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Bay Area Jewish Healing Center
Bureau of Jewish Education/Family Education Project
Sinai Memorial Chapel

An Introduction to Grief and Growing: A Healing Weekend for Bereaved Individuals and Families

The Grief and Growing weekend is filled with specialized workshops and activities designed to help individuals and families attend to their losses and identify tools to help them in their mourning. The program takes place within a beautiful natural setting at Camp Newman in Santa Rosa, that is both invigorating and relaxing.

While Jewish programming is integrated throughout the weekend in both formal and informal ways, both Jewish and non-Jewish participants are warmly welcomed at camp.

Staff includes clinical specialists, camp counselors, medical personnel, massage therapists, workshop leaders, and camp specialists in art and other camp activities. Even the kitchen staff is sensitized to the weekend's purpose. Most of the staff have been with us for a number of years.

Participants consistently express their gratitude for the community that surrounds them at the weekend. They return with a deeper appreciation of Jewish life and community. This is not a therapy oriented weekend, though participants do report that they experience new and abiding insights.

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When someone we love dies, our entire world is knocked off balance. One of the most common and yet difficult feelings we experience is isolation. It seems no one understands what we're going through. And many of us are so busy, we don't take the time to fully grieve and, therefore, heal from our losses.

Grief and Growing provides a special period of time and a safe and supportive environment where individuals and families can meet others who have experienced similar losses. It offers opportunities to connect with others, using play, creative projects, rituals, discussion groups, and the healing power of nature to help in the grieving and growing.

"I had not sung since my husband died suddenly almost three months earlier," said Bonnie, mother of a 5 year-old. "Singing and emotions are so closely intertwined, and I was afraid if I sang, my feelings would overflow." At the camp, Bonnie finally did sing, spontaneously, her husband's favorite song, "Summertime."

"All the events of the weekend made it possible for me to let go and really cry, really grieve, really heal. It was wonderful," Bonnie said.

"It was the most amazing thing I'd ever heard," said Rabbi Eric Weiss, a co-director at the camp. "Her voice pierced the silence and echoed through everyone's heart. That's the kind of catharsis that happens here."



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Each year's success at Grief & Growing draws on an ongoing collaboration among professionals from the sponsoring agencies (Bureau of Jewish Education/Family Education Project, Bay Area Jewish Healing Center, and Sinai Memorial Chapel), the staff (many of whom return year after year), and a committee of volunteers who represent the Jewish community. Generous support also comes from the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties and Sinai Memorial Chapel.

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Grief and Growing serves the bereaved in our midst. It uniquely supports multi-generational families. During periods when the children are engaged in their special activities, adults can feel free to mourn and to share their mourning with others, to feel nurtured and replenished. For children a most important aspect is that they meet peers who have also lost a loved one. Their experience of loss can be talked about with other kids without feeling as if s/he is "the only one." This kind of interaction lets kids know that they can continue to enjoy their childhood in healthy and happy ways.

Over the past years hundreds of people have come to Grief & Growing to share their stories and heal their pain. The annual weekend retreat typically serves between 40 and 60 participants, ranging in age from a few months to 80 years. They often arrive feeling alone, rejected and confused in their grief and leave two days later feeling embraced and nurtured by community. The intensive residential camp experience helps to dissolve the isolation that is so often a part of grieving, while allowing for exploration and providing physical, psychological, and spiritual "tools" – such as religious language, creative projects, mutual support, a sense of community, and an understanding of the grief process – to assist in mourning. The beautiful natural environment at Camp Newman provides respite from hectic lives and reaffirms that grief is simply another part of the life cycle.

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The tools which participants are offered can become special supports which they can take home in order to extend the benefits of the weekend into their daily lives. These tools may include activities engaged in during the weekend, as well as helpful reading materials, and connections to community resources for the bereaved.

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To be put on the Grief & Growing mailing list, call (415)-750-3436 or contact jewishhealing@ioaging.org. A link to web pages with camp information and registration materials can be found at: www.jewishhealingcenter.org.