



Peter's Place
A Center for Grieving Children and Families

The Talking Stick

Happy spring!!

Thank you for your wonderful response to the first edition of *The Talking Stick*. We heard from so many of you how helpful it was to hear about the activities that we do with the children and about how the story of the talking stick originated. As we continue to bring you information about Peter's Place, you will see that each of our staff members is contributing pieces in relation to their specialties. We hope you enjoy hearing about our Outreach Program and how our facilitators prepare for their time with each group. If you have comments or suggestions for *The Talking Stick* please send them to staff@petersplaceonline.org.

Peter's Place Reaches Out ~ Joe Kelly, Outreach Specialist

Early this February, Group Coordinator, Denise Paul, and I were preparing to provide the second of five group sessions to students at The Episcopal Academy. It had barely been a month since the sudden and devastating death of an elementary school student, and the faculty and parents were concerned about how their children were responding to the death.

I had spent time in the preceding weeks at The Episcopal Academy, speaking with teachers, followed by a group of parents. Their worries were many and tended to center on the challenging questions being asked by their children. I recalled experiencing those intense questions from the children firsthand, during the first group session in January. To this day, those three group sessions remain some of the most powerful I have experienced. It was clear that the entire school community was struggling to cope with this reality.

This thought remained very present as Denise and I prepared question-cards to distribute to the group as part of the Peter's Place "classic" M&M activity. We developed specific questions related to the difficulties and concerns that were voiced by the students, parents, and teachers alike. A couple of days later, we headed off to school...

The second group began much as the first one had, with all of the students sitting in a circle, very well-behaved. The participation in the group was astounding! They were all eager to talk about their grief and some of the more burdensome thoughts and feelings they were experiencing. The time flew by and I was left feeling that we had actually made a real and positive difference for these children. As we were getting ready to leave and the students were playing, waiting for their parents to pick them up, Nancy, a senior faculty member at The Episcopal Academy, said in a soft, heartfelt tone, "Thank you for not forgetting about us."

It is the donors, families, volunteers, and staff members at Peter's Place who make this kind of impact possible. The ability to go into a school and support the *entire* school community as they grieve the death of a student is the soul of our outreach program. The continued support of the Peter's Place

family ensures that we do not forget about those in the community who need comfort, hope, and healing.

PRE & POST-GROUP SESSIONS: A preparation for Grief Facilitators

Contributed by Melissa Robinson, Intake Coordinator & Child Group Facilitator (6-10yr age group)

Many families may wonder how Peter's Place Grief Facilitators prepare themselves for each group session. I would like to share with you a brief overview of how we ready ourselves to help the children and the caregivers that we serve. As you may already know, each Grief Facilitator has to go through a lengthy training process in order to lead and/or facilitate a group. A key element in the training is learning how to conduct Pre & Post-group sessions, which are used to help the facilitators prepare for each evening, as well as to debrief once the group ends.

Pre-group

Pre-group sessions are generally held in the Adult Group Room one half hour before each group begins. The Pre-group session opens with a relaxation/meditation activity that helps the Grief Facilitators leave behind any of the worries or frustrations of the day, as well as to help clear their minds so they are able to fully focus on the needs of the children and/or the caregivers. A second key element in the pre-group session is to check-in with each of the facilitators to see how they are feeling, both mentally and physically, and whether there is anything new that they need to share since the last group session. A third element is to go over any key factors that may have come up in the last session; at this point, the facilitators also take some time to go through the attendance and re-familiarize themselves with the families. A fourth and final element for the Grief Facilitators to focus on before the group begins is what activities/discussions may be planned for the evening. The leaders and facilitators of both the children and adult groups share the grief-focused activity or discussion they have prepared for the evening.

Post-group

Post-group sessions occur immediately following the closing of each group. Families may wonder why the facilitators whisk away to the Adult Group Room so quickly; the reason is that we spend some time debriefing on the night's activities and the experience of being in the group. We take the time to share any pressing issues that may have come up, as well as to discuss how our prepared activity turned out. We note where to begin the following session, and discuss possible activities that may go along with the topic at hand. Post-group is also the time when facilitators share with one another the personal impact of the work. After a session, a facilitator may feel moved, saddened, hopeful, or reminded of a personal loss. This must be processed in order to keep facilitators present, aware, and able to provide good support to children and families.

These are some of the ways we prepare ourselves to provide assistance and care for all of the children and caregivers who enter through the doors of Peter's Place. If you have thoughts or questions about this, please do not hesitate to share them with a member of the staff at your next group session.

Mark Your Calendars for Upcoming Events!

June 21, 2008 Inaugural Bowling Ball (A Uniquely Elegant Bowling Experience!)
December 7, 2008 Peter's Place at the Please Touch Museum

All the best from Peter's Place!!!