National Bikkur Cholim Conference
Companioning the Bereaved

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* Jewish Board groups/agency April 2020 moved to zoom
* Currently NO groups in person
* All groups on zoom, 12 weeks duration
* Enables us to see many people over the year
* Groups segregated by type of loss
* Spousal, parent, sibling, young adult child
* Also: Living with loss groups, for those whose loss is over a year, spousal, parent, adult child
* We also provide groups for parents who lost young adults to overdose
* We are also running group for women with breast cancer; another kind of loss
* Closed group model. We don’t accept new members past the 2nd meeting
* After 12 week group, many groups move on to become peer led groups using JB zoom with some JB support
* We begin our first group meeting with group guidelines, with intention to create safe, caring, sacred, confidential space, what is said in group stays in group
* We do not engage in forced sharing
* We encourage use of I statements when speaking
* We support their courage and bravery at coming to group, in each session
* In sharing their heart and soul with us, we are honored to be their guide/facilitator
* We are present, to be companions to the bereaved
* We are present to be a witness to their pain
* We cannot fix them, heal them, make them feel better, reduce their pain, end their grief
* We can help them heal and accompany them for a portion of their grief journey that will continue long after our group ends
* We can sit with them in their pain, and be present
* We can help them explore and express their feelings of loss
* “grief responds to attention and expression”
* We encourage them to welcome their grief and make it their friend
* We provide education about grief and affirm that what someone is experiencing is normal, to help them understand they are not crazy
* We affirm that disorganization, losing things, lack of focus, lack of ability to concentrate, sleep disturbances: all signs of grief
* And that anger, guilt, regret, self-blame may all have a place in grief
* We affirm that feeling sad can be pervasive and overwhelming
* We can help the mourner seek comfort for themselves, nurture themselves, encourage them to be compassionate with themselves, be kind to themselves, be their own best friend
* We encourage the mourner to treat herself with tender loving care; find what brings her comfort and eat it, read it, do it, watch it
* We educate to help people understand that grief is forever but the pain will shift over time to be less searing and raw; that ‘grief bursts” \* are part of mourning and will happen, and are normal
* We affirm that it is ok to still speak with your dead loved one; the relationship with them never ends; it is only their life that has ended
* We help them understand that the way out of grief is through it; feel the pain, honor the pain, live the pain; crying is a sign of strength; coming for help is a sign of strength
* Subjects that are usually covered during the 12 weeks of meetings: Shiva, eating alone, experience of friends during loss, role of adult children, clothing of person who died, guilt, forgiveness, forgiving oneself, gratitude, hope, funerals, self-care, cremation, burial, headstones, unveilings, and sharing photos and stories of their loved one
* Most weeks in advance of the meeting we provide a piece of material; Torah, poetry, prayer, a Psalm, excerpts from books on grief, perhaps specific to topic or theme of discussion previous week. These can help explain what is happening with them, embody, reflect or mirror what they are feeling, and can help launch conversation. Some of us provide work sheets to help people express feelings. Some give homework.
* We may also provide additional grief resources to clients: books, on line groups

\*Alan Wolfelt: :”understanding Your Grief”