

# Connections

A Newsletter from the Family Partners Program, an Initiative of the LPCH Palliative Care Program

*The Family Partners Program at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford is a group of bereaved family members who work on a variety of initiatives designed to improve aspects of care for families facing the death of a child.*

Since our last newsletter, we've observed the season and environment changing. The long dark nights have become long sunny days, bright green leaves have emerged, flowers raise their heads from the bare earth, and temperatures are gradually rising.

We are physically in summer now, and yet our hearts remain with our child, who can never again enjoy this seasonal growth and change. And perhaps we find ourselves holding back ; unwilling or unable to move forward. Despite our feelings, nature will have its way. And so we try to honor and remember our child; keeping their memory and their essence present, for their siblings, their grandparents, their friends, and for ourselves.

In this issue, we focus on wellness. Caring for those who remain, and for ourselves. Finding balance in a world which has been forever tilted on its axis.

We wish you peace as we all continue our journey onward.

Warmly,  
The Family Partners

## SAVE THE DATE

*The Eleventh Annual  
Day of Remembrance and Rededication  
Sunday, October 9, 2016  
1:00-4:00pm  
Arrillaga Alumni Center  
Stanford University  
Invitation to be sent this summer*

Would you like to receive the *Connections* newsletter by email? If so, please send your name and email to [bereavement@stanfordchildrens.org](mailto:bereavement@stanfordchildrens.org). Thank you!

## Our Mission Statement

The Family Partners Program supports families and their communities facing the death of a child.

### Wellness in Grief

by Family Partners mom, Sandy Cowell

In the surreal, dark days of grief, it's easy to neglect our health. In the early days following my son's passing, I recall kind and dear friends and neighbors arriving at my house with food, insisting that we all "eat, keep your strength up." I also recall surreptitiously feeding the dog those same, lovingly-prepared meals and casseroles, simply because nobody in our house had any enthusiasm for food or nourishment of any kind.

Unfortunately, however, there is no end to this kind of emotion, this kind of stress, this kind of sadness. In some miraculous way, our hearts keep beating, we keep on waking up in the morning. Like it or not. And eventually, our health begins to suffer for it; the weight of our sadness and grief, combined with the neglect of our routines, begins to drag us down.

We know that, for the sake of our family, we simply must keep going. We must take care of ourselves. We need to consume good fuel, and we need to move. We need to sleep, and to learn to relax and quiet our minds.

Fortunately, our bodies are wonderful and responsive machines, and there are a few simple actions that can help.

#### What we eat

For many in grief, loss of appetite is a big problem. It's hard to dredge up any kind of enthusiasm for food. We may have a persistent dry mouth, or lump in the throat. We may not have the energy or interest in preparing anything. Our blender may be our greatest ally during this time. Liquids are often easier to get down, and they can be prepared in a nutrient-dense way, to keep the calorie, vitamin and mineral content high. Soups, protein drinks, or smoothies which may include easily-blended foods such as fresh greens, fruit and healthy fats, are good options. These may be sipped slowly, and tend to slip down more easily than drier, denser, more fibrous foods which require a lot

of chewing. It is also easy to add hard-to-swallow vitamins to a blended drink, which adds to its value.

Soups and broths may contain a wealth of health-supporting ingredients, and it's no coincidence that they've have been offered as a traditional healing food for centuries. Once made, they're easy to heat and prepare, and can last for days.

It's a good idea to try to eat unprocessed foods, simply because they provide the most nutritional value, even if we can only manage a little at a time. Fresh greens and fruits offer vitamins for energy, minerals for bones and cell repairs, antioxidants to combat the physical effects of extreme stress, and are said to have a mood-elevating effect. Simple proteins like eggs and fish are light and easily-digested, and can be prepared quickly and easily. Nuts and seeds are a good source of calories, and the healthy fats they contain support the body's nutritional needs. They're also portable and good to graze on to provide energy during the day.



In addition to fresh foods, it is important that we drink plenty of water. Hydration allows the body's systems to work efficiently, eliminating wastes that weigh us down, leaving us feeling sluggish and tired. Water may be drunk in many variations - plain and cold, flat or fizzy, hot with a slice of lemon, or perhaps

in a variety of soothing teas.

It's important to be mindful of the use of substances which may harm us or provide some kind of crutch. Alcohol, cigarettes, or too much coffee provide no health benefits and put an added strain on an already exhausted body.

### **What we do**

An important component of supporting and cherishing the body is to move. This doesn't need to be complex. A simple, short walk outside in the fresh air can work wonders, and carries the additional bonus of making us physically tired, which can help with getting a good night's sleep. Walking alone, or while listening to music, can be a peaceful, meditative experience. Walking with family members or friends creates an opportunity to be together, share and talk. A brisk walk stimulates the production of endorphins, the mood-elevating hormones. A slow walk provides the opportunity to look around and appreciate our surroundings.

Some prefer to participate in very hard, fast exercise. This can be a great stress reliever, but it's important to be mindful of overdoing it, and injuring ourselves. Yoga can be done at home alone, or with a group. It provides a wonderful link between the physical and the meditative (see details on the Yoga and Mindfulness class on page 4). It provides strength, resistance, flexibility, and relaxation, and if we participate in a class, it also offers structure and a social aspect.

### **Rest**

Any type of physical activity is going to create fatigue, and help with another important component of wellness - sleep. Sleep is often elusive for bereaved individuals. Having routines such as going to bed at the same time each evening, having a clean, clear space, and not having electronics in the bedroom, can all help.

### **Being realistic**

What we are going through is tough, and no amount of vitamins and walks will help with the fundamental issue; that is, the pain of losing our child.

Nothing can take that away. But by taking as much care of ourselves as we are able, we can at the very least provide a measure of protection, and care for



ourselves and our families and loved ones, as we continue to navigate this road.

*“There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love.”*

*- Washington Irving*





### *Yoga & Mindfulness for Bereaved Parents* *8 Week Series, starting in Fall 2016* *Tuesdays 6:00–8:00pm*

Grief is a universal human experience that profoundly affects the body, mind, and spirit. In this 8-week series, participants will practice yoga and mindfulness exercises to ease the physical and emotional symptoms of grief within the context of a supportive group.

During each session, participants will be guided through a series of yoga postures followed by relaxation practices, breathwork, and mindfulness exercises (including meditation). All levels of yoga and mindfulness experience are welcome.

If you are interested in participating or have questions about the program, please call the office at (650) 497-8175 or email us at [bereavement@stanfordchildrens.org](mailto:bereavement@stanfordchildrens.org).

***Hope is the thing with feathers —  
that perches in the soul —  
and sings the tune without the words —  
and never stops — at all.***



***— Emily Dickinson***

### **A Walking Group** for those who are grieving the loss of a child

The Walking Group is an opportunity for bereaved parents to socialize and share experiences. Please join us as we walk in lovely areas near or on the Stanford campus.

We are planning to meet for a weekly, hour long walk. If you are interested in joining us, please let us know if you prefer a weekday or weekend time. You can email [bereavement@stanfordchildrens.org](mailto:bereavement@stanfordchildrens.org) or call (650) 497-8175. The group will start when we have a minimum number of participants.







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Thank you to the wonderful staff of the National Center for Equine Facilitated Therapy!



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## Calendar of Events

<p><b>Summer 2016</b></p>	<p><b>Pathways Hospice Summer Workshops</b></p> <p>In the summer months, Pathways offers healing grief workshops to all in the community. Examples of workshops include <i>Collage Creations to Connect with Grief</i>, <i>Memorial Garden Creation</i>, <i>Moving through Grief</i>, <i>Inner Peace through Meditation</i>, and <i>Healing Touch for Self Care</i>. For current offerings, please visit <a href="http://www.pathwayshealth.otg">www.pathwayshealth.otg</a>.</p>
<p><b>October 9, 2016</b></p>	<p><b>LPCH Annual Day of Remembrance and Rededication, 1:00-4:00pm</b></p> <p>Invitations will be mailed this summer.</p>
<p><b>October 15, 2016</b></p>	<p><b>Kara 2016 Walk-N-Run to Remember, 10:00am, Mitchell Park, Palo Alto</b></p> <p>This annual event is a unique opportunity for individuals and organizations to walk or run in memory of a loved one and support grieving friends, family and community members. For more details, please visit <a href="http://www.kara-grief.org">www.kara-grief.org</a> or call (650) 321-5272.</p>
<p><b>November 2016</b></p>	<p><b>Pathways Hospice Through the Holidays</b></p> <p>As winter holidays approach, grieving families sometimes struggle; the world celebrates and they grieve. We offer a place to come for exchanging ideas of how to cope, to receive support, and to honor and remember loved ones. Details at <a href="http://www.pathwayshealth.org">www.pathwayshealth.org</a>.</p>
<p><b>December 1, 2016</b></p>	<p><b>Kara Annual Candlelight Service of Remembrance, 7:00pm, Stanford Memorial Church</b></p> <p>Each year Kara invites the community to join together to remember loved ones and significant others who have died. This is a non-denominational service open to all. For more information, please visit <a href="http://www.kara-grief.org">www.kara-grief.org</a> or call (650) 321-5272.</p>
<p><b>December 11, 2016</b></p>	<p><b>Pathways Hospice Celebration of Light, 2:00-3:00pm</b></p> <p>This memorial service brings light and warmth to the winter season in early December by remembering loved ones with music, readings and a candle-lighting ritual. Please visit <a href="http://www.pathwayshealth.org">www.pathwayshealth.org</a> for details.</p>

## Contact Us

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### Additional Hospital Support Services

Social Services: (650) 497-8303      Chaplaincy: (650) 497-8538 or (650) 723-6661, pager #27729

Child Life: (650) 497-8336      Palliative Care: (650) 497-8963 or (650) 723-6661, pager #19474

