

COALITION NEWS



MINNESOTA COALITION FOR
DEATH EDUCATION AND SUPPORT

June 2023

Vol. 46 Since 1977

Dear Readers,



I finally feel confident in saying that spring is here and has left winter behind! Spring is my favorite time of the year; I love the feeling of fresh possibilities, growth, and new beginnings. Spring is one of those threshold spaces—the space between the extremes of black and white, or in this case, winter and summer, when it feels as if we are on the precipice of something hopeful and exciting.

This spring also brings to mind the growth we've felt in our MCDES Board, with our new administrative coordinator, Stephanie Becken and treasurer, Bob Furniss. They have both been fantastic additions to our hard-working board, who have brought with them unique experience, fresh eyes, innovative ideas, and energy to foster helpful change.

Thank you to all who attended our fantastic spring conference with Dr. Phyllis Kosminsky! I was captivated and engaged as we learned about the ways in which our relational and attachment style influences our grieving process and patterns. I was honored to have spent the day with her and all of you. I hope to see you again this fall on Friday, October 6th, when we will host the esteemed Dr. Mary-Frances O'Connor.

Through the changing seasons, the constant of course, has been your ongoing dedication to the patients, families, and clients you serve. As I welcome another chapter in service as one of the leaders within the MCDES organization, I cannot help but reflect on my appreciation for our members and friends. Thank you for looking to MCDES as a trusted source for education, professional development, and networking. Moreover, thank you for your steadfast engagement in the difficult and important work you do each day.

As professionals encountering death, dying, grief, and bereavement, we spend much of our time working in threshold spaces wherein patients are dying, energy is shifting, clients are grieving, and contemplation occurs. It's reassuring to know that these are the gray spaces where there are no clear answers *and* where we can often be most impactful—because the threshold spaces are right where hope and change can blossom.

These have been such challenging times in so many ways. Thank you for continuing to support MCDES, those you serve, and one another throughout it all!

All the best,
Florence Wright
MCDES Chair

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May 5, 2023 Virtual Conference

Thank you, Dr. Kosminsky!

Coalition News



Closing remarks by Chris Lewis, MCDES Board member:

The highest compliment I can give a speaker is when, throughout their presentation, I regret not having urged everyone I know to attend! Dr. Kosminsky, that's what I have been feeling today. Thank you for time so well spent! (And yes, to answer your hopeful musing a few minutes ago, you definitely ARE an "interesting person"!)

It so happens that on this night, May 5th this year, our world will see a full moon, called the Flower Moon, named for the abundance of spring flowers in the Northern Hemisphere each May. This full moon will rise about 7 pm Eastern Time tonight, Dr. Kosminsky's time, and will set just after sunrise tomorrow morning. It will be visible all night unless obscured by clouds. That seems like a metaphor for this day we spent together.

All day, Dr. Kosminsky's shared insights have felt like bright moonlight in the darkness. For example, her weaving of what is known about attachment with what is known about loss, made me suddenly realize that Attachment-Informed care is as important as Trauma-Informed care. I appreciate her giving us fifteen pages of practical, useful, here-and-now strategies, and the accompanying assurance that yes, we are able to do this work, especially in our listening. And her multiple verbal invitations to email her with our additional questions seemed so genuine that I feel safe to do that!

We, in our work, might be sad or frustrated that we can't do time travel and go back to the childhoods of people we serve. We can't change attachment factors for them. For ourselves, that is the darkness, the night. We feel our way, we bump into things, we feel vulnerable. BUT...when the moon is full and bright, it's easier to move through the dark without tripping and falling. In fact, the night becomes beautiful. Your presentation, Dr. Kosminsky, has been like the Full Flower Moon happening tonight. It's also true that with the tools you shared, WE can be the full moon for others.

Next time my fellow attendees can see the moon, let's think of today's learning.

Thank you:

Dr. Kosminsky

Conference Attendees

MCDES Members

Conference Guests

MCDES Board



Guest Article: Lisa Gray

Lisa Gray is a writer and teacher from Winona, Minnesota. In January of 2022, Lisa had surgery to remove precancerous cells from her right breast. In March, her father was diagnosed with non-Hodgkins lymphoma. Her mother suffered a massive heart attack on May 10. Her oldest brother died two days after her mother's heart attack on the same day a storm blew through her family's farm taking the power and several outbuildings. Her father completed chemo in August, but it was not successful and he died on November 14th of 2022.

It was a difficult year.

Reflections on 2022

1. Time is precious, each moment. The trick is staying awake to being alive.
2. It's ok to cry whenever you want to. People are surprisingly warm and gracious. Case in point: the first time I've encountered someone since (waves hands) I tend to cry. 100% of people are kind, open their arms or just stay with me. This gives me faith in humankind.
3. Everyone, and I do mean everyone, is walking around with little and big hurts, tiny terrors and large gaping wounds. Knowing this makes it somehow a bit more tolerable in dealing with my own.
4. Pets, in all of their joy and innocence and total embodiment of a moment, offer me nonstop love, inspiration, and comfort.
5. Grief is singular and personal and there is no one way to do it right. To talk or to not talk. I process on paper and verbally with a select few. What I write isn't all of what I feel. It's a start, the tip of the iceberg. And some may never say a word about their deep pain. In the words of a master griever, "You do you." So be it. I aim not to judge after I have judged and been judged. Ah, to be human. Isn't it messy?
6. It's ok to laugh. It's ok to worry. It's ok to feel nervous, to feel scared, to not know, to miss and long for and hope and dream and be wild with joy. It's ok to hold more than one of these at once. It's ok, it's ok, it's ok. Again, to be human is messy. If there is one message I wish we could wipe from the planet it's that what we feel is somehow wrong or we are shamed or ashamed for our feelings.
7. Being outside, taking a deep breath, listening to the leaves crunch as you walk, watching the snow fall, feeling the bitter wind slide across your face, smiling at the first buds of spring, zeroing in on a bird's call. All of this is paying attention. It is being aware of being alive. See number 1. I aim to keep noticing- I am alive.
8. Having a bit of a routine is life saving. My sweet mama, in a wildly new life, has created a bit of a routine for herself already. Despite the large holes, the gaping absence of two men who relied so much on her, she is moving through the day with purpose, sometimes invented, but always moving. I am enormously proud and in awe and humbled by the grit and grace of the one I call my mama.
9. Forgiveness and grace can be offered at any time to anyone, including myself.
10. I made no resolutions this year. My only promise is to stay awake and pay attention to what is in my heart.
11. As sure as there will always be pain and suffering, there is also joy and love and I aim to keep seeing, keep noticing because even in deep pain there is still life. And as long as I can see that, I will also find love.



Sundries & Self Care

Sundries

Approximately 1 in 450 children lost a caregiver to COVID. This article looks at best practices for grief support in schools.

<https://www.k12dive.com/news/best-practices-for-bereavement-grief-support-schools/642687/>

Surviving an earthquake can present extended mental health challenges. A psychiatrist has researched survivors.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/survivors-of-deadly-earthquakes-must-deal-with-lasting-trauma/>

Kate Bowler interviews Tom Long, a Presbyterian minister and author of *The Good Funeral*, on the history of the purpose of Christian funerals and rituals.

<https://katebowler.com/podcasts/number-our-days/>

Anna Tims, a hospice volunteer, shares what she unexpectedly gained from the experience of writing life stories for patients.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/mar/05/what-being-a-hospice-volunteer-taught-me-about-life-and-death>

Minnesota Now shares feel-good stories. This woman received a generous act from a ticket attendant after saying goodbye to her father for the last time.

<https://www.mprnews.org/episode/2023/03/16/at-her-darkest-moment-a-nurse-was-lifted-up-by-an-unexpected-ticket-attendant>

Death Cafés are places for people to gather, drink tea, eat cake, and talk about death. The objective of the organization is 'to increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives'.

<https://deathcafe.com/what/>

A father who lost his two teenage children in a car accident writes about what was and wasn't helpful in the aftermath.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/03/how-to-talk-about-grief-support/673232/>

This medical resident shares her reflections on the importance of health care providers allowing space for grieving their patients who die.

<https://www.kevinmd.com/2023/04/physicians-cry-too-6-tips-for-coping-with-death-and-grief-as-a-health-care-worker.html>

This on-line post from Psychology Today offers insights into the unique grief of caregivers.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/how-to-grow-hope/202304/6-things-caregivers-should-know-about-their-grief>

End-of-life doulas share what drew them to their jobs, how they mentor family members of the dying, and how they maneuver personal and professional life.

<https://www.huffpost.com/entry/end-of-life-doulas-1-642c6405e4b00c9517549091>

Coalition News

Summer Self Care Andrea Tatley

I have rested for 18 months. Or more accurately, I have been learning to rest. I thought I knew how to do that. After all, I talk about it, teach about, try my best to include practices to care for mind, body, and soul...but this last year and a half has showed me how much more there is to learn.

Restoring, recovering, recuperating - all great words to keep in mind as we practice taking care of self. However, regardless of the number of practices we have (or we think about having), we are tired. And we have been tired for a long time. We've been tired for so long that it may even have started to feel normal.

Curious as to how the dictionary would define the prefix "re," I dove into my search engine, and this is what I found. The prefix "re" (as in restore, recover, recuperate) can be used to mean "again and again", to indicate repetition. Or, other times, it can mean "back" or "backward" to indicate withdrawal or backward motion. This bit of information gave me hope and a new way to wonder about all those wonderful "re" words and how they relate to caring deeply for self.

These meanings remind me caring for self isn't a one and done. It isn't something we begin as a habit. Rather, it is something we start, if lucky we keep the practice, until one day something distracts us and it is postponed for a day. Then another day until we realize it's no longer practice. The first day skipped always feels like "no big deal" but soon mind, body and spirit can feel a difference.

We easily wonder what these "restorative" practices are doing for us...until weeks or months after we stop using them. For most of us, our practices will need to begin *again and again*. We *withdraw* from them for various reasons, then one day when we realize we are hurting...we start them up again (often in company of a wee bit of self-judgment for having stopped). All these words (restore, recover, recuperate) we are accustomed to reading in self-care books are acknowledging our tendency to begin *again* because, in our humanness, we withdraw from what we know is good.

So, friends, let's ditch the self-judgment. It is **exhausting**. Instead, let's try this: embrace generosity with ourselves. If the practice you have been doing has stopped being effective, chose another. Change it up. If you got busy and stopped, acknowledge that, and put a date with yourself on the calendar. Support the person next to you. Some days you have more energy to share, and other days you may need someone to share with you. May we remember, we are all doing the best we can with what we have.



Creative Space

Coalition News

Adrift

a poem by Mark Nepo

Everything is beautiful and I am so sad.
This is how the heart makes a duet of
wonder and grief. The light spraying
through the lace of the fern is as delicate
as the fibers of memory forming their web
around the knot in my throat. The breeze
makes the birds move from branch to branch
as this ache makes me look for those I've lost
in the next room, in the next song, in the laugh
of the next stranger. In the very center, under
it all, what we have that no one can take
away and all that we've lost face each other.
It is there that I'm adrift, feeling punctured
by a holiness that exists inside everything.
I am so sad and everything is beautiful.

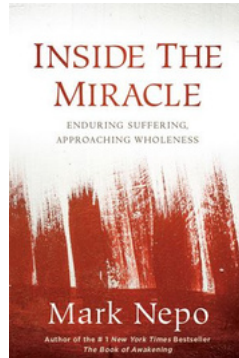
From Inside the Miracle: Enduring Suffering,
Approaching Wholeness, (2016)

A Duet of Wonder and Grief

Mark Nepo is a poet and spiritual writer. He is also a cancer survivor who weaves his philosophy of being called to love, listen, and pay attention into his 23 books.

His most recent book, Surviving Storms: Finding the Strength to Meet Adversity addressed the turbulent times we live in. The Book of Awakening, 2000, is his most widely known book and was a #1 New York Times bestseller.

His teachings are informed by life's struggles and offer nuggets of wisdom to those spiritually included. He generously gave permission for MCDES to share his poem, Adrift, with our members. We are very grateful.



Margaret's Tale

a poem by Ann Murphy O'Fallon

How did she decide that it was time
to begin unzipping her skin,
allowing it to shimmy to the floor
like an old ball gown?

With exquisite tenderness she slipped it
over her ankles and off her feet.
She held the limp shroud to her heart and
began to gather and fold.
Worn and wrinkled fingers and fore arms
are kissed and caressed and then
smoothed against breasts and knees.

Hardest of all was to contain the wildness of her hair.
It sprang from her scalp like Medusa's snakes.
Burst of curls and brilliant blue eyes
refuse to be flattened and closed.

Yet she goes on, smoothing and folding and
smiling at the great trick she has performed and
laid to rest upon the hospital bed.

The rhythm of her task is so familiar
that we miss it all together
and wonder in our emptiness
where she has gone.

Her bold vibrant spirit
now free of the last constraint
flies and flaps on the breeze,
waiting for each of us to
breathe her in.





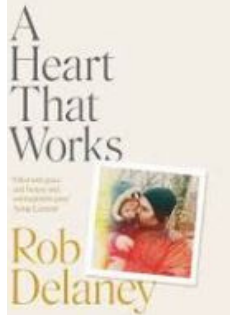
Future Reading & Listening

Coalition News

A Heart That Works

A review by Eunie Alsasker

Rob Delaney writes that parents have a belief and orientation to life that when our children are sick, we can and will help them get better. It is our job—it's what we eagerly sign up for when we become parents. When his one-year-old son, Henry, was diagnosed with a brain tumor on his brain stem, he and his wife dove into this mission while also parenting their two older sons. Despite every attempt for a different outcome, a little over a year later, Henry died.



In Delaney's grief, he found comfort in Joan Didion's memoir, *The Year of Magical Thinking*. He felt less isolated hearing from others who lost a child. He already was an author, so turning to the written word was natural. He wanted to give testimony to his son's brief life, and to let other grieving parents know that they weren't alone.

This is not an easy book to read. It is a topic most of us want to turn away from lest we imagine it happening to us or someone we love. The book is filled with raw emotion and language; "unflinching" is sometimes used to describe it. While his language may be off-putting for some, my sense is that parents who have experienced such deep loss may find his frankness a relief.

A Heart That Works is filled with love and awe for his wife, his sons, and Henry's caregivers. People who cared for, loved, and made his son laugh are high on his list. Henry received the highest quality medical treatment from compassionate providers, which led him and his wife, even in their awful situation, to see how it could have been worse. Addressing the "both/and" nature of grief, he remembers this special time both painfully and tenderly.

Choosing to use humor, not to accept Henry's death but to get through their days, came naturally for this comedy actor. He notes that humor may not be a standard emotion in difficult times, yet their situation was anything but typical. It called for creativity.

Unique and spot-on descriptions are part of the success of this book. When talking about how grief destroyed his memory, he writes, "I felt like I was being asked to find an individual lentil in a warehouse that a tornado had just blown through" (p.29). On hearing one awful health report after another, he states, "So you sit there like a decaying disused train station while freight train after freight train overloaded with pain roars through you" (p.8). You will not find platitudes or clichés here.

His book is first and foremost about love—our vulnerable, heartbreakingly indescribable love for our children and our immense gratitude for those who help us parent.

The Delaneys provided a "good death" for their son/brother. They cried for him when he was no longer physically able to. His half-smile (a side effect of his cancer treatment was the development of Bell's palsy which paralyzed half his face) melted them with joy. They loved hard and they loved well.

Delaney, R. (2022) *A Heart That Works*. Spiegel and Grau.

Podcast

End of Life University:
<https://eoluniversity.com/>

On Being with Krista Tippett
<https://onbeing.org/series/podcast/>

What's your favorite?

Favorite podcast?

Favorite book?

Favorite website?

Favorite work resource?

Favorite workout?

Share your favorites with the
Newsletter team and we'll get
the word out so others can enjoy!



Coalition News

Conference update

Life dramatically changed in March 2020. As you may recall, the Spring 2020 conference was cancelled, and the MCDES Board began to explore options on how to continue to offer high-quality educational opportunities. Our next six conferences were virtual. We missed the networking, seeing familiar faces, and the feeling you get when you are together with like-minded people, but we were so grateful that our conferences could continue.

Virtual conferences did offer some new opportunities. People from out of state and even out of the country attended. In our post-conference surveys, we found that it was a fairly even split between people who appreciated taking in a conference in the comfort of their own home and those who would prefer returning to in-person. So, after considering your voices and watching CDC recommendations, we have decided to have our fall conference in-person. Our previous Brooklyn Park venue is no longer available. After multiple "field trips" by MCDES Board Members to explore new sites, we are excited to try a new space.

On October 6th, we will gather and learn from Dr. Mary-Frances O'Connor at the Eagan Community Center. We are so very excited to see you there!

Summer Events:

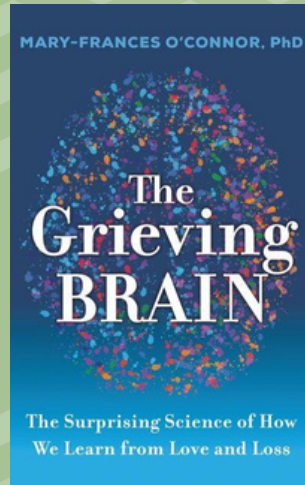
June 16, 2023

Medical Provider Forum with MNHPC <https://us02web.zoom.us/join/jMjE9YEEzOBsaerDII9fnlEhmiQ#/registration>

July 12, 2023

Community Webinar: Death and Dying as a Pathway to Generate Resilience and Cultivate Compassion with Tenzin Namdul, TMD, PhD <https://csh.umn.edu/for-community/events>

Mark your calendar



Moved to virtual--see you online in October.

We are hopefully in person Spring 2024

MCDES Fall 2023 Conference

In person, for the first time since 2020!

Mary-Frances O'Connor, PhD

October 6, 2023

Eagan Community Center

Eagan, Minnesota

Registration to open in August 2023

Many more details to come!



Resources

Jewish Grief Education/Support Group:
www.jfcsmpls.org

Pathways—A Healing Center:
www.pathwaysminneapolis.org

North Metro Grief Support Coalition:
763-354-7828

Allina Support Groups: “grief support”
www.allinahealth.org

Capitol City Grief Coalition:
Lois Knutson, 651-227-4430

Downtown Coalition for Grief Support:
www.mplsgriefsupport.com

MN Network of Hospice & Palliative Care:
<https://www.mnhpc.org/grief-support>

Children’s Grief Connection:
www.childrensgriefconnection.com

Compassionate Friends:
<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/>

Essentia Health-St. Mary’s (Duluth):
www.Essentiahealth.org/griefsupportduluth

West Suburban Coalition:
www.westsuburbangriefmn.org

The Grief Club of Minnesota:
<https://griefclubmn.org/>

Edina Coalition for Grief Support:
www.edinagrieffsupport.org

Dakota County Grief Resources:
<https://www.co.dakota.mn.us/HealthFamily/MentalHealth/Training/Documents/GriefLossSupportServices.pdf>

Youth Grief Services, Fairview:
<https://tinyurl.com/2vcfu3mp>

The Young Widowed Support Group:
mcaem@parknicollet.com

Center for Grief, Loss & Transition:
<http://griefloss.org> or 651-641-0177

South Mpls Coalition for Grief Support:
www.trustinc.org/programs/grief-support

Bloomington-Richfield Grief Coalition:
<https://brgriefcoalition.com/>

Prince of Peace Grief Support, Burnsville:
<https://popmn.org/mission/support-groups>

Weathering Life’s Losses—Adult Support Group, and Kids in Grief Support Group
Thurs., Stillwater, 651-430-4586

The Grief Project:
www.griefproject.org

Brighter Days Family Grief Center:
www.brighterdaysgriefcenter.org

Crisis Text Line: Text “MN” to 741741
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
The Trevor Project: Suicide prevention line for LGBTQ. Text “START” to 678678



Board Members

| | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
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| Eunie Alsaker, Secretary | Christine Lewis |
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