **Content Level**

Intermediate

### **Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

## **CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

## **CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship

### **Literature References**

- Boelen, P. A. (2024). The co-occurrence of symptoms of prolonged grief and dissociation: Could there be a dissociative prolonged grief disorder subtype? *European Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 8(1), 100368.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejtd.2023.100368>
- Ford, J. D. (2025). Childhood Relational Trauma and Dissociative Symptoms Across the Lifespan. *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 1-4.
- Kaplow, J. B., Wamser-Nanney, R., Layne, C. M., Burnside, A., King, C., Liang, L., Steinberg, A., Briggs, E., Suarez, L., & Pynoos, R. (2021). Identifying bereavement-related markers of mental and behavioral health problems among clinic-referred adolescents. *Psychiatric Research and Clinical Practice*, 3(2), 88–96.  
<https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.prcp.20190021>
- Revet, A., Bui, E., Benvegna, G., Suc, A., Mesquida, L., & Raynaud, J. P. (2020). Bereavement and reactions of grief among children and adolescents: Present data and perspectives. *L'encephale*, 46(5), 356-363.

**18- 146- Grief is Strength: Turning Pain into Power Through Physical Resilience (Non-CE offering)**



**CEO/Founder Joseph Fernando**  
**Limitless NYC, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

As a native of Brooklyn, New York, I've always understood the value of grit, resilience, and showing up for my community. This determination has been tested by personal tragedy and honed through my journey as a Division 1 baseball player at Bethune-Cookman University and a professional with the San Diego Padres and Atlanta Braves. My experiences with grief and hardship, particularly the loss of my brother when I was 14, have uniquely shaped my purpose. This lived experience fuels my work with Stronger Together, a non-profit dedicated to providing mentorship and support to low-income and minority youth navigating their own difficult journeys. Through our community-based programming, I use physical activity—specifically calisthenics—as a constructive outlet for grief, helping young people build self-trust, confidence, and emotional resilience. My professional background as a certified personal trainer with over 10 years of experience, combined with my firsthand understanding of channeling personal loss into meaningful action, gives me a distinct perspective on connecting physical endurance with the emotional endurance required to live with grief. I am qualified to speak on this topic not only as a subject matter expert in physical training but as a credible messenger who has walked this path personally and now guides others along it.



**CEO/Founder Omar Longi**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Born and raised in Queens, New York, in a Dominican household, I chased a dream of playing professional baseball. However, a series of injuries and surgeries ended that path, leading to a difficult turning point in my life. It was during that time that I discovered calisthenics. As a New York native, I've always understood the importance of community and resilience. My own journey has been shaped by personal hardship, specifically the loss of my best friend when I was 17. This profound experience has become the driving force behind my life's work. I channeled my focus and determination into training and competing, eventually winning every major event from New York to California. This journey of personal transformation became the foundation for my professional purpose. In 2023, we opened Limitless, the first calisthenics gym in the U.S., and in 2024, we launched Stronger Together to bring fitness and mentorship to underserved communities. My lived experience—navigating grief, hardship, and personal redemption—is what qualifies me to speak on this topic. I have firsthand knowledge of how physical discipline can serve as a constructive outlet for personal struggle. Today, I lead workshops globally and partner with groups like Nike NYC, FDNY, and 360 ASA, using physical training to help youth rise strong and stay on track.



**Director Tehmina Pechefsky**  
**Stronger Together, Inc., United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

I am a nonprofit professional with a strong background in grant development, program design, and organizational leadership. My career includes directing operations and fundraising for community-based nonprofits, designing youth-centered academic and athletic programs, and advancing health equity initiatives. My experience is directly relevant to this session because of my work with Stronger Together, Inc. and 360 Academic Sports Academy (360 ASA). In my role as a Director at Stronger Together, I lead strategic vision and operations for a nonprofit that uses calisthenics to promote health equity and workforce development. I also manage grant development and partnerships for 360 ASA, helping to build youth-focused academic, athletic, and leadership programs. As a legal professional, I have represented clients in disability benefit appeals and co-authored legal scholarship and amicus briefs. This background has honed my ability to translate complex issues into clear, persuasive narratives, which is essential for communicating the deep connection between physical discipline and personal resilience. Together with the other presenters, I offer a powerful combination of technical expertise and personal insight. My professional experience in building and sustaining the very programs and partnerships discussed in this session provides a credible framework for understanding how discipline and community connection can be transformed into strength and opportunity for youth.

**Abstract**

This session explores how grief, particularly in children and adolescents, can be channeled into strength through intentional physical activity and culturally conscious mentorship. Drawing from personal experience and non-profit Stronger Together's community-based programming we will highlight how mindful physical exertion can serve as a constructive outlet for grief, creating space for self-trust, confidence, and emotional resilience. Joe Fernando and Omar Longi, founders of Stronger Together, Inc. ("Stronger Together"), a non-profit focused on augmenting community and health equity through calisthenics-focused resources, and Limitless NYC New York's first and only calisthenic gym, will speak on their lived experience. When they were 14 and 17, respectfully, they tragically lost their brother and best friend. They'll discuss how they have used grief to fuel socially conscious, youth-focused work and provide mentorship to low-income and minority youth working through their own grief journeys. Joe is a former professional baseball player, and both Joe and Omar are trainers certified by the National Council on Personal Training with a collective 20+ years of experience in the field. Joe and Omar's journey from personal tragedy to professional purpose is the foundation of Stronger Together's mission to use physical movement as a tool for healing and growth. Participants will engage in both conceptual discussions and an experiential workout. This session will connect physical endurance with the endurance required to live with grief. The session underscores the importance of credible messengers, cultural competency, and practical tools for using physical movement as a bridge to healing conversations and community support.

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Understand physical exertion as a grief outlet: learn how structured movement can provide children and teens with nonverbal, embodied ways of processing loss.

2. Recognize the role of cultural competency and credible messengers: explore why youth respond best to mentors who share lived experience and can meet them where they are.
3. Connect physical and emotional resilience: experience how pushing through physical challenge mirrors the persistence needed to adapt to grief over time.
4. Support confidence and self-trust in grieving youth: identify how exercise builds self-esteem, focus, and a sense of agency essential for healing.
5. Apply practical tools to grief support: gain strategies to integrate simple bodyweight exercises and guided reflection as part of grief support programs, fostering both individual resilience and community connection.

**Categories**

Outreach and Community Collaboration (schools, Boys and Girls Club, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

No

## **I9- 149- Reciprocal Grief Dynamics in Families Facing Early Parental Death and Premature Widowhood (1.0 CE)**



### **Associate Professor Liza Barros-Lane**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Dr. Liza Barros-Lane, PhD, MSW is an Associate Professor of Social Work at the University of Houston–Downtown and founder of The Young Widowhood Project. Widowed at age 36 while parenting her 3-year-old son, her personal experience shapes and informs her scholarship. She conducts qualitative and phenomenological research on how premature widowhood impacts the family system, with a focus on the experiences of children and parents navigating profound loss. Her work has appeared in *Death Studies*, *OMEGA–Journal of Death and Dying*, and the *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, and she regularly presents at national and international conferences to bridge research and practice in children’s grief.

#### **Presentation co-authors include:**

### **Social Service Director Laura Gottschalck**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Laura Gottschalck, LMSW is a Doctorate of Social Work student at Tulane University whose research explores young widowhood and intergenerational trauma. Her scholarship examines how grief and loss shape individual well-being and how trauma reverberates across generations, influencing resilience, mental health, and identity. Grounded in qualitative inquiry, she centers the lived experiences of widows, widowers, and families to illuminate gaps in practice and policy. Her professional background spans clinical, supervisory, and program leadership roles. She currently serves as Social Services Director at Memorial Driftwood Nursing Center, where she oversees admissions, trauma assessments, interdisciplinary care planning, and referrals for psychiatric and clinical social work services for both long-term and skilled residents. Prior to this role, she worked at the Specialized Treatment Facility, beginning as a therapist providing individual, family, and group therapy with evidence-based modalities including TF-CBT, SPARCS, and CBT. She later became Social Services Supervisor, leading a multidisciplinary team of therapists, social workers, and behavioral health staff in delivering trauma-informed care. Laura’s earlier roles include work as a Behavioral Interventionist and School-Based Therapist, where she provided assessment, intervention, and therapy for students with disabilities and behavioral health needs, as well as positions such as Medicaid Waiver Case Manager and Mental Health Technician. Across these settings, she has consistently advanced trauma-informed, resilience-based interventions and strengthened systemic supports for vulnerable and marginalized populations.

### **Lead Counselor Sarah Vollmann**

#### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Sarah Vollmann, DSW, MPS, ATR-BC, LICSW is a registered, board-certified art therapist and a licensed clinical social worker. She is a faculty member of the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition, and the Associate Director of the Young Widowhood Project. She maintains a private practice specializing in grief and traumatic loss, and is the Lead Counselor at Buckingham Browne & Nichols School. Sarah has published articles and book chapters about grief, and co-authored a recent book entitled *Born Into Loss: Shadows of a Deceased Sibling and Family Journeys of Grief*. She presents nationally and internationally on art therapy, grief, and bereavement.

## **Amber Perez**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Amber Perez is a Bachelor of Social Work graduate and a Master of Social Work candidate at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. She is currently completing her clinical internship at Texas Children's Hospital, where she is gaining clinical experience in supporting children and families through medical and psychosocial challenges. As a survivor of childhood parental loss, she brings both personal insight and academic rigor to her work. Her research interests focus on childhood grief, particularly the short- and long-term impacts of parental loss, with the goal of advancing interventions that foster resilience and healing in children navigating bereavement.

### **Abstract**

The death of a parent in childhood often coincides with the surviving parent's widowhood, creating dual grief that reverberates through the family system. For children, this loss disrupts attachment, development, emotional regulation, and even stress physiology (e.g., HPA axis dysregulation; Yehuda et al., 2016). For widowed parents, the simultaneous loss of a partner and the task of parenting through grief creates lasting strain on relationships and health (Ellis et al., 2025; Yopp et al., 2019a; Park et al., 2021). Parents describe being retraumatized by both telling their children about the death and then witnessing their children's ongoing grief, while also carrying their own (Ellis et al., 2025). Children, in turn, are deeply shaped by their parents' grief, sometimes suppressing their own feelings to protect a parent who seems emotionally unavailable (O'Connor, 2025).

Yet, much research treats children's and parents' grief separately, casting parents only as facilitators of their children's grief (Kaplow et al., 2014). This overlooks the way each intensifies the other: children's distress increases parents' strain, which then further disrupts children's adjustment (Ellis et al., 2025; Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2020). These cycles can lead to ambiguous loss—when parents are physically present but emotionally distant—and heighten the risk of intergenerational trauma (Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2020).

This presentation introduces Reciprocal Grief Dynamics (RGD), a framework that integrates family systems (Bowen, 1978), multidimensional grief (Kaplow et al., 2018), and trauma theory to conceptualize grief as a two-way process. We will also highlight key areas for intervention, including strategies that promote parent-child co-regulation, culturally responsive supports, and attention to structural barriers such as "bereavement deserts" (Smith et al., 2025). By reframing grief as relational, RGD emphasizes the importance of addressing both child and parent experiences to disrupt cycles of distress and foster resilience across the family system.

### **Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Define Reciprocal Grief Dynamics (RGD): Describe how parents' secondary trauma from witnessing children's grief (e.g., delivering the death notification, ongoing caregiving) and children's distress in response to parental emotional unavailability create cycles of mutual dysregulation in bereaved families.
2. Identify relational processes in parent-child dyads: Recognize specific patterns such as parental avoidance triggered by children's grief expressions and children's suppression of emotions to protect grieving parents, and explain how these dynamics sustain distress across the family system.
3. Highlight key areas for intervention: Demonstrate how approaches that strengthen parent-child co-regulation, integrate culturally responsive practices, and address

structural barriers like “bereavement deserts” can disrupt reciprocal grief cycles and reduce risk of intergenerational trauma transmission.

**Categories**

Specific Bereaved Populations (children of all abilities, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Theories and Concepts of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills, Diversity and Social Justice

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Human Growth and Development, Social and Cultural Foundations

**Literature References**

- Ellis, K. H., Barros-Lane, L., & Kasper, T. (2025). The difficulties of parenting when widowed: A qualitative study of the lived experience. *Death Studies, 49*(4), 486–500. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2025.1234567>
- O’Connor, M. F. (2025). Prolonged grief disorder: Course, diagnosis, assessment, and treatment. *Focus, 23*(2), 178–186. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.focus.20240048>
- Park, E. M., Check, D. K., Yopp, J. M., Edwards, T., Deal, A. M., & Rosenstein, D. L. (2021). Parenting while grieving: A cross-sectional study. *Death Studies, 45*(2), 79–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1702122>

**I10- 160- MISSION Grief Lab- A Free, Downloadable Curriculum for Grief Support Groups for K-12th Grade Youth (1.0 CE)**



**Director Heartlinks Grief Center Diana D Glenn-Cuddeback  
Heartlinks Grief Center, United States**

**Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic**

Diana Cuddeback, LCSW is the Founding Director of Heartlinks Grief Center in Belleville, Illinois. Since her first Children's Grief Group in 1991, Diana has provided children, families, and adults with innovative grief counseling, support, and programming. Diana regularly presents on a variety of grief topics to a lay and professional audience both locally and nationally. Providing clinical professionals education and concrete, useable tools for supporting grieving individuals is key part of Diana's mission to make the world more friendly to grieving people. Diana has worked in schools, community agencies and other youth programs providing grief groups for all ages of children. The Grief Lab Curriculum is a passion project, providing a free, accessible, flexible grief support program for K-12th grades, usable for professionals and lay-people working with grieving youth. Diana is an author of Heartbroken: Grief and Hope in the Opioid Crisis. Diana's mission is to create a meaningful community of support for grieving people filled with learning, activity, fun and connection.

**Abstract**

Is your program challenged by requests for more school groups than you can provide? Are you wanting to start school groups but lack material? Are you tired of your 8-session program with the same old activities year after year? Are you spending hours in the car traveling to schools when you want to equip school personnel to support youth? Then Grief Lab is an opportunity for you to come find out about a free, downloadable curriculum in 2 parts for youth K-8th or 7-12th grades. Bursting Bubbles is a session limited model for K-8th and TAG (Teens and Grief) is an ongoing program provided throughout the school year. Together, they make up Grief Lab. Both research and our experience providing peer-focused, grief support for youth highlights the utility of groups. Thanks to a Congressionally appropriated spending grant, Heartlinks Grief Center has created this grief group resource and will share a presentation about this topic-based curriculum. Grief Lab is complete with lesson plans containing grief information, learning goals, discussion topics, along with 'drag and drop' activities, flexible for different youth in a variety of settings. Curriculum is provided in both English and Spanish. During our session we will talk about the Grief Lab programs, you will hear how Heartlinks is using it in our urban to rural service area, discuss school group challenges and wins together, as well as do activities and play games. Like Grief Lab, this session will be filled with activities, sharing and opportunities to compare notes. Play Grief Burst with us! Brainstorm where Grief Lab can be used with us! You will leave this presentation with a ready-made resource. Prepare for not being bored!

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. identify and download the Grief Lab Curriculum
2. list 3 of the 8 grief topics used in the Grief Lab Curriculum
3. select 1 activity useful to their clinical work with grieving youth
4. describe at least 2 barriers to school-based grief groups
5. demonstrate one grief education activity available in the Grief Lab Curriculum

**Categories**

Outreach and Community Collaboration (schools, Boys and Girls Club, etc.)

**Content Level**

Intermediate

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?**

Yes

**CE Content Information Social Work**

Social Work Practice, Knowledge, and Skills

**CE Content Information Counseling**

Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship

**Literature References**

- Linder, L., Lunardini, M., & Zimmerman, H. (2024). Supporting Childhood Bereavement Through School-Based Grief Group. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 89(2), 741–758. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228221082756>
- Matthews, D., Finney, N., Owens, D., Gordon, F., & Morgan-Swaney, C. (2022). Creative Counseling Strategies for Adolescents Working Through Grief. *The Family Journal*, 30(3), 261–267. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10664807221090946>
- Riely M. (2003). Facilitating children's grief. *The Journal of school nursing : the official publication of the National Association of School Nurses*, 19(4), 212–218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10598405030190040601>
- Russell, C. E., Chin, M., Bollig, G., Cait, C.-A., Carnevale, F. A., Chrastek, J., Lavorgna, B., Macpherson, C., Remke, S. S., Scout, L., Skeen, J., Szylit, R., van Breemen, C., & Shalev, R. (2024). Re-Imagining Childhood Grief: Children as Active Agents in a Transactional Process. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 302228241310264. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228241310264>
- Schuurman, D. L., & Mitchell, M. B. (Eds.). (2021). *The Dougy Center Model: Peer grief support for children, teens, and families*. The National Grief Center for Children & Families. <https://dougycbookstore.org/products/the-dougy-center-model-peer-grief-support-for-children-teens-families>
- Whole Child Counseling. (2025, August 14). *How to structure group counseling sessions with kids*. [https://www.wholechildcounseling.com/post/how-to-structure-group-counseling-sessions-with-children?srsId=AfmBOop6EfIRY8jWak4kKoXi7RPM-a1iWp0H\\_FFpeNblPorMgzNJxl8](https://www.wholechildcounseling.com/post/how-to-structure-group-counseling-sessions-with-children?srsId=AfmBOop6EfIRY8jWak4kKoXi7RPM-a1iWp0H_FFpeNblPorMgzNJxl8)

\*\*\*\*\*We have a longer list of resources that will be shared with the presentation\*\*\*\*\*

## **Plenary Session- The Most Powerful Intervention We Have: Relationships (1.0 CE)**



**Jeff R. Temple, PhD**  
**Associate Dean for Clinical Research**  
**School of Behavioral Health Sciences at UTHealth Houston**  
**Betty and Rose Pfefferbaum Chair in Child Mass Trauma and Resilience**

### **Bio highlighting their experience/qualifications to present on this topic:**

Dr. Temple is a professor, licensed psychologist, and the Associate Dean for Clinical Research at the School of Behavioral Health Sciences at the UTHealth Houston, where he also holds the Betty and Rose Pfefferbaum Chair in Child Mass Trauma and Resilience. As the Director of the first CDC-funded Injury Control Research Center in Texas, his work focuses on the prevention of interpersonal and community violence, including firearm violence. He has been continuously federally funded by the National Institute of Justice, National Institutes of Health, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention since finishing his training. He has over 225 peer-reviewed scholarly publications in a variety of high-impact journals including JAMA, JAMA Pediatrics, The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health, Pediatrics, and the Journal of Adolescent Health. He recently co-edited a book on adolescent dating violence, co-chaired the Texas Task Force on Domestic Violence, served on the Board of Directors for the Society for Prevention Research and the Texas Psychological Association. He is an inaugural Fellow of the Society for the Advancement of Violence and Injury Research. Locally, he served for 7 years as the Vice President of the Galveston Independent School District Board of Trustees. His work has been featured on Forbes, CNN, New York Times, TIME, Washington Post, and even the satirical website, The Onion.

Highest Degree Earned: PhD  
Field of Study: Psychology  
License: Licensed Psychologist

### **Abstract**

Healthy relationships are one of the most powerful protective factors in young people's lives - especially during times of adversity. Research consistently shows that supportive relationships with peers, caregivers, and trusted adults help children regulate emotions, build resilience, and navigate adversity.

In this keynote, Dr. Jeff Temple will discuss what prevention science tells us about how healthy relationships shape coping, healing, and long-term wellbeing. He will connect this research to the critical work happening across National Alliance for Children's Grief member organizations, where peer support and family-based programming intentionally create spaces for connection, validation, and belonging.

The talk will also address a common challenge for practitioners: communicating the value of relational work. By translating relationship science into accessible language, this keynote will help professionals more clearly articulate the profound impact their programs have on children and families experiencing grief.

**Content Level:**

- Basic - This best describes a topic or issue that the prospective audience is encountering for the first time in a meaningful way

**Categories:**

- Research, Outcomes, and Measurements
- Programming and/or Activities/Techniques

**Learning Objectives: After this session, participants will be able to:**

1. Describe at least 3 specific ways supportive relationships function as protective factors in children's emotional regulation, resilience, and long-term wellbeing, particularly in the context of grief and adversity.
2. Identify and apply at least 2 principles from prevention science to real-world practice by explaining how peer support, caregiver relationships, and trusted adults can be leveraged to promote coping and healing in bereaved youth.
3. Draft 1 brief message (1–2 sentences) using clear, accessible language to communicate the impact of relational interventions to families, stakeholders, or funders.

**Are you applying to offer CEs for this session?** Yes

**Social Work Content Area(s):**

- Social work research, programs, or practice evaluations
- Social work practice, knowledge, and skills

**Counseling Content Area(s):**

- Counseling Theory/Practice and the Counseling Relationship
- Assessment
- Research and Program Evaluation

**Literature References:**

- Temple JR, Baumler E, Wood L. (2025). Effects of a Middle School Dating Violence Prevention Program on Depression at Five Year Follow Up. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 77, 168-170.
- Temple JR, Baumler E, Wood L. (2024). Intimate partner violence and parenting. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 178, 1074-1076. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2024.2705.
- Baumler E, Wood L, Temple JR. (2023). Three-year outcomes from a middle school dating violence prevention program. *Pediatrics*, 152(4), e2023062281. PMC10522923.
- Temple JR, Baumler E, Wood L, Thiel M, Peskin M, \*Torres E. (2021). A Dating Violence Prevention Program for Middle School Youth: A Cluster Randomized Trial. *Pediatrics*, 148, e2021052880. PMID: PMC9645690.

### **POSTER SESSIONS- VARIOUS**

- **Camp Hope: A Family-Centered Approach to Grief** by Cynthia Anderson
- **Exploring Disenfranchised Grief of Individuals Who Have Lost a Non-Familial Loved One** by Anahi Esquivel & Raegan Carrillo
- **Exploring Efficacy of Therapeutically Applied Tabletop Role-Playing Games in a Grief Group Setting** by Christina Thomas & Christina Harries
- **Exploring Grief Through Equine-Assisted Learning: A Collaborative Approach to Family Grief Support** by Susana Calley, Carrie Fox, & Adrienne Freeland
- **From Panic to Perspective: Understanding Program Change** by Riley Acuff
- **Grief Moves** by Zachary Schafer
- **Holding Loss in a Pressured World: Adolescent Grief and School Expectations During COVID-19** by Kaylie LeVasseur
- **Making It Visible: Ambiguous Loss and Disenfranchised Grief Among Children with Incarcerated Parents** by Gregory Gomez, Julie Kaplow, & Lauren Alvis
- **Pass the Mic: Elevating Youth Leadership in Grief** by Samira Moosavi
- **Time for Change: Involving Children in the Funeral Process to Support Healthy Grieving** by Victoria Shea-Martens
- **Weathering Emotions: Examining the Role Children's Museums Play in Supporting and Normalizing Grief** by Erin Crison
- **What I Needed Then, What I Offer Now: A Lived-Experience Approach to School-Based Grief Support** by Meg Gladieux