



THE AUSTIN CENTER FOR  
**Grief & Loss**  
*Hope > Healing > Transformation*

Newsletter

Spring 2018

Grief can be the garden of compassion. If you keep your heart open through everything, your pain can become your greatest ally in your life's search for love and wisdom. - Rumi

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## A Message from our Executive Director

Spring is in the air. I think it is the most beautiful time of the year in Central Texas. The fragrances, colors, and sounds are distinctive and, for me, comforting. Often, I know hummingbirds are in my yard before I see them because of the rapid beating of their wings and the reason for which they are named. My plant selections were made to attract these small but mighty birds along with bees and butterflies. Every year, I'll add a perennial or two in the hopes of enhancing the colors, smells and habitat. It has truly been a meticulous process, well thought out, but one that I so enjoy and am with which I'm so comfortable with that spring weekends working in the garden are part of my association with this season.

Many of the people that we serve at Austin Grief have fond and loving associations and connections which they continue to treasure though their loved ones are no longer with them. However, the pain of loss is so profound that the help of a peer led support group or individual counseling is essential to their hope, healing and transformation back to a full life. With careful planning, our counselors, staff and volunteers give to the interventions, programs, and groups that are offered at The Austin Center for Grief & Loss we, too, are always working on enhancements. Austin Grief has been in its lovely home for 18 months which gave us the opportunity to thoughtfully consider changes that we wanted to better serve our clients and enrich the work we do. With the generous support of our donors, we were able to undertake and complete a remodel of our children's area, provide a dedicated office space for our therapists and add an additional therapy/group room. I invite everyone to come by and visit us as our healing place is budding. Thank you for your continued support of our mission and the important services we provide the greater Austin community.

With gratitude,  
Mary Q. Dickerson

# EXPANDING SERVICES

## **Now Accepting Insurance**

Austin Grief is now accepting BCBS, Medicaid and Medicare. TRICARE will be accepted beginning summer 2018.

## **Offering Spanish Therapy Services**

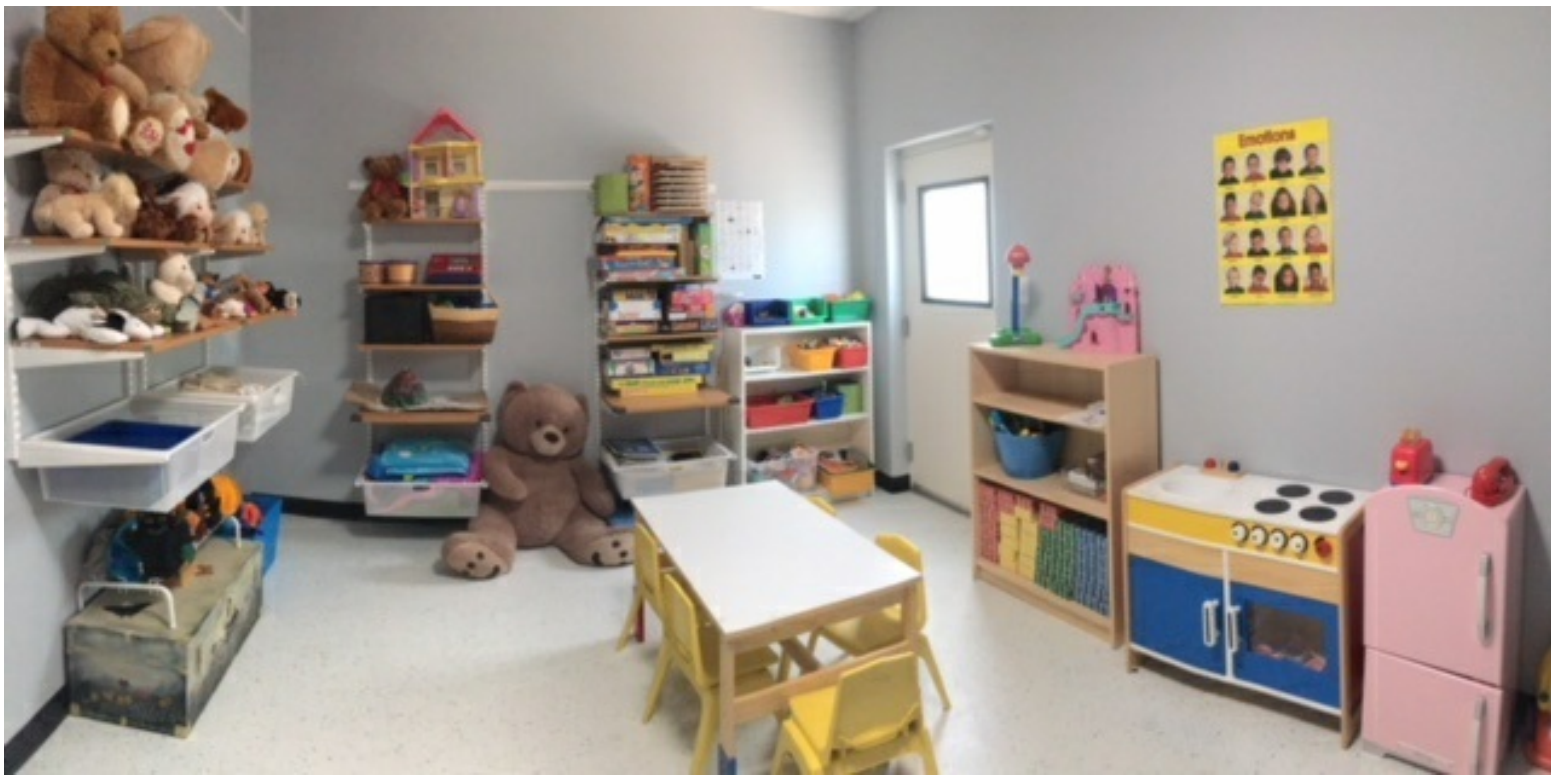
Austin Grief is now offering Spanish services, including individual and family therapy. We are also developing an interest list for a Spanish language family centered support group.

## **Welcome Monica Egnar, MS, NCC, LPC-Intern, Bilingual Therapist**

Monica Egnar earned her Masters in Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling, and she is currently in her second year of a PhD program in Psychology. She joined The Austin Center for Grief & Loss in April 2018 as the first bilingual therapist. Monica was born and raised in Reynosa Mexico and moved to San Antonio in 2010. Monica understands the cultural needs of the Latino population and is excited to serve. She has worked in a variety of settings and has experienced meaningful losses in her own life. This has informed her understanding of the pain which one feels from losing a loved one. We are thrilled to welcome her in this new role.

## **Expanded Children's Area & Programming**

Children's programming is expanding at Austin Grief! We are pleased to announce therapist, Rachel Saffer, LCSW is now the full time Children's Program Manager. Austin Grief, in partnership with Communities in Schools, provides 5 school-based support groups. This will increase to 8 schools in Fall, 2018. Additional programs for children include art workshops and yoga. With the success of our inaugural children's grief day camp, we are offering two sessions of Camp Red Bird this summer, June 11th - 15th and August 6th - 10th. In addition to expanding programs, the playroom has been doubled in size providing a comforting kid-friendly space for children's therapy and support groups.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **Mindful Photography**

Led by: Julie Bowman and Becca Van Tassel, LCSW-S

When we lose a loved one, our world shifts. Mindful Photography, as a creative expression or a spiritual practice, can help us accept this new way of being. This series is appropriate for those who have experienced a significant loss in recent years. This is not a technical class, and no experience is needed. Saturdays 4/14, 4/21, 4/28, 5/5, 5/12 from 10:00 am - 12:00 pm.

### **Grieving Across Cultures Brown Bag Lunch & Learn**

Led by: Rachel Saffer, LMSW, Nawal Traish, and Hannah Koster

In this training, participants will learn the importance of cultural competency in bereavement work and will be provided with best practices for serving the needs of diverse clients experiencing grief and loss. The presentation will take a deeper dive into specific cultural and religious communities' views on death, grief, and

mourning. Local representatives from some of these communities will share their perspectives on a speaker panel, allowing time for questions. April 27, 2018, 12:00 - 1:30 p.m.

## **Finding Your Way Back to Hope Bereaved Parents Workshop: Loss of a Child to Suicide**

Led by: Brittany Neece, LPC-S, LMFT-S

This experiential workshop is designed for parents/care takers who have lost a child to suicide. During this workshop, we will explore how grieving a child to this type of loss can lead to complicated grief reactions, the struggle to make meaning in the world again, and difficulty recreating identity within the individual and the family system. We will utilize in-person exercises to recognize tasks that need to take place in order to adapt, recognize ways we are hindering vs helping ourselves in this process, and focus on ways to help restore hope and meaning for the future. Group members will be invited to share during the experiential exercises but will not be required to do so. Saturday, May 12, 2018, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

## **Healing Hearts Writing Group**

Led by: Kristy Peloquin, MA and Becca Van Tassel, LCSW-S

Within this six week series writing will be used to explore themes of grief, loss, and transformation. Each session will begin with a short, guided meditation. Group members will have an opportunity to share the emotions and transformation that the grief experience elicits through writing exercises followed by processing. Wednesdays, 5/23, 5/30, 6/6, 6/13, 6/20, 6/27, 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

## **The Process of Grief: A Matter of the Heart**

Led by: Paula Loring, LCSW

This continuing education presentation will review the process of grief and how it manifests in support groups. It will allow participants to develop skills in being present to grief work in support groups and learn simple activities to facilitate expression and healing grief. Thursday May 17, 2018. 6:00 - 9:00 p.m.

## **Your Life Your Legacy**

Led by: Laurie Fryer, Licensed Pre-Need Advisor and Veteran's Burial Benefits Specialist with Dignity Memorial

Many people have done everything they can to protect their family's future: invested wisely, opened savings accounts, and acquired insurance on their life and home, but hey haven't take care of their own funeral arrangements. This leaves the most difficult task to

loved ones to figure out at a time of sadness and loss. That is why it is important to give serious thought to your personal wishes and to plan the services you want in advance. It is your life and your legacy. This lunch and learn opportunity, generously sponsored by Dignity Memorial, provides a step by step workbook and method to help you determine your wishes. Friday May 18th, 11:30 to 1:00 pm., lunch provided.

## **Remember and Reflect Gathering and Celebration of Life**

Through music, poetry, ritual and contemplation, Remember and Reflect is a special gathering to honor our loved ones who will forever live in our hearts. In partnership with Swan Songs, music will be a part of this special program allowing a time to come together in community. Please submit a picture of your loved one to [jowens@austingrief.org](mailto:jowens@austingrief.org) or bring a hard copy to provide to your support group facilitator before May 1<sup>st</sup>. Generously sponsored by Weed-Corley-Fish Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. Sunday June 3rd, 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m., followed by a reception with light refreshments. Location: Trinity Methodist Church of Austin, 4001 Speedway, Austin, TX 78751.

## **Camp Red Bird**

Austin Grief will be hosting two summer day camps for children ages 6-12 that have experienced the death of a loved one. Children can expect a week filled with fun, therapeutic games and activities, arts and crafts. Two sessions, June 11th - 15th and August 6th - 10th. To inquire about referrals, please contact Rachel Saffer at [rsaffer@austingrief.org](mailto:rsaffer@austingrief.org). For more information and to register please visit our website, [www.austingrief.org/campredbird](http://www.austingrief.org/campredbird).

**For more information on all our upcoming programs and to register for events, please click the link below.**

[Austin Grief Events](#)

## **COMMUNITY IMPACT**

### **Amplify Austin Celebration**

Amplify Austin 2018 was a whirlwind and a great success in so many ways! We made new connections and partnerships and we raised over **\$24,000 in 24 hours!**



## Asterra Properties Happy Hour

Thank you Asterra Properties for hosting, for the second year, a Happy Hour benefiting Austin Grief! Annahita Varahrami, Austin Grief Board Chair, shared our mission to an energetic crowd.



## Social Solutions

Thank you to Social Solutions for coming out to volunteer at the Center to help set up the new playroom! We were delighted with this positive group of people!

## Service Learning Fair at UT

The Austin Center for Grief & Loss attended the University of Texas Service Learning Fair in January. Pendo Mugofwa, student intern from St. Michael's, attended along side Clinical Director, Becca Van Tassel, to share volunteer opportunities with UT students.

## Fox News Good Day

Becca Van Tassel spoke with Fox News morning show Good Day Austin discussing how to talk with our children about school violence in the wake of the multiple school shootings. Brittany Neece was also featured to discussed coping with anxiety during the bombings that shook the Austin community and tragically took innocent lives.

## Youth Suicide Prevention

As a member of the Suicide Prevention Coalition, Austin Grief has worked with various Austin area schools to help educate teachers,

students, and staff on ways to recognize warning signs for suicidal behavior. We at Austin Grief believe it is important to collaborate with community leaders to address the mental health crisis in Austin. Sadly we have been a resource, too many times, after students have acted on self-harm plans.

## YOUR AUSTIN GRIEF COMMUNITY

### A Message from our Clinical Director

My first spring in Texas was a memorable experience. In December 2010, I packed up my car and made the 28-hour drive from Michigan. I made the difficult decision to move to Austin after my dream job in England fell through. I was devastated, recently graduated, yet hopelessly lost, and desperate for a change and new start. I was relieved that there was no snow for the first time in my life in those early months of the year. Seeing the bluebonnets blooming and families out in the fields getting pictures signified promise and connection. I felt hopeful to start my new life in such a welcoming and beautiful city. More importantly, I was ready to heal.

Spring time at The Austin Center for Grief & Loss has provided insight that new beginnings can be painful reminders of our losses. Grief does not suddenly go away just because seasons change. It is my hope that The Austin Center for Grief & Loss can continue to provide thoughtful programming for our clients to provide support through all grief and loss experiences. We are thrilled to be launching our first Mindful Photography class led by me and Julie Bowman. In May, Kristy Peloquin will be offering her Healing Hearts writing group. Brittany Neece will also be offering an experiential workshop in May, Finding Your Way Back to Hope -- Bereaved Parents Workshop: Loss of Child to Suicide.

I also want to take this opportunity to make some exciting announcements regarding staffing changes at the Center. Rachel Saffer recently obtained her LCSW and has accepted the position of Program Manager for Children's Services. It is our hope that with dedicated staff and our new play room, we can greatly enhance the therapeutic experience for our children. Monica Egner has recently joined our team to provide intakes, individual therapy, family therapy, and family support groups for our Spanish speaking clients. Finally, I want to thank our MSW student interns, Nawal and Hannah. These two remarkable women have been valuable assets to our team, and I am so grateful for their hard work and dedication. They will be presenting a Brown Bag Lunch and Learn at noon on April 27th Grieving Across Cultures: Best Practices for Grief Work with Diverse Populations. This presentation will feature a panel discussion with community leaders to explore grief from a culturally competent perspective.

All of us at The Austin Center for Grief & Loss hope that our rich

programming, individual counseling services and peer led support groups continue to provide the Austin Community with hope, healing and transformation.

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"We all benefit from healing the scars we get from things that are beyond our control. Each of us cope uniquely, but none of us have to go through it alone."

Please take a moment to read the full piece from Jessica Galfas, 'What I Found When I Lost My Almost-Fiancée'.

[P.S. I Love You](#)

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## **Our Community is your Community: Client Testimonials**

Take a look at our [website](#) for first hand reports of Austin Grief's client relationships with you... our community. If you would like your testimonial to be considered, please contact us.

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## **Volunteer Opportunities**

Austin Grief has a compassionate volunteer community. If you would like to be a part of transforming lives after loss, please consider joining our volunteer community. There are numerous ways you can support hope, healing and transformation, including child care during our evening support groups, event coordination, fundraising, special projects and group facilitation. Please contact Katie Tarvin at [ktarvin@austingrief.org](mailto:ktarvin@austingrief.org) for more information.

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## **How can you support your Austin Grief Community?**

**Referrals**, individuals can schedule an intake appointment by phone at: 512.472.7878 or [online](#) anytime. For consultations or trainings in the community please call 512.472.7878.

**Shop** and give at the same time! When you shop using Amazon Smile, Freytag's Austin Community Bloom's program and even using your Randall's card!

**Spread the word** and let your community know why you support The



Austin Center for Grief & Loss.

**Donate**, without your support, we could not continue to change lives providing hope, healing and transformation. To make a donation visit our [website](#) or click the link below.

[DONATE TODAY](#)

[www.AustinGrief.org](http://www.AustinGrief.org)

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