

An interactive support group designed to help with the grieving process by using visual and thought-provoking tools. During these four sessions, the participants share their story, build memorials, compose letters, write in journals and develop goals with milestones. Designed for all types of losses, individuals and family members.



Facing the Mourning

Facilitator Manual



HeartLight
Center

Facing the Mourning®

A four-week hands-on grief support group, offering unique projects to help grievers cope with the loss of a loved one

Facilitator Manual

Developed by
HeartLight Center
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FACING THE MOURNING OVERVIEW

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Facing the Mourning is an interactive support group for all ages, types of deaths and length of grieving. The group is designed to help individuals with their personal grief journey by using visual and thought-provoking tools and examples. The facilitator will help the attendees by presenting different ideas, methods and creative projects to help individuals and grievers express their feelings. The attendees will have weekly assignments to support the concepts introduced in each session.

The four sessions:

- **Week 1 -- Keeping Your Memories Alive** -- Learn how to honor your loved one by building memorials. The group will discuss memorial ideas, share memorials that have already been created and develop new ideas through group interaction.
- **Week 2 -- Letter Writing** – Each attendee will write at least one letter to the person of their choice. It could be to your loved one, a family member to share more about the person you have lost, a religious figure, the medical staff or whomever else. We will share the letters in our group.
- **Week 3 -- Journaling Your Thoughts** -- Learn how to journal your thoughts to recognize and emphasize progress through your grief journey.
- **Week 4 -- Goal Setting with Milestones** -- Learn how to set goals with milestones to track progress, the significance of milestones is to feel progress has been made towards the goal.

PROGRAM HISTORY

HeartLight Center opened in January of 2004, offering grief support groups and educational programs for grievers and caregivers. After facilitating numerous programs, we surveyed our clients and the community for feedback and learned traditional support groups were helpful, but grievers were looking for a “different” program to help them cope with their loss.

Facing the Mourning was developed and constantly updated using feedback from the attendees and the facilitators. In 2005, the material was first published, tested and presented to numerous groups. After years of presenting, receiving feedback and collecting examples, we update the program to include new memorial examples, personal letters and other material. The true measure of success has been the transformation of the attendees from the first session through the four weeks as they walk their own journey through grief.

GROUP FRAMEWORK

The group meets for four consecutive weeks for 1.5 hours followed by time for the attendees to interact casually with each other. It is recommended that the format be a “closed group”, as adding people after the first session interrupts the bonding and momentum causing the new attendee to feel displaced. The telling of the stories the first week sets the stage for the next three weeks.

The configuration of the group can be defined by type of death or a combination of those who have lost a spouse/partner, parent, child, sibling, friend, co-worker or any other loss. Those who are experiencing an anticipated loss will find the program very helpful in capturing the life of the one who is ill. The discussions, openness of the attendees and results of the projects will inspire those who attend. Our experience has shown that groups bond well despite the variety of different kinds of losses experienced.

GROUP STRUCTURE

Who should attend?	What the attendee should expect?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An individual or family who has lost a loved one • An individual or family experiencing anticipatory death • A workgroup experiencing the loss of a co-worker • Caregivers who would like to facilitate the program or would like to learn new techniques for facilitating a grief group • A griever who has been grieving for more than 3 months or feels comfortable enough to engage with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A safe environment to share their story • Positive experience (although it will be emotionally difficult at times) • An opportunity to bond with others and build new friendships • An hour and a half of group interaction and 30 minutes of casual interaction • Portions of sessions are challenging but part of the grief journey • A feeling of accomplishment

Group size - It is recommended that the group range from 3-12 people with the ideal number being 8 -10 people. Running a smaller group allows greater individual attention but takes away from growth the attendee receives when working with other grievers.

Group dynamics - The facilitator is responsible for engaging the group to interact with one another. Bonding early makes the group feel more comfortable and relaxed together allowing the attendees to open up and share their experiences. The facilitator should encourage all attendees to participate and provide each person the same amount of time to share their thoughts. If an attendee is uncomfortable sharing, the facilitator should ask direct “easier” questions to make the attendee more comfortable.

PREPARING FOR THE SESSIONS

Location of program

When choosing a location for your 4-week session, be sure to pick a location that is easy to find providing appropriate directions and ample parking. The setting of the sessions should be inviting and comfortable. The presence of tables to place refreshments or take notes adds to the comfort but is not mandatory. If the program is being offered online, please ask participants to join 15 minutes before the start of each session to deal with any technical challenges they might experience.

Facilitator

It is recommended that the facilitator be trained in *Facing the Mourning* by observing a session or attending a training session. The facilitator must be experienced in working with grieving individuals.

The facilitator should:

- Review this book and hand-outs before each session
- Collect and distribute any additional visuals, hand-outs (memorials, letters that have been written, articles, flyers for upcoming programs, etc.)
- Be sure to help the group bond
- Be sure to listen to each individual and help those participate who are quieter by asking open-ended questions
- Share your personal story and stories from other sessions to help illustrate the importance of the grief journey
- Be sure to provide all attendees with facilitator contact information

Marketing the Program

Create a downloadable flyer or email to be used as a marketing tool and registration form for your session.

Be sure to include the following information:

- Name of Program
- Description of Program (including information about the four sessions)
- Location (address, telephone contact and directions)
- Dates and time of each session
- Registration information (name, affiliation (if applicable), address, phone number, email address, how did they hear about the program)
- Cost of the program
- Where to register and make payment (i.e., website, mailing check, etc)
- Information about your organization including website and contact information for questions

Reaching out to your community

Informing the community about the program can be accomplished with very little expense to your organization except for the printing of flyers or postage. If you are submitting information to a newsletter or calendar of events, be sure to include your contact information for additional questions. Often media calendars will truncate verbiage so be sure to include telephone number and email address.

Send information to:

- Local newspapers - Send a description of the program and the dates to the local calendar or health section, including information about your organization
- Hospices, hospitals and other healthcare organizations
- Faith communities
- Local chapters from other grief related organizations
- List of names and contacts captured by your organization
- Board member connections
- US Mail, email or social media campaign
- Community contacts
- Collaborating organizations mailing lists
- Friends and family

Registration

- Request registration commitments in advance to allow you to plan accordingly, however allow for walk-ins as not everyone will register in advance
- Request a donation so people will commit to attending the program and to cover any associated costs
- Choose the amount to charge based on the organizations needs and what the community expects

Room Layout

- Table and chairs should be set up in a manner to allow people to see one another
- Facilitator should be able to have eye contact with all individuals
- There should be an extra table for any memorial samples or ones that have been built, hand-outs or other items needing to be shared

Supplies

- Tissues
- Name tags
- Refreshments (water, coffee and tea, snacks if appropriate)
- Participant workbooks
- Pen and paper for taking notes