



Peter's Place
A Center for Grieving Children and Families

The Talking Stick

Hello Friends,

We hope everyone is keeping cool through the latest heat wave. At Peter's Place we have been busy concluding our programs for the year, and looking forward with great anticipation to our exciting fund raising activities. We hope you enjoy this edition and as always please send your comments to: staff@petersplaceonline.org. Have a nice summer!

Raising Funds for Peter's Place

As a non-profit organization, Peter's Place is totally dependent on the generosity of its donors and benefactors in order to fulfill our mission.

The Bowling Ball will be held on June 21, 2008 at the Lucky Strike Lanes in Philadelphia. This is our major fund raising event of the year and we hope you are able to support us. It will be a fun night filled with great food, drink, bowling, billiards and most of all the friends of Peter's Place. Information for the event can be found on our website at www.petersplaceonline.org.

We are also selling "***Pretzels for Peter***" in the lobby of the Radnor Financial Center. Our sales take place on the 4th Wednesday of each month. We are looking for volunteers to help with the sales. If you have time between 10 am and 2 pm on June 25th, July 23rd or August 27th and can volunteer an hour please let us know.

Save the Date – ***Family Night at The Please Touch Museum*** will be on December 7, 2008.

Closing Our Year With Ritual - Program Director Carrie Miluski, MS

How do we mark the closing of a year of comfort, hope and healing for children, caregivers, and facilitators? At Peter's Place, we know the importance of goodbyes, and the healing power of ritual. One special tradition is used to close the final session for each of our groups for the program year ***The Candle Lighting Ceremony***.

Support groups at Peter's Place meet from September through June. While many children and families return to groups for more than one year, each year the members change and it is important for children and adults to be prepared for this. Unique bonds built on trust and shared compassion form among members and so the closing of the year is often marked with moments of sadness, and even sensations of loss.

The Candle Lighting Ceremony at Peter's Place serves two very special purposes- to remember within the circle of support, the people who have died, and to say goodbye and thank you to the group itself.

For most sessions at Peter's Place, children and caregivers are in separate meeting spaces, but for this special session, we all join together. Children and teens can sit in a circle with the adults who bring them to Peter's Place. In the center of our circle, is a lighted candle _ a representation of the light of the group. In turn, each person holds a votive candle to the flame and says, "I light this candle in memory of..." Each person is offered the opportunity to share a thought about their parent, sibling, spouse, child, or other special person who has died. After each participant has lit their candle, and placed it in a holder in front of them, the group sits quietly for a few moments or may read a poem together. Many groups also share messages of gratitude to the group at this time, or express what their time at Peter's Place means to them. When everyone has had a chance to speak, we blow out the candles together. Families are invited to take their candles home with them as a keepsake of their experience.

At Peter's Place, we pay careful attention to endings, closings, and goodbyes. While these are natural parts of life, honoring their significance _ for the pain as well as the growth _ is a crucial part of healing.

Grief Work Can Be Fun - Group Coordinator Denise Paul, MA, CT

We often refer to children as "forgotten mourners" because our society often does not encourage them to mourn in ways adults do. However, the staff at Peter's Place welcomes the responsibility and the privilege to create conditions in which children, as young as three years old, can mourn. If a child is old enough to love, he or she is old enough to mourn. It is our job to listen and watch as the child teaches us what their grief journey is like. We recognize the value and need for inventive, creative, and therapeutic play as the bereaved child continues life in the absence of someone that was important to them. One of the tasks of mourning is to convert the relationship with the person who has died from one of presence to one of memory. The group facilitators create activities in which children are encouraged to remember that special person while in the presence of other children who have experienced a similar loss. An example of one of these activities is the Egg Hunt Game. The Egg Hunt Game was recently played with a group of 3 to 5 year olds, in which plastic eggs, filled with questions and a small candy treat, were hidden around the play area at Peter's Place. The children joyfully found their eggs and returned to our talking circle to see what was inside. Each egg contained a piece of paper with a question on it pertaining to their parent who had died. A few examples are:

- What did you like to do with your Mommy or Daddy?
- When do you miss your Mommy or Daddy the most?
- Who else misses your Mommy or Daddy?

The response to the question "What did your Daddy look like?" which was posed to a precious 4-year-old girl who lost her dad was simply unforgettable. Without hesitation, she looked up with the most sincere expression, and answered exuberantly, "He was tall _ and he had gray hair _ and he loved me." That is what he looked like to her. This game offered her the opportunity to remember the look of love that was on her father's face. Though her father was no longer present to her, his loving memory will stay with her forever. The Egg Hunt activity is one example of how we are able to incorporate fun with "grief work". By acknowledging the pain of the loss, we can heal, and by talking about the person who died, we can keep their memory alive.

Have a wonderful summer!

The Staff at Peter's Place