

Supporting children through grief

Hospice care offers wraparound support for all family members, regardless of their age. Support for children who are facing the death of a loved one is an important part of our bereavement care.

"Children are often called the forgotten mourners," says Bereavement Counselor Isabel Stenzel. "A child's life is forever changed by the death of a parent or close family member. We really do acknowledge grief in children and support the grief needs of the entire family."

Our bereavement team has long provided individual counseling and play therapy for children who are grieving. Thanks to funding from our community, we can now provide extra support for young people who have lost a parent or other close loved one.

A generous grant from Sandhya's Touch, a foundation dedicated to improving quality of life for people with chronic or serious illness, funded supplies for several projects, including our new grief kits for children who are grieving the loss of a parent or primary caregiver.

Isabel explains, "These kits allow us to reach and support so many more young people in ways that can impact their emotional health for years to come."



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Our new grief kits offer age-appropriate ways to support young people who have lost a parent or other close loved one.

Take Charge! on National Healthcare Decisions Day – April 16

New month-long campaign celebrates reasons people decided to plan ahead

National Healthcare Decisions Day is April 16 – and for Mission Hospice and our community partners, it's the perfect time to encourage everyone to Take Charge of their future care.



All month long, we're focusing on advance care planning – details are in your *Community Connections* guide.

We see every day the importance of planning ahead.

As Alijah Marquez, our Community Education Manager, says, "Serious illness doesn't have an age bias. Everyone's end-of-life wishes should be expressed and respected. Now is the time to complete your advance care directive – no matter your age or circumstances."

Advance care planning is a process, which we break into a series of steps:

- **Think about what matters most to you.**
- **Talk about your wishes with your family and friends.**
- **Choose your health care agent.**
- **Write it down – and share your plan.**

Our website has lots of resources to help you take each of these steps, including our Take Charge video and booklet, along with a

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Tips from Jaymie Byron for supporting children through grief

- Let children teach you about their grief - it's their journey.
- Grief is often more physical for younger children, who are less oriented to language.
- Give children direct and truthful answers in developmentally appropriate language.
- Listen, and remember the power of acknowledgment.
- Offer a range of outlets for expression of grief - mind (games and play), body (movement), and heart (creative outlets).
- Give children choices about how to express and participate in rituals and ways to memorialize the person who died.
- Offer routines and stability to provide safety and help diffuse anxiety.



Our bereavement team assembled dozens of kits to support grieving children. Clockwise from top left, volunteers Molly Butler, Allison Shields, and Wendy Parker with Bereavement Counselor Isabel Stenzel. The kits include age-appropriate resources (shown below) specifically for ages 5-8, 9-12, and teens. These kits, along with some recent training, will help us support even more young people who have lost a loved one.



Supporting grieving children

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"Grieving parents can be overwhelmed and find it difficult to get a child to bereavement counseling - especially in a pandemic world," she says. "The idea is to offer a variety of age-appropriate resources that young people can explore - with a social worker or spiritual counselor, or on their own."

Isabel convened a committee - including volunteer Wendy Parker, a retired school psychologist and counselor - to determine what would be most therapeutic for young grievers. Based on that research, the team developed and created kits with resources specifically designed to support ages 5-8, 9-12, and teens.

Our staff and volunteers have been getting special training on supporting grieving children. Jaymie Byron, LMFT, Director of Community Outreach at our community nonprofit partner Kara, led a special workshop on helping children cope with loss.

Jaymie emphasized that children act differently to grief, crisis, and trauma depending on their age and development. In addition, as they develop, children will re-experience the death in new ways and reintegrate the relationship that has been lost.

Understanding how children experience grief, and being better able to support them, is a key part of our ability to serve the entire family. As Linda Goldman wrote in her book, *Life & Loss*, "If a child is old enough to love, he or she is old enough to grieve." 🐾

National Healthcare Decisions Day

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conversation starter kit. You'll find all of this, and more, at MissionHospice.org/TakeCharge.

Of course, as your situation changes, it's a good idea to reevaluate your wishes – they may change as you age. Perhaps there's been a marriage or birth in the family, and you want to choose a different healthcare agent. Or maybe you've added a new alternative agent and want to be sure to discuss your wishes with them, should they need to represent you.

Throughout the month of April, we'll be sharing stories from people who have decided to Take Charge of their future care.

"Our end-of-life wishes are important and valid, and we never know when we are going to need to have them documented," says Alijah. "They are something to share with those around us as both a way of supporting ourselves, in our last moments of life, and the loved ones who will accompany us during that challenging and sacred time." 🍌

Meet Alijah Marquez



Our campaign for National Healthcare Decisions Day – and our many other educational programs – are coordinated by our new Community Education Manager, Bay Area native Alijah Marquez.

A longtime bereavement volunteer, she says, "My work at Mission Hospice is an incredible bridge between my education and career experience in public health and my volunteer and personal experience. I couldn't be happier to have joined this amazing team!"

You'll see Alijah at our events – both in person and online. Please take a minute to introduce yourself.

I decided

"I decided to Take Charge and plan ahead to take the burden of decisions off my family and to ensure they knew my wishes were well thought-out."

– Joan Goldner, Seniors at Home



"I completed my advance directive when I started working in hospice and realized that my family may not fully know my wishes, or recognize that I wanted my partner (now husband) to be the one in charge if I no longer had capacity. It was a pretty humbling conversation, but made us appreciate the fragility of life."

– Anthony Lupian, Mission Hospice



"Eight years ago in March I lost my first husband. His wishes were known via his Advance Directive and conversations we had in the prior months. He was placed on comfort care in the hospital and within just a couple of days was gone."

My current husband was diagnosed with leukemia a few years ago and we have had many discussions regarding end-of-life wishes. Luckily, he is in remission and doing quite well. Over the years working with dying patients and working with families, I am a strong believer in planning ahead."

– Dolores Miller, CEO, Mission Hospice



"The reason I decided to Take Charge and plan ahead is so my husband would know what I wanted, because I want to make his life easier when my time comes. We planned our whole future together."

– Amy Yotopoulos, Avenidas



Read more stories – and add your own – at MissionHospice.org/IDecided

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Mission Hospice & Home Care serves patients and families in the San Francisco Peninsula and South Bay with personalized, compassionate end-of-life care and education. Founded in 1979, our local, independent nonprofit has supported thousands of patients and their families through illness and bereavement. Donations from the community support our exceptional care and educational programs, and help us serve people regardless of their medical coverage or ability to pay.

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INSIDE: Supporting children through grief
Take Charge! on National Healthcare Decisions Day
Grief support book club offers discussion and connections



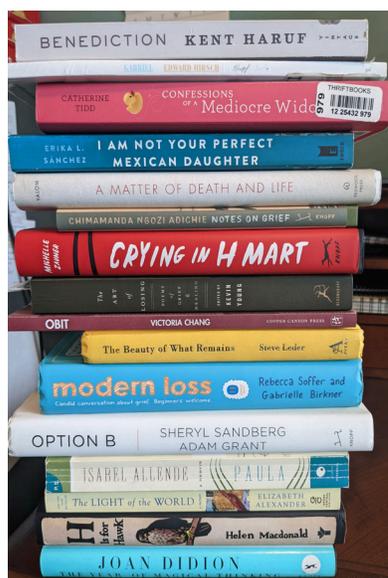
Grief support book club offers literary discussion and connections

Our Grief Book Club meets on the fourth Monday of each month to discuss how stories relate to attendees' own grief experiences. One long-time participant, Pat Madden, shares what she loves about the group.

"Facilitators Melissa White and Kate Nitze provide a space for people to come early in their grief journey as well as those like myself that still need some connection with other griever years after the loved one has died.

"We are welcome to read part or even none of the book. Flexibility is good for us griever who don't need the stress of meeting a timetable. Even if I haven't read the book, I still gain by listening to the discussion.

"Melissa and Kate make time for people to discuss their grief apart from the discussion of the book.



I recommend this book club to anyone who would like to try it. You will be welcomed by fellow griever and supportive facilitators."

The next book club meeting is Monday, April 25 at 6pm, when we'll discuss Tyler Feder's graphic novel *Dancing at the Pity Party*. For more information and to sign up, contact Christine at ckovach@MissionHospice.org.