
Support Groups

"They provide a sense of community.

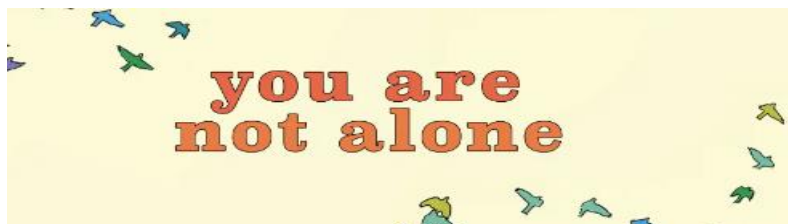
In fact, they often provide the only way for individuals to meet another person with the same challenges and perspectives.

The value of such friendships cannot be overstated.

Differences between people in education, economic status, and political persuasion all evaporate when you actually meet someone who has experienced the same shock and has the same abrupt reorienting of life's priorities.

Annual conferences of these organizations should really be called family reunions. These people are members of a family with an enduring bond, it is not just a bond of blood."

Author Unknown



Board News

The UNITE, Inc. Board of Directors would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Barbara Bond Moury for her 23 years of service and leadership to the UNITE Board of Directors. Barbara stepped away from her position as Board Chair on December 23, 2023.

Barbara also served as UNITE's Administrator for many years and was responsible for day-to-day operations and administrative tasks of UNITE, Inc. Many thanks to Barbara for her years of service as the Administrator of UNITE, Inc. and ensuring seamless services to our UNITE families.

Per Board review, the UNITE Administrator position has been converted from a paid position to a volunteer position, effective January 1, 2024. Most of the day-to-day tasks of the Administrator position have been divided among board members and volunteers. Much appreciation to the following individuals for generously giving their time to assist UNITE during this period of transition: Kevin Binns, Andrea Boyle, Theresa Fisher, Simon Hindle, Denise Paul, Matt Sklar, and Sandy Smith.

The UNITE Annual Board Meeting will be held on April 17, 2024 at 7pm via zoom. The Annual meeting includes reports from all UNITE support groups facilitators, as well as, reviewing UNITE's financial and organizational progress in the past year, including establishing goals for the future. The election and terms of Board Officers is also reviewed at this meeting. This meeting is open to all members of UNITE. If you would like to attend, please email boardchair@unitegriefsupport.org so we can forward the link to the meeting.

Volunteers are always welcome at UNITE! There are many ways to get involved. One can serve on a committee, such as, fundraising or community awareness, or help out with an annual event, such as, the Walk to Remember. If you would like to volunteer for any of these, all you need to do is email boardchair@unitegriefsupport.org

Thank you,

Cathy Plaisted
Interim Board Chair

We love
♥ OUR ♥
Volunteers

Spotlight on Matthew Sklar



Daddy, Father, Dad, Poppa, Dada are just a few names we yearn to hear when we have a child. It is more than a name, it is an identity, a role, and a responsibility we take on. But when your child dies, especially your first, all of that becomes questionable. Will you ever hear a child call you Dada? You start to doubt that you are one, as your identity is in conflict. Yes, I have a child, but she is not physically here. How can I be a father to a dead baby? What you will learn in this journey is YES, you are a dad and YES, you can find ways to father that child; you carry them with you every day and intertwine them into your everyday life.

Our first daughter, Maya Dylan, was born at 4:31am on March 1st, 2019. She was 5lbs 1oz of perfection, except she was stillborn. Shortly into our 34th week, my wife Hali started to feel decreased movement. We did not think much of it as we had just been to the doctor a couple of days before and everything was great. We assumed Maya was just getting bigger and there was less room; whoever started that myth has really done well spreading that lie. After a few more days, Hali became more concerned, and we headed to the hospital to get checked out. Within minutes, which felt like an eternity, three doctors had tried to find a heartbeat and that is when we heard the

words no parent should ever need to hear; the words we will never forget, “I’m sorry, I’m just not seeing what I want to.” 30 odd hours later, Maya was born.

We spent the next eight hours making as many memories as possible to last our lifetime. We held Maya and introduced her to both sets of her grandparents and they too held her and made their own memories. We read, “Guess How Much I Love You,” over and over and Hali sang, “You Are My Sunshine.” We took pictures of our family, and I had my Daddy Daughter dance; something I had dreamt about doing since finding out we were having a girl, and one dance was not enough, I had to do it twice. Knowing there was never going to be enough time, we did the second hardest thing that day; we gave her hugs and kisses and said goodbye.



Our grief journey was just beginning, and we quickly joined UNITE. We had to be around other parents of loss, those that sadly just get it, and we quickly realized one meeting a month was not enough, so we joined three UNITE groups in addition to our weekly private therapy. Validating our worst thoughts was comforting, and learning from others, as to how they were navigating this journey, was helpful. Feeling like you are not alone was reassuring.

As my grief became softer, I was asked by Denise Paul, Group Facilitators Director, if I would Co-Facilitate a new Dads Loss Group. Along with Simon Hindle, we embarked on building this new group. It quickly took off as more dads (unfortunately) joined. For me, this was an opportunity to do something good to honor Maya and pay it forward. I know if it were not for UNITE and the parents who helped me, especially in those beginning months, I would have been lost. Helping other dads is something I am very proud of and I am honored to have also joined the UNITE Board as the VP of Fundraising.

I grew up in Lansdale and attended the William Penn Charter School for High School. While there I was a three-sport varsity athlete in water polo, swimming, and track. Upon graduating, I moved to Washington, DC to attend the George Washington University Undergraduate Business School, majoring in Marketing. I am also a founding father of the school's chapter of Sigma Alpha Mu. During my senior year, I interned at Dynamic Advertising Solutions, a promotional products and branding company. I am currently celebrating my 19th year there as the Executive Vice President.

In my free time I love spending time with my wife, Hali, and our three-year-old rainbow baby, Mila, who is named after her big sister. We always say, "Mila Devon sent from heaven," as we know she is truly a

gift from Maya. I love spending time on the beach and traveling. Any excuse to eat good food and drink great wine works for me.

I will leave you with this. To push forward through this journey, you must do your grief work and always remember you have two hands. You will learn to hold and balance your grief and your happiness.

It is truly an honor and privilege to be part of UNITE and Maya and Mila's Daddy.



Professionally Speaking.....

Denise M. Paul MA, CT, CPLC

Grandparents Grieve Twice

I often think of grandparents as the “forgotten mourners.” Grandparents rush to the bedside to comfort their child who has suffered a miscarriage or stillbirth. The attention is always on the parents who have lost the baby - especially the mother. Parents are so consumed with their own grief that they don’t recognize the pain that the baby’s grandparents are feeling. It is important to remember that the grandparents also had hopes and dreams for this new life. They feel the pain of losing their grandchild, and they also feel the pain of witnessing their child’s grief over the death of their baby. It is especially challenging for grandparents to hold their own grief, while trying to support their children in their suffering.

Grandparents may feel the same feelings that the baby’s parents feel. Some of these feelings may be: shock, sadness, anger, disbelief, confusion, bitterness, isolation, and hopelessness. There is one other feeling that is unique only to the mother of the baby. Mothers almost always feel guilty. While there is nothing that they did to cause a miscarriage or stillbirth, mothers always blame themselves, because it was their body that failed to protect their baby. It is heartbreaking for grandparents to hear this, but it is a real feeling for the mother, and one that needs to be heard. One of the needs of mourning is to process the loss and find meaning for what happened. Gently remind the mother that she has done nothing wrong.

Grandparents also experience physical problems such as fatigue, stomach problems, increased blood pressure, headaches, and sleep disturbances.

Here are some ways that grandparents can support their children:

- Encourage your children to talk. Be ready to listen attentively without judgment. Allow them to talk about their baby and about their baby’s death. Never say, “You shouldn’t feel that way!” All of their feelings are legitimate and should be honored. The greatest gift you can give your child is to listen with a loving heart.
- Don’t try to keep them busy in an attempt to keep their minds off of their loss. Parents think about their babies every minute of every day. Parents want to feel their grief. It is the closest connection that they have to their baby.
- Say the baby’s name in ordinary conversation so that the parents know that they are not forgotten.
- Don’t force your children to attend social events. It will take some time for them to feel comfortable in public. Gatherings such as Weddings, Funerals, Birthday parties, Christenings, and Baby Showers are all places in which parents who have lost a baby feel very vulnerable. They worry about what people will say to them. They worry about having a burst of grief in front of others. They worry about seeing other pregnant women or infants. Outings can be a land mine of possible grief bursts.

- Remember the baby's birthday every year. Support your children in thinking of ways to honor the baby's date of birth. Many parents seek to find ways to keep their baby's memory alive.

Here are some suggestions:

- ~Plant a tree or flower garden with a garden stone with the baby's name on it.
 - ~Donate a gift to the Labor & Delivery Unit of the hospital where your grandchild was born.
 - ~Give the baby's mother a necklace with the baby's name or initials on it.
 - ~Purchase an angel statue for the parents.
 - ~Give the parents memorial wind chimes to remind them of their baby.
- Order a personalized candle with the baby's name. Light the candle at every family gathering to symbolize the presence of the baby in the family.
 - Display a photo of your grandchild in your home, along with your other living grandchildren's photos.
 - Attend Walks to Remember and Infant Memorial events with your children.
 - Visit the cemetery and leave a small token of your love, if your grandchild is buried. If your grandchild was cremated, purchase a small symbol of your love to be placed by the urn.
 - When telling someone how many grandchildren you have, include the baby who died. You may say, "I have 3 living grandchildren, and one who died before birth."
 - Know that your children will never be the same. As much as you try to help them return to their normal, happy selves, they will have a "new normal" which may look very different from before their baby died.

With a grandchild's death, you face one of the most painful kinds of grief. It will break your heart to see your son and daughter as "bereaved parents." Recognize that their hearts will always be broken, but in time, and with much support from you, their hearts will continue to beat. The scar will always remain, but they wouldn't want it any other way. The scar represents their precious baby.



Farewell From Barbara Bond-Moury

I would like to thank each and every person who has been involved with UNITE for the last 25 years. I have been on the UNITE Board for 23 of those 25 years. I have met so many amazing people along my journey of grief, even new best friends I honestly never wanted to have. I thank God every day for everyone who helped me navigate many years of grief as I learned to accept my loss and I was able to turn my sorrow into helping others on their journey of grief. When Mary Doherty asked me to step into her position as the UNITE Board Chair, I was honored that she hand-picked me to chair UNITE. I hoped that I would make her proud by the accomplishments that I would complete as UNITE moved forward into the electronic age. Today we have an updated website, Facebook and an Instagram page.

My personal mission as the UNITE Board Chair was that no parent or family would have to walk their journey of grief alone. I am extremely proud of all that I accomplished with the help of the UNITE board and facilitators. I am very thankful for the new board members who have come forward to volunteer for UNITE. UNITE could not exist without the volunteers.

I think about the pandemic, the brain storming sessions of, “how can we continue to support parents during this time of quarantine for those having a loss?” After many phone calls, emails, and meetings, the UNITE board decided on moving towards online meetings. UNITE was able to continue the mission of helping parents during a very difficult time of human isolation. What an amazing new UNITE support group option we were able to offer parents, an option which many seem to really enjoy. It also gave the option for people not from the local Philadelphia area to join the UNITE online groups.

I think back to the story of how UNITE started, two moms sitting at a kitchen table, both had a loss and felt the need to help each other along their journey of grief. From their peer-to-peer support for each other,

UNITE was formed to help all families who had a loss.

In 2011, UNITE celebrated 35 years of supporting parents after the loss of their infant(s). UNITE celebrated this milestone with a gathering at Ridley Creek State Park in Media, PA. We all shared stories about our children and made new friends. The event was such a success that I presented to the UNITE Board that we should have this event every year and turn it into a fundraiser for UNITE. Although this was a major undertaking, I headed up the committee and gathered volunteers to delegate responsibilities. I am proud to say that the “UNITE Walk to Remember” has become an event that UNITE families look forward to each year. The UNITE Walk to Remember is held each October to coincide with October being Pregnancy Loss Awareness month. Although I am stepping aside from my UNITE duties at this time, the “UNITE Walk to Remember” will be my legacy that reflects my commitment to UNITE for the last 25 years.

Cathy Plaisted has stepped into the UNITE Board Chair role for three months. Cathy has also been involved with UNITE for 25 years and has held numerous board positions over the last 25 years. Please welcome Cathy into the UNITE Board Chair position.



Finding Warmth in the Winter Months

Laurie Holper



For many people, the cold, dark months of winter, may lead to depression. More severe cases of the “winter blues” may be the result of Seasonal Affective Disorder. Less sunlight and shorter days may be linked to a chemical change in the brain. Adding the loss of a baby to this, may result in an even deeper sadness, as well as, possible lethargy and irritability.

There are numerous things that may be helpful during this time. As always, be kind to yourself. Be sure to eat well. Get as much rest as possible. Try to slow your pace, allowing for time to grieve. It is OK to sit with sadness to help you process what has happened. Winter may be a time for introspection. Add warmth and coziness to your space. Leave out extra throw blankets. Find ways to bring into your home as much light as possible. Open the blinds and curtains. Light a candle. Listen to some music. Meditate. Watch a funny movie while wearing comfy pajamas. Remember - laughter is the best medicine.

Partake in various indoor activities, do puzzles, read books, keep a journal, and, if desired, make a scrapbook in memory of your baby. If you enjoy cooking, try some new recipes. If desired, invite friends and /or family members to visit. Perhaps this may even be a time to contact people with whom you’ve lost touch but with whom you would be interested in renewing a relationship. Of course, choose those people who would be compassionate

and understanding.

If you are so inclined, and the weather cooperates, plan to go out of the house. Take a walk, go to a concert, museum, the movies. Visit friends. Go somewhere new or different.

Of course, if you are working, your job may be helping you get through this time. Although your work may allow you to repress some of your grief, you will still need to deal with the underlying emptiness you are experiencing. Perhaps you are able to take a short break during the workday for some “alone time.” Maybe you have some coworkers who are sympathetic and good listeners who may provide some comfort. The grieving process can be helped by structure, routine, and time. Many of the previously mentioned suggestions regarding dealing with grief during winter may be helpful in the evenings and weekends, if you are working all week.

Remember, winter will end and spring will eventually arrive. Look towards a brighter tomorrow.



*“If winter comes,
can spring be far behind?”*

Percy Bysshe Shelley - Ode to the West Wind

Congratulations and Not Condolences

Theresa Fisher

Joshua and Eric were born very early at 24 weeks gestation. Their birth was not the typical celebratory time that most births are. As you can all imagine, it was a very scary time for Jeff and me and our families. Two days after they were born, while still in the hospital, my sister's mother-in-law, Mrs. K, sent us a huge, "Congratulations on the birth of your twins," baby basket. When it came to the house and I saw it, I must admit, I was very angry. I remember thinking to myself, "This is not a happy time. Why is she sending us this basket?" I put it aside and didn't look at it again.

On the day I was released from the hospital, my cousin, Sharon, sent us a potted plant to congratulate us. It was one of those plants that had a variety of plants in the pot. Again, I had the same thoughts as I had about Mrs. K's basket. "Why is she saying congratulations?"

Eric and Joshua left us when they were just three weeks old. About two weeks after they died and were buried and when I was at the lowest point I thought I could ever be, I started journaling and putting my thoughts down on paper. I started working on a memory book for them and putting together their memory box. This was the only thing I could do for them at the time. That's when I actually looked through Mrs. K's gift basket. It was wonderful. It was twin themed. While I was sad

when looking at all the items in it, I had a sort of happy feeling at the same time. You see, this basket was given to us when my babies were alive. It was not a "death" basket. It was a "living" basket, if that makes sense. I enjoyed looking through everything and putting the little items in their memory box.

After 26 years, Sharon's plant is still with us. It started out small and as it grew, I separated it into different pots. When my rainbow babies, Jessica and Abigail, were born, I put a piece of Eric and Joshua's plant in each of their nurseries. As they grew, they referred to the plants as Eric and Joshua's plants. The plant is now in my living-room and I see it every day. I nurture that plant and take care of it. I cut it back when needed. I put it in more pots as it outgrows the ones it is in. I don't know if anyone will understand this or not, but taking care of that plant brings me comfort because it's my connection to Eric and Joshua.

While I was angry when I first received the congratulatory gift basket and plant, Mrs K and Sharon were right on the mark when they said congratulations to us. While many people offered their condolences after Eric and Joshua died, very few people offered their congratulations when they were born. I am happy I have things that make me smile when seeing them.



Baby Bowls from Mrs K's Basket



Toddler Cups from Mrs K's Basket



Eric and Joshua's Plant

New UNITE Group Chester County Hospital



UNITE recognizes that parents need to grieve following the death of their baby, through emotional support and parent-to-parent sharing on issues related to their loss.

*Meets on the 2nd Monday of each month
7:00pm – 8:30pm*

VIRTUAL via Zoom

Anyone who has experienced a miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, stillbirth, or infant death is invited to attend.

The group will be guided by Ryan Oliver. Please note that the meetings are not Group Therapy Sessions, but Peer Support Groups. If additional professional support is needed, UNITE can offer referrals.

www.unitegriefsupport.org

Please pre-register on our website or by calling the number below. A UNITE facilitator will contact you prior to your attendance.

UNITE, Inc.
1.484.758.0002

New UNITE Group Grieving Grandparents

Grandparents are often the “forgotten mourners” because parents are so consumed with their own grief that they don’t recognize the pain that the baby’s grandparents are feeling. It is important to recognize that the grandparents also had hopes and dreams for this new baby. Grandparents grieve twice. They feel the pain of losing their grandchild, and they also feel the pain of witnessing their child mourn the loss of their baby. This group will be facilitated by Nancy and Steven Sklar, grandparents to baby Maya, born still on March 1, 2019.

*Meets Virtually
2nd Tuesday of each month
7:00pm – 8:00pm*

Please pre-register on our website or by calling the number below. A UNITE facilitator will contact you prior to your attendance.

**UNITE, Inc.
1.484.758.0002**



Winter 2024 Donations

We Are So Grateful for Donations Given Throughout the Year

UNITE Donations

Cindi Callaghan -in memory of Katharine Elizabeth & Perpetua Maria

Ann Dickey – in memory of Kaia Alessia Dickey

Robin Foy - in memory of Heinrich (Henry) John Focht

Keith Focht - in memory of Heinrich (Henry) John Focht

Anthony Guilardi – in honor of UNITE

David McDivitt - in memory of Kaia Dickey

Stephanie Robinson - in memory of Heinrich (Henry) John Focht

Christopher Schieve – in memory of Reed Michael Schieve

John Schieve – in memory of Reed Michael Schieve

Nancy Sklar - in memory of Maya Dylan Sklar

Robin Sokolic - in memory of Heinrich (Henry) John Focht

Robert Svihla

Geoff Trzepacz

Eric Woolf – in memory of Scott Nolan Woolf

Merck Match – in memory of Scott Nolan Woolf

Grants

PayPal

The James K. and Denise M. Paul Family Charitable Fund, a Donor Advised Fund of Renaissance Charitable Foundation Inc.



UNITE offers a number of services to grieving parents and their caregivers including the following:

Peer to Peer Grief Support Groups

- * Literature
- * Educational Programs
- * Training Workshops
- * Group Development Assistance

Without Your Most Generous Donations, UNITE Would Not Be Able To Continue These Services

News

Mailing Address and Phone Number

Please note our new mailing address:
P.O. Box 21715, Philadelphia, PA 19346

Phone Number

Please note our new phone number:
484-758-0002

Safe Arrivals

We would love to hear about your safe arrival so we all can celebrate in your joy. So we can put it in the newsletter, please send information on your new bundle of joy to boardchair@unitegriefsupport.org.

Home Page Info

www.unitegriefsupport.org

Virtual Butterflies: The donation cost for placing one of these virtual items on the page is \$25 and will be in memory of your baby. You may donate through PayPal by clicking on the Buy Now icon. Note: On the PayPal page, where it states, "Instructions to the Merchant," type in your baby's name, etc.

Newsletter Submissions

Please send your original poetry, short stories, articles, and letters to *UNITE Notes*. The beautiful

writings that we receive from UNITE's bereaved parents are what make our newsletter so special. If you have written poems, articles, etc. that you would like to share with other parents, please send them soon. Note that the newsletter is now being uploaded to the UNITE website which allows all who are searching for comfort and support due to the loss of their child(ren) to see your written story.

Acknowledgments

If anyone has not received an acknowledgment for their donation, please contact the boardchair@unitegriefsupport.org, or call the UNITE line at 484-758-0002. Please leave your name, phone number, and the best time to return your call.

Fundraisers Wanted

We are looking for some fresh ideas in fund raising! Do you have an idea to share? We'd love to hear about it. Please contact UNITE at boardchair@unitegriefsupport.org.

Support Groups

For information about the group nearest you, please contact UNITE, Inc. at 484-758-0002 (leave a message), write to UNITE Inc. at P.O. Box 21715, Philadelphia, PA 19346, or email boardchair@unitegriefsupport.org. New members must contact the group coordinator before attending their first meeting. **All UNITE Virtual Support Groups are by Invitation only. Please call 484-758-0002 if you would like to attend a UNITE Virtual Support Group.** UNITE, Inc. does not discriminate on the basis of gender, age, marital status, religious belief, race, sexual orientation or economic status.

Pennsylvania

UNITE, Holy Redeemer

Huntingdon Valley, PA
Meets 3rd Thursday, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Facilitators:

Denise Paul
Liz Steward

UNITE, Lankenau Hospital

Wynnewood, PA
Meets 3rd Tuesday, 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM

Facilitator:

Paris Margaritis

UNITE, Paoli

Paoli Pointe Medical Center, next to hospital
Meets 2nd Monday, 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Facilitators:

Sue McAndrew
Gerri Donaher

UNITE, Pennsylvania Hospital

Philadelphia, PA
Meets 1st Tuesday, 6:30 PM - 8:00 PM

Facilitators:

Michelle Ferrant
Kelly Colby

UNITE, University of Pennsylvania Medical Center

Philadelphia, PA
Meets 3rd Tuesday, 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Facilitators:

Kelly Zapata
Vicki Kroesche

UNITE, Chester County Hospital

West Chester, PA
Meets 2nd Monday, 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM

Facilitator:

Ryan Oliver

UNITE, Riddle Memorial Hospital

Media, PA
Meets 2nd Thursday, 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Facilitators:

Regina Fazio
Sheila McCabe

New Jersey

UNITE, Penn Medicine Princeton Health

Meets 1st Wednesday, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM
Contact: Debbie Miller, RN

Facilitator:

Bernadette Flynn-Kelton BSN, RN

UNITE, Virtua at Voorhees

Barry D. Brown Health Education Center
Meets 1st and 3rd Monday 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Facilitator:

Ann Coyle, RN

Subsequent Pregnancy Group

Virtually on Zoom by invitation
Meets 1st Monday, 6:30 PM - 8:00 PM

Facilitator:

Denise Paul

Father's Group "Grieving Dads"

Virtually on Zoom by invitation
Meets 2nd Tuesday, 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Facilitators:

Simon Hindle
Matthew Sklar

Grieving Grandparents Group

Virtually on Zoom by invitation
Meets 2nd Tuesday of Each Month, 7:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Facilitators:

Nancy and Steven Sklar

UNITE Parenting After Loss Group

Virtually on Zoom by invitation
Meets 2nd Wednesday, 7:30 PM – 9:00 PM

Facilitators:

Hali Sklar
Cathy Plaisted

UNITE Notes Staff

Editor: Theresa Fisher
Co-Editor: Laurie Holper

Submissions: We welcome your original poetry and articles. Your contributions are important to UNITE's work of reaching out to bereaved parents. We reserve the right to edit and select from submissions. Please send all submissions to:

UNITE Inc.

P.O. Box 21715

Philadelphia, PA 19346

484-758-0002

or email boardchair@unitegriefsupport.org

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