



## ***Reaching Past Grief: A Profile of Our House***

By Emilia Hamburg

The five stages of grief, known as the Kübler-Ross Model, include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These stages take a toll. No matter how we lose someone, no matter when we lose someone, we run through these stages of grief. Grief is not the same for everyone. Some of us spend more time in one stage than another, some of us never go through all five phases. Grief is unpredictable. No one knows how long it will last. No one knows the magic thing to say or the perfect thing to do to regain their footing, not when someone you love is taken from you.

We lose people for different reasons; a bad car accident, old age, a heart attack... Some deaths we can prepare ourselves for; like when your grandpa dies at 98 years old. You are prepared for that because you can say one important thing. You can say, "they lived a long fulfilled life." When we lose someone young, it is somehow different. When you lose someone too young, when you lose your child or your friend, that phrase goes out the window. All you can say is "they died too young, they did not get to grow up, they did not get to live the life they deserved." Yet, no matter what leads to the death of our loved one we are still forced to figure out life without them. Forced to figure out how to keep living when they are gone.

As you struggle with loss there are people ready and willing to help. Ready to extend their hand and give you the support you need. These people are trained, they understand grief, they understand what it looks and feels like to miss someone. A group of these people are at the Our House Grief Support Center.

I had the pleasure of speaking to the clinical director of the child and adolescent program of Our House Grief Support Center, Lauren Schneider. Our House provides four core services with the goal to help people move through the loss of their loved one. Their first program is a grief support group, led by volunteers, for people aged four and older who have experienced the death of a close family member. Some of these groups are specifically tailored for different people and situations. For example, they have a group for teens whose goal is to help those who have lost a parent, this past September, that group was opened up to teens who have lost a sibling. They also have groups that are specifically for parents who have lost a child.

Their second program is providing professional education for therapists, medical students, and educators in the community enabling them to better serve those grieving whom they encounter in their work. Their third program is a summer camp they offer to grieving children. They offer two sessions both a weeklong at Camp Erin in Los Angeles, it is for both children and teens between the ages of 6-17. The goal is to not only support and educate these children that are grieving, but also give them a fun and normal camp experience. The counselors at camp are volunteers as well as grief specialists. The grief specialists volunteer year around helping to lead the other programs that they offer. Lastly, their fourth program is an on-site grief support service which gives them the ability to respond and provide services to places like schools and businesses when someone cherished has passed.

Our House's goal is to help the teens that they serve, supporting them while they process what happened to the person that died. They help them gain honest information and to find the words they need to express what happened and what they are now feeling. They may have them draw pictures that express the anxiety and anger felt because of their loss, helping the teens become accustomed to the new reality of being without a parent or becoming an only child. The hope is to give them the tools needed to express themselves through words while they process their loss and thereby help them honor the memories of their loved one. Lastly, they want to reduce the isolation that grieving teens experience by surrounding the grieving teen with people who are also grieving, helping them normalize everything they are feeling.

On average, Our House serves about 600 teens per year. Making them one of the bigger grief support centers in the country, primarily through their school programs. This program is special because it brings the grief specialists to the school, providing these teens the opportunity to join a group for an hour weekly, over the course of ten weeks. Typically, the teens are initially resistant to talking about their loss with the Our House grief counselors but settle in quickly once the program begins.

For teens who have watched a parent or sibling face cancer, they come into the program having been through so much already. Watching a parent or sibling go through radiation, chemotherapy, is very traumatic for a teen. When the death first happens, they often feel a sense of relief because they no longer have to watch their father, mother, sister or brother go through further treatment; despite not being ready to talk they need to find someone they believe understands what they are going through. When the teens finally do open up, they tend to talk about everything they have been through including saying goodbye, going to the funeral, and everything else they had to go through because of cancer.

In the end, kids do really well when they get good support after a traumatic experience. When a kid or a teen really opens up about what they have gone through they can move forward with their lives. However, when kids and teens stay silent after losing a loved one they tend to struggle, often turning inwards with depression and anxiety, at times turning to drugs and alcohol to ease their discomfort.

Our House is a place where children and teens can start the grieving process. It is the largest group in California dedicated to supporting people experiencing loss and is an important resource for all of us during the difficult times of life

Our House facilities can be found through their website, at [Ourhouse-grief.org](http://Ourhouse-grief.org). They are always available. Currently, all support groups for children, teens and adults are currently being offered via virtual (or Zoom) platform and that our toll-free number is: (888) 417-1444.