



# THE AUSTIN CENTER FOR Grief & Loss

*Hope › Healing › Transformation*

Newsletter

Fall 2023

## **A Message from Clinical Director/ Interim Executive Director Dr. Pamela A. Malone, LCSW-S, Fellow in Thanatology**

As we enjoy cooler weather and the fall season, we extend a heartfelt thank you to our supporters, volunteers, clients, staff, therapists, and board members all of whom allow us to offer much-needed services for grief and loss to people of all ages. It takes the support from all to continue the amazing work that Austin Grief provides. The fall season reminds us of upcoming events and holidays that involve the gathering of friends and family.



Grief reminds us of the brother who was missing during the fasting of Yom Kippur in September, the sister with whom we can no longer share the detailed and intricate Halloween costume planning, the uncle with whom we celebrated Veteran's Day and honored his time in the U.S. Army, the husband who loved to make his mother's stuffing and who gave heartfelt and humorous toasts to each family member at Thanksgiving, the mother who lit the first candle during Hanukkah with a smile on

her face, the daughter who handed out the Christmas gifts to each family member before opening her own, and the son who always made sure to call his parents at midnight on New Year's Eve. Holidays and celebrations remind us of our grief and loss and emphasize who is not here and the ever-present hole in our hearts. Yet this time of year also provides an opportunity to continue the bonds with our deceased loved ones. Continuing bonds is an active constructive process where we establish symbolic connections through our memories and imagination. This allows us to maintain an adaptive sense of connection to which we can turn as a comforting presence when sad, under stress, and missing our people. Each time a loved one's name is mentioned that person stays alive in our hearts. At every holiday ritual when we honor and include memories of our deceased significant people, we access the bond and the associated relationship. Austin Grief's fall and winter season wish for you is that as you anticipate sadness and grief during this time, that you also notice joyful moments based on memories, thoughts, images, and reminders of those who are not here.

Pamela A. Malone, Ph.D., LCSW-S, Fellow in Thanatology  
Clinical Director/Interim Executive Director

## EVENTS

The Austin Center for Grief & Loss celebrated our annual Holders of Hope fundraiser and gala at Umlauf Sculpture Garden on Thursday, October 19, 2023. This special evening featured inspiring stories of lives touched by our programs and services.

We recognize the vital role of our supporters and donors, 'Because of You' we are able to provide healing services to those who have experienced grief and loss. Thank you to our presenting sponsor, Texas Oncology, and to our many sponsors and in-kind donors! Please visit the link for a full list of our sponsors.

This annual mission-driven event secures the funding needed to provide services to children and adults including therapy, support groups, bereavement summer camp, and school-based groups in Title 1 schools.

[Thank You Holders of Hope Sponsors!](#)

## COMMUNITY IMPACT



## Community Connections

The Austin Center for Grief & Loss is often called to offer immediate and crisis-based grief support to various community sites as well as to provide psycho-education about grief and loss.

- In August, Rachel Saffer, LCSW-S, the Director of Children's Services gave a presentation to APD Victims Services interns
- In August, Joey Fechtel, LPC-Associate represented Austin Grief at Manor ISD's school fair where he gave information about grief and loss to approximately 100 families
- In September/October, Alicia Gostylo, LPC-Associate provided a 6-week psycho-education group to congregants at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church
- In September, Laura Babineau, LPC, provided a webinar for the



Breast Cancer Resource Center for their “Ask the Experts! Let’s Talk about Breast Cancer” program on “Finding Meaning and Living with Metastatic Disease”

**Professional Trainings**

The staff at The Austin Center for Grief & Loss represents Austin Grief by presenting locally, nationally, and even internationally on grief and loss.

- In September, Dr. Pamela Malone, LCSW-S, fellow in Thanatology, Clinical Director/Interim Executive Director presented virtually on “Supporting Adolescents through Loss, Grief, and Trauma” as a 6-hour training over two evenings to clinicians at Singapore’s Viriya Community Services.
- In October, Dr. Pamela Malone, LCSW-S, Fellow in Thanatology, Clinical Director/Interim Executive Director presented at the NASW (National Association of Social Workers) conference on “The Ethics of Trauma-Informed Supervision”

**YOUR AUSTIN GRIEF COMMUNITY**



# Grief and Loss Support Groups

Our peer support groups provide a safe space to connect with others who have experienced a similar loss. Our groups provide the opportunity to share personal experiences, learn new ways of coping, and increase feelings of hope. The following groups are accepting members.

## Virtual Groups

- Elementary Children's Loss
- Bereaved Parents
- LGBTQIA Grief Support

## In-person Groups

- Adult Death Loss

Austin Grief peer support groups have two trained facilitators and are supported by a clinically licensed coordinator. Peer support groups meet online two times per month. **To join please call 512.472.7878.**



THE AUSTIN CENTER FOR

## Grief&Loss

*Hope > Healing > Transformation*

512-472-7878

[info@austingrief.org](mailto:info@austingrief.org)

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

The Austin Center for Grief & Loss offers 19 support groups, both virtually and in person. Each group is facilitated by two trained volunteers and supervised by a licensed clinician. Groups are kept small to foster emotional safety and offer time to attend appropriately to each group member. If someone you know needs support, please call.

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## Individual Counseling Services

The Austin Center for Grief & Loss offers individual, couples, and family therapy for both adults and children. Our therapists have training specific to grief and loss in children and adults. We strive to help anyone in need of hope and healing, regardless of one's ability to pay. We offer a sliding fee structure for those in need and a care assistance subsidy.

# AUSTIN GRIEF TEAM

## Welcome Our New Team Members!



Micki Horn joins us as Events Coordinator where they plan for the Holders of Hope fundraiser as well as other in-house and community-wide psychoeducation and training events. Micki is currently a counseling graduate student at Texas State University.

Mark Killian, LPC-Associate joins us as a contract therapist and group night coordinator. He works with clients of all ages and has experience in hospice. He recently graduated from Texas State University and was a previous volunteer support group facilitator with Austin Grief.



Elaine Dunn, LCSW-S joins us as a contract therapist. She works with all clients of all ages and has experience working in community mental health. She had been a volunteer support group facilitator at ACGI in years past.

Jennifer Nguyen joins us as Administrative Assistant. She has experience in hospice administration and early childhood development for medically fragile children. She is excited to support the Austin Grief team!





## Therapist Spotlight



Today we highlight Nadia Velasquez, LCSW-S, who has been a contract therapist at Austin Grief for 4 years. When asked to describe her interest in and approach to grief therapy, here are her heartfelt words:

“A couple of weeks into starting graduate school, my grandmother, the matriarch of my paternal side died. I grieved on my own, during what could have been perceived a stressful time in my life with starting graduate school and a new job. However, I found it to be an incredibly supportive environment to experience loss. I felt compelled to take courses in grief and loss and found the readings and coursework where I was encouraged to write about my personal losses to be both validating and cathartic for me at the time.

What I didn't expect is how grief would impact me over time. And that's the thing with grief, it's not just the loss of your loved one. It's the loss of not being able to call them to say, “I love you,” or it's the loss of a favorite meal they would cook for you. It's the loss of their scent on their clothing as time passes. This is what I really think grief therapy is about. It's about processing, grieving, and coping with the millions of ways that we lose our loved ones over and over again.

When I think about my role as a grief therapist, my hope is to create a space where others can share the thousands of ways they may grieve their loved one and space where they can say their loved one's name out loud ... And no, we (therapists) won't ever get tired of hearing about your grief."

Thank you to Nadia for all that you bring to your work as a grief therapist!

### [Meet Austin Grief Therapists](#)

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## **Volunteer Shout-Out**



Austin Center for Grief & Loss would like to highlight the contributions of volunteer Casey Branthoover! Casey has been a Volunteer Facilitator with ACGL since 2018. However, he is no stranger to grief and loss. Since losing his sister in 2007, Casey served his community through his work at Bo's Place which then



led him to Austin Grief, where he has facilitated in-person and virtual kids support groups.

When asked about his experience working with the groups and how he prepares the space for them to process their loss, this is what he had to say:

"I love working with kids in our groups and providing space for kids to connect with one another on their grief journeys. Kids are a whole different ball game than adults are, so their aspects of grief and talking about their loved ones tends to happen through play therapy, small talking spurts, or through some other avenue. I've especially loved our virtual groups with kids because it's provided opportunities to share and connect with them in new ways...

The kids ALWAYS lead in our grief groups- they choose what they want to do week to week, how much they want to open up about their loved ones, and how much they want to share. Our kids in group often have the best ideas- one of my favorite things they came up with was the idea to plan and throw a birthday party for their loved one that had passed away. That was one thing I had never considered before: the loss of celebration at birthdays. So that's what we did: we got together supplies for a birthday party, told kids to come prepared to party, and even were able to send them a mini package to have birthday hats and plan out birthdays together.

The kids are oftentimes SO MUCH more insightful than I'd ever imagined and the way they share their grief, come up with awesome new activities, and share is amazing...The added joy of being a facilitator for as long as I have been is also seeing their grief journeys change overtime. Younger kids tend to play a lot, but I've literally seen kids grow up in groups and be able to open up more, voice more about how they are feeling, and how their grief around their loved ones changed. It's truly amazing to watch them grow and form and define their own grief journeys."

Thank you to Casey for being an advocate for grieving youths!

**Support Austin Grief**



**Holder of Hope Giving Circle**, by contributing a gift of \$10, \$25, \$50, or \$100 per month, you will become a [Holder of Hope Giving Circle](#) member and will help sustain the much-needed work of providing hope, healing, and transformation.

**Sponsor** Holders of Hope. For more information visit our website, [Holders of Hope](#) or email Jessica at [jowens@austingrief.org](mailto:jowens@austingrief.org).

**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.

**Spread the word** and let your community know why you support The Austin Center for Grief & Loss.

[DONATE TODAY](#)

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

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