



Connections

A Newsletter from the Family Guidance and Bereavement Program

Dear Families,

The Family Guidance and Bereavement Program is honored to relaunch our Connections newsletter. Some of you may remember earlier editions, while others are joining us for the first time. Wherever you are in your journey, we hope you find a sense of community, understanding, and connection here.

This revived newsletter marks an opportunity to reconnect and share how our program has grown over the past few years. Through Connections, we'll highlight stories, articles, and grief resources that support and strengthen the bonds among parents walking similar paths.

This issue focuses on navigating grief during the holidays—a season that can bring both comfort and challenge for those living with the profound loss of a child. Inside, you'll find reflections, practical tips, and information about upcoming grief-support events.

As we move through this season together, we renew our commitment to you and your families. We hold you—and your beautiful children—in our hearts. We love, grieve, remember, and honor your children alongside you.

Grief is a journey that can often feel isolating or misunderstood. Please remember that our team is always here for you—our contact information is listed at the end of the newsletter, and we welcome hearing from you anytime.

Wishing you peace and gentle moments of comfort this holiday season.

Warmly,
The Family Guidance and Bereavement Program Team



Upcoming Events

Grief Support Group for Fathers

Wednesday evenings, Jan 7-28
Location: Zoom

For dads who have experienced the loss of a child of any age.

If you are interested in more information or would like to register, please [email us](#).

Pregnancy Loss Support Group

Wednesday afternoons, Feb 4-March 11
Location: Zoom

For moms who have experienced a pregnancy loss at any stage.

If you are interested in more information or would like to register, please [email us](#).

Resource Corner

2026 Summer Grief Camps for Kids

Organizations offering free grief camps for children. Registration starts soon and spaces fill up quickly.

- [Camp Kara](#)
- [Camp Erin](#)
- [Bay the Bay Camp](#)



Navigating the Holidays

Holidays remind us of family and traditions, but nothing is as it used to be after the loss of your child. There is no “right” way to grieve during the holidays, and what feels manageable one year may feel different the next. Be patient with yourself as you discover what works for you.

Remember that grief can intensify during the holidays, and difficult emotions may surface unexpectedly. This is a normal part of the grief process, not a sign that you’re moving backward. Consider letting trusted friends or family know ahead of time what kinds of support would be most helpful. Whether it’s a phone call, companionship during difficult moments, or simply respecting your need for space, people often want to help but don’t know how. If certain holiday activities feel too painful, it’s perfectly acceptable to decline invitations or skip events. Protecting your emotional well-being is not selfish—it’s necessary. Some families find comfort in doing something meaningful in their child’s memory, such as donating to a cause they cared about, volunteering together, or creating a new tradition that honors their child’s life.

These ideas may help:

- Grief can take a lot of energy, so try to balance social time with time alone to recharge.
- It is OK to change traditions. If you need to do things differently to help you through this time, that is OK.

- It is OK to laugh and have a good time. Pleasurable experiences don’t diminish the love you have for your child.
- Share memories and remind others that it is OK to talk about your child. Family and friends sometimes think that talking about your child will make you feel worse, but many parents find that sharing memories can be affirming and comforting.
- Consider creating a special holiday ritual to remember your child: For instance, light a candle or have a special memory time.
- Allow yourself to express your feelings.
- Decide what you want to do, what you can handle, and what can be avoided.

Above all, remember that healing isn’t linear, and there’s no timeline for grief. Whatever you’re feeling this holiday season is valid, and you don’t have to navigate it alone. If you or someone you love is struggling during this time, our team of clinicians is here to help. Please don’t hesitate to **[reach out to us](#)** for support or grief resources. **We are here, and we would love to hear from you.**



"The holidays feel so daunting this year. It's like there's a veil over everything and it feels wrong to celebrate."

"Be gentle with yourself. Don't be afraid to take a break."

"There are no rules for surviving holiday grief. Do what you need to do to survive."

—Quotes from Grieving Parents



Our Story

by Monica Garcia

Originally shared at Day of Remembrance, October 2025

I want to share with you a story that's very dear to my heart. This is the story of the short and beautiful life of my youngest son, Andrés.

On Sept. 16, 2020, Andrés was born with a terminal condition known as Patau syndrome. Although his time on earth was brief, he showed us the purest form of love. We witnessed the life of a great soul, who didn't need much time to leave a profound imprint in our hearts. He had a powerful mission, to transform all who knew him. Even in spirit, he continues to do so.

As parents we're naturally wired to protect our children ... to love them, to provide for them, and dream about them growing up and thriving. We imagine all kinds of milestones, from their first words and their first steps to graduating and maybe even becoming parents themselves someday.

So what do you do when your child's medical team suddenly tells you, "There's nothing else we can do"? Where on earth do you find the strength to cope with this pain and accept that your child's life is ending when it seems like it's just beginning? How do you find hope when you feel so lost and helpless?

When I think of the word hope, the first thing that comes to mind is having the ability

to find glimpses of light in our darkest, most painful moments.

I often think about the saying, "We are spiritual beings having a human experience." I believe that, when we come face-to-face with human devastation, it is the Spirit that carries us through.

For me, there was no way possible I could witness my son's body slowly shutting down through my human eyes. A parent is just not programmed to bury their child. I had to see life from a different perspective, see beyond my five senses. To find hope, I had to tap into something greater—I had to acknowledge and live every day from the belief that love never dies, that it transcends time and space. I had to hang on to the love that was within me and was surrounding me. I had to grasp onto the tiniest blessings in the midst of the most heartbreaking moments.

It's like suddenly I had been given this superpower to notice things I didn't perceive before, see a blessing in every doctor and every nurse. Gain strength from loving gestures from our family and friends, from every hug, from every call, even when I spotted a singing bird or a blooming flower in the hospital garden. From those subtle everyday gifts that we often take for granted.

I came to realize that although I couldn't prolong Andrés' life like I most desperately wanted, what I could do was to concentrate my attention on creating meaningful moments. Whenever I would get tormented by the thought, "Any day could be his last," I was able to see how this also meant that every moment with Andrés was a gift and therefore wanted to make the most out of the time we had left together.

For instance, I remember feeling enormous joy every time Andrés' tiny hand would grasp onto ours, every time we would hold him and feel his soft skin against ours. What a gift it was when my children Emma and David met their little brother, sang "Happy Birthday" to him, brought him cupcakes, and gave him the sweetest hugs. Even enjoying his tiny protests when we changed his diaper.

These love-filled moments became our source

of hope when Andrés was receiving end-of-life care; all our energy and attention were focused on prioritizing quality time with him.

However, when he passed away, we no longer had these moments to grasp onto, and finding hope became extra-challenging. This is when I started to find hope in what I like to call “love winks.” Love winks are these situations that come at the perfect time, in the perfect moment when you most need that gentle push or that loving hug to keep moving forward. It’s when you run into the perfect book, podcast, or grief group. When you realize you’re not alone in this pain.

For example, it wasn’t a coincidence that the nurse who was with us the night Andrés died had also lost her baby a couple of years earlier. She shared with my husband and me how she would commemorate her daughter every year on her birthday and how she would hang special ornaments on the Christmas tree in her honor. I remember seeing her as an inspiration and thinking, “If she has survived this pain, so will I.” I didn’t know how yet, but I knew it was possible.

Navigating grief has been one of the biggest challenges I have ever faced. It’s like an earthquake that rocks you at your core. Your heart feels like it has shattered into a million pieces, and it seems like you won’t ever be able to put it back together again.

It’s so overwhelming that it’s easy to get swallowed up in despair. Research shows that when you don’t have access to big hope, microdosing hope can be a powerful alternative. Sometimes doing the smallest next right thing is so hard, but it’s often all we’ve got.

At the very beginning for me, this meant counting my wins. Getting out of bed, taking a shower, going out for a walk with my husband. Asking for a hug when I needed one. Taking my kids to school, cooking a meal, snuggling up and watching a movie together. It also meant learning to allow myself to feel in order to heal. No more running away from uncomfortable feelings like intense sadness, anger, and fear. No more pretending like everything’s OK. There’s no such thing as skipping the pain; we need to go through it.



Having the courage to sit with and express my most difficult emotions was an incredible challenge and a transformative experience. I came to realize that tears aren’t shameful, they’re evidence of love, and when I had the freedom to release these for as long as I needed to, it was cleansing; it brought renewal to my heart.

With time, I’ve been able to remember Andrés with more love than pain. I have slowly found ways to channel my love for him, feel connected to him, and share his legacy. I often do so by supporting families who have a child facing a chronic illness and facilitating support groups for other bereaved parents. But to be honest with you, it’s when I’m able to live life as a gift, instead of a burden, that I feel especially close to my sweet little boy.

Your story is not like mine or any other, but we do share one thing in common: What brings us together is love. When love touches us, we are forever changed; it leaves a profound imprint in our hearts. Love lights our way through the darkness of pain, fear, and uncertainty. When hope is lost, love brings it back.

Our children are still with us, every step of the way. We honor them by being living proof of their love and sharing their light with the world. May they continue to guide us and encourage us to make the most of every moment, find awe and wonder in all the little things, and be an inspiration of hope to those around us.



Building Community: Reflections on the 20th Annual Day of Remembrance

by Nichole LeFebvre

Day of Remembrance, hosted by the Family Guidance and Bereavement Program on the first Sunday of every October, is an annual event for families who have lost a child at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford. The day's emotions are as varied as the people who attend: some adults by themselves, grieving quietly; parents and young children sharing happy memories of baby brother or sister; extended families of aunts, uncles, and cousins all wearing T-shirts depicting their loved one. What unites them is their grief; on this day, they can talk about and honor their beloved children with other people who understand.

While somber, Day of Remembrance helps families make something beautiful from loss: community. "It's a day we recall, we reconnect, we gather with intention and care," said the opening speaker, John Winslow-Rodriguez, a pediatric palliative care chaplain at our hospital. "It's a day we gather in love."

As always, the room was full of love, memories, and a sense of belonging. The Stanford Medicine chorus sang beautiful music, including "Remember Me," from *Coco*, and "Your Special Song," written by a bereaved parent. Spanish speakers listened to the remarks through live interpreter services. Child Life and Creative Arts specialists led legacy-making activities for the youngest guests, helping them to honor their siblings by decorating altars or painting flowerpots for planting forget-me-not seeds.

During the ceremony, Monica Garcia, who spoke in honor of her youngest son, Andrés, shared a message of gratitude: "I want to acknowledge how grateful I am that we have spaces like this, where we can gather, where we can honor our children, where we can share their love, share their stories, and connect with other families, so we know we're not alone."

Day of Remembrance is just one of our team's many therapeutic offerings. The Family Guidance and Bereavement Program provides compassionate, culturally responsive care for bereaved families through individual counseling, educational workshops, remembrance events, and support groups for children and adults, including those grieving pregnancy loss. All services are offered in English and Spanish—at no cost, thanks to the generosity of our donor community, including the Association of Auxiliaries for Children, a longtime supporter.

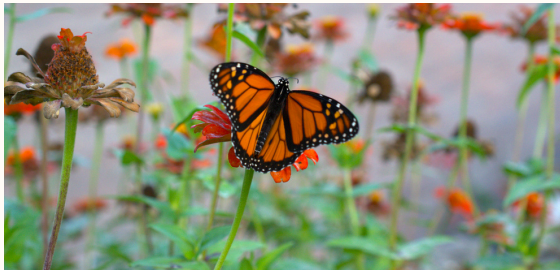
Thank you to the many donors in our community who enable compassionate, inclusive spaces for bereaved families—and to everyone grieving and remembering a loved one. As Family Guidance Manager Ana Stafford, LCSW, said to close out Day of Remembrance: "We thank you for sharing your beautiful children with us."



A Poem for the Hurting Hearts This holiday

By Liz Newman

A day that's supposed
To bring such joy
Is now so sprinkled with sorrow.
The plans we had and moments we shared,
Grief so painfully stole our tomorrow.
All these heavy milestones
Holidays with heartbroken undertones
But I'll do my best
To remember
That your love will always linger.
That the memories live in me
That the love endures for eternity.
That you're with me today,
And that no matter how I choose or
Do not choose to celebrate
Your love will always remain.
Our love will always remain
Even if holidays will never look the same
The love will always remain.



The Invisible Cord

By Amy Merrick

We are connected, my child and I,
by an invisible cord not seen by the eye.
It's not like the cord that connects us at birth,
this cord can't be seen by any on earth.
This cord does its work right from the start,
it binds us together attached to my heart.
I know that it's there though no one can see
the invisible cord from my child to me.
The strength of this cord it's hard to describe,
it can't be destroyed, it can't be denied.
It's stronger than any cord man could create,
it withstands the test, can hold any weight.
And though you are gone,
though you're not here with me,
the cord is still there but no one can see.
It pulls at my heart, I am bruised ... I am sore,
but this cord is my lifeline as never before.
I'm thankful that my heart connects us this way,
a mother and child, death can't take it away.

Donations

All of our services are funded by the philanthropic support of the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health's Association of Auxiliaries. If you would like to make a gift, [please donate here](#).

Contact Us

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*If you would like to contribute an article,
photos, or a poem to an upcoming newsletter,
please reach out to us by [email](#).*



*The Family Guidance and Bereavement team at
our program's 2025 Family Memory-Making Day*