

VOICES

Of Hope Hospice

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Grief Support helps children with healing process

As she carefully adds the final touches of blue to the pink ceramic owl memory bank she is painting, 15-year-old Amy whispers, "Pink is my favorite color and blue is my Dad's favorite color." She says she chose an owl because her dad was wise and she could ask him all kinds of things and get answers. "I miss his wisdom," she says with a sigh. Then she writes a special message to her father and places it in the bank. She will share this message with her family at a later date. The personal symbols Amy has added to this bank will provide her with a continuing memory of her father.

Crafting "memory objects" takes place during the last session of Hope Hospice's six-week Children's Grief Support Group. It's just one of the many ways children learn to cope with the death of a parent or sibling. Support groups are available for children and teens from ages 6-17.

Preserving memories through art

"This last session is a lovely way to conclude the work they have accomplished during the previous five weeks," says Linda Henry, CT, children, teen and family grief support specialist. "Often, children say they are afraid they will forget their mother or father who has died," says Linda. "That's why we incorporate so many



Children express their feelings through art.

activities that access memories," she adds. "Although these children have experienced a profound loss, no one can take away their memories."

To help children express themselves through art, Hope Hospice in 2012 began working with Anthony Knutson, artist/founder of the Art for Life Foundation (artforlife.org). He provides the Artfelt Memory Program which includes the ceramic pieces and all of the supplies to decorate and finish the projects.

"These art projects are a personal expression of how children and parents are feeling and remembering the parent, child or sibling who has died," says Anthony. "When children and parents leave the final support group session, they have more knowledge of how to cope as a family and have a tangible reminder of this part of a personal and shared emotional journey together."

Children's Grief Support Groups address the unique needs of youngsters

The Children's Grief Support Group sessions take place over six consecutive weeks. "We like to think of it as a 'family' program because it is not only the child who is grieving," explains Linda.

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