

GATHERING TO REMEMBER



ABRPO

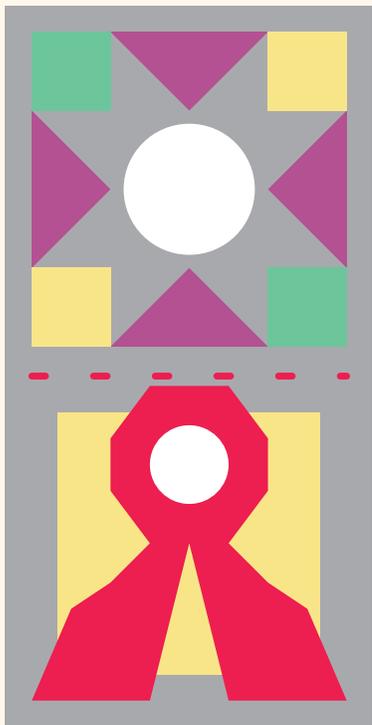
“

*When anybody
leaves, all those
we've lost leaves
again*

”

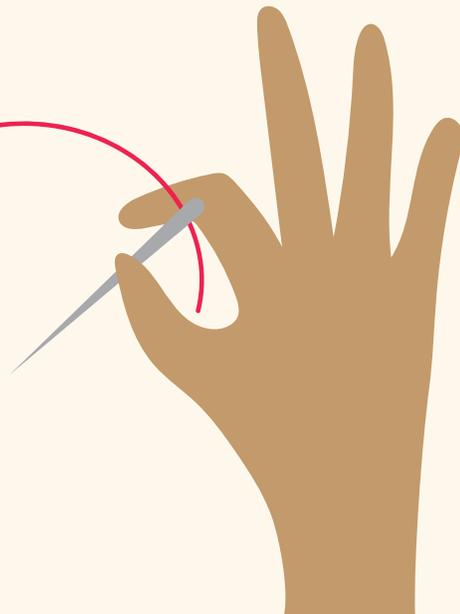
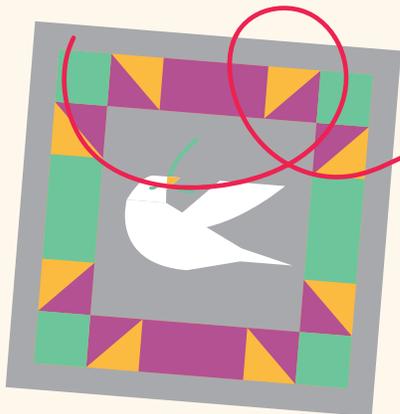
- Maya Angelou

WE NEED MEMORIALS



Grief and loss keep coming to work with increasing frequency in these extraordinary times we're living and working in. Many workers are experiencing heightened grief related to loss of community members, colleagues, family members and friends. From fatal and near fatal opioid overdose, complications from HIV-related illnesses, AIDS, covid deaths, violence, suicides, accidents, people leaving the workplace, and other losses, there is so much to grieve.

The impact of bearing witness to on-going multiple loss events, often with no opportunity to attend the funeral or other public grief healing gatherings where one gets to mourn, have left many workers struggling under the mental and emotional weight of grief and loss at work. Organizing memorials within your workplace (online or in-person) are a way to support each other while also gathering to remember. They are a way to resist the injustice of ongoing traumatic multiple loss through solidarity with our colleagues and community members.



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*Solidarity makes
the project
of sustaining
our work less
daunting and
more possible.*

”

- Vikki Reynolds

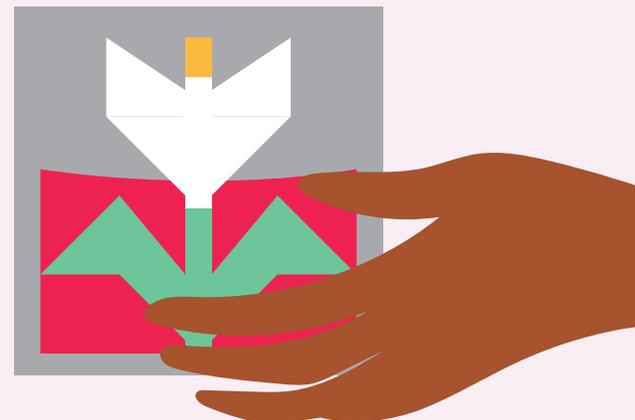
HOW MEMORIALS CAN HELP:



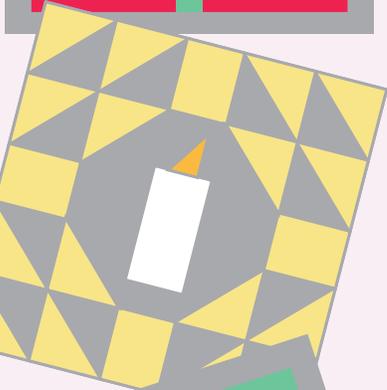
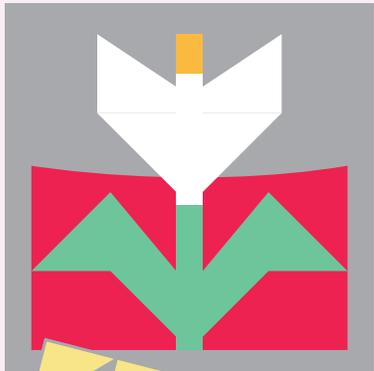
Memorials are rituals that provide a time for us to come together with a compassionate presence to acknowledge and honour those who have died or those we have lost. Memorials can be held after a specific loss, or seasonally to honour several losses that have happened in that time.

Just the simple act of stopping to remember with others who've been touched by the same loss(es) as ours, can bring a sense of comfort and solidarity in the work environment. Grief can be isolating but when we can gather together, we're never alone in our grief.

Memorials are also a way to normalize the immense and intense feelings resulting from traumatic ongoing multiple loss. It's normal to not be okay amid a crisis.



THINGS TO CONSIDER FOR A MEMORIAL GATHERING:



- * They can be held indoors, outdoors, or online, with a small or large group of people.
- * They should represent and honour the uniqueness of those being acknowledged.
- * Allow space for everyone to share the full story of their connection to the deceased.
- * If appropriate for your group, a memorial can also be a time to offer songs, light a candle, do some drumming, offer prayers, and serve food during this time of remembering and celebrating the lives that have touched us.
- * Invite community members to be involved in the planning of the memorial, to participate, and help guide the flow of the event.
- * While there really is no set time limit for these gathering, 60-90 minutes is typical.
- Longer memorials will allow for time at the beginning for people to gather and connect with each other, followed by time for the actual memorial program and time after the closing for people to connect with each other, and possibly share a meal/snacks (grief work is hungry work!).

“

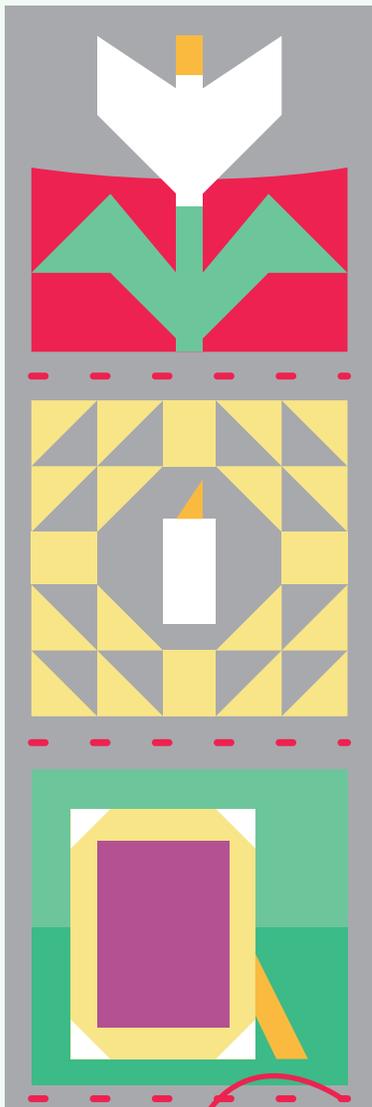
When words are
inadequate, have
a ritual.

”

- Author Unknown

THE MEMORIAL

Can include but is certainly not limited to the following:



SETTING UP THE SPACE

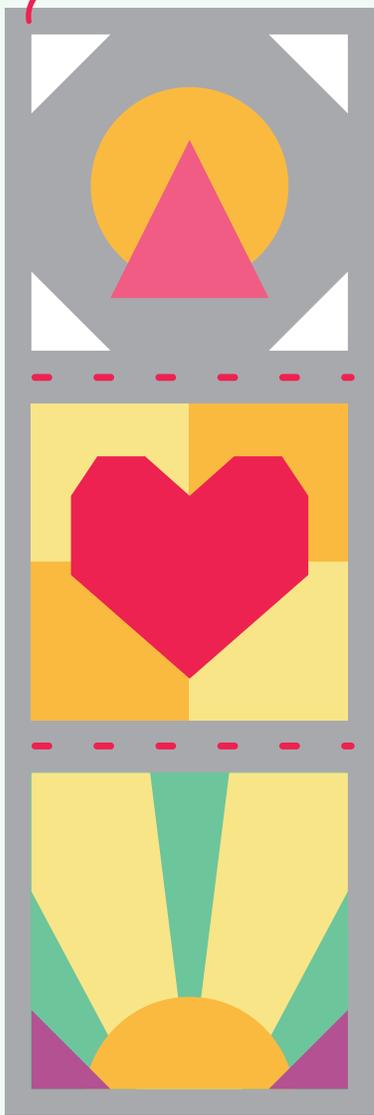
- * Create the center (table with candles, pictures, names, plant, sacred items, and any other items deemed appropriate for the space you are creating).
- * Place chairs in a circle (if that works for your group/space) or space to stand in a circle. Circles allow everyone to see each other and connect more fully.

THE GATHERING

- * Consider starting the gathering with some music and time to connect with each other.
- * You can have a memorial activity (writing/ painting names and leaving messages on fabric, paper, board, etc.) to engage folks to ground their energy or create something lasting to keep from the memorial. This can be done with an online memorial as well, if people have craft supplies at home.

THE OPENING CIRCLE

- * Welcome people to the space and acknowledge the land you are on.
- * Give an opening message about the intention for the time. This may also include lighting a candle, and playing or singing an opening song. This can also include spiritual practices such as smudging, drumming, prayer, calling in the ancestors (if appropriate for your group) for the space you are creating.



- For example, you could say, *“We’ve come together in this space to take some time to acknowledge the deaths we have experienced and grieve together. There will be opportunities for people to share feelings, thoughts, poems or songs. We also have a memorial cloth on a table for people to write the names of those they are grieving.”*

THE SHARING CIRCLE

- * The sharing circle can simply be formed by inviting those present to share anything they would like to say about their feelings about the loss or their connection to those being honoured. People can also read poems or share songs.
- * If the memorial is online, you can encourage participants to both unmute and share, and/or use the chat to post their memories or names of loved ones and community members.
- * Or you might choose to have a guided discussion using the following prompts. As Vikki Reynolds, Activist/Therapist, says, speaking to these questions helps to keep us humble.
 - * *Tell the story about the person(s) we are remembering.*
 - * *What difference did I make in their life?*
 - * *What difference did they make in my life?*
 - * *How are you going to resist the disappearance of those we’re remembering?*
- * After everyone has shared, think about bringing in some grounding, breathing, music, movement, etc. at this point before transitioning to closing the circle.

CLOSING THE CIRCLE

- * The person(s) facilitating the memorial can close by reading a poem, or people in the circle can be invited to briefly offer their closing reflections as a check-out.
- * The group can take turns reading The Mourner’s Bill of Rights (included at the end).
- * Or simply close with a moment of silence.



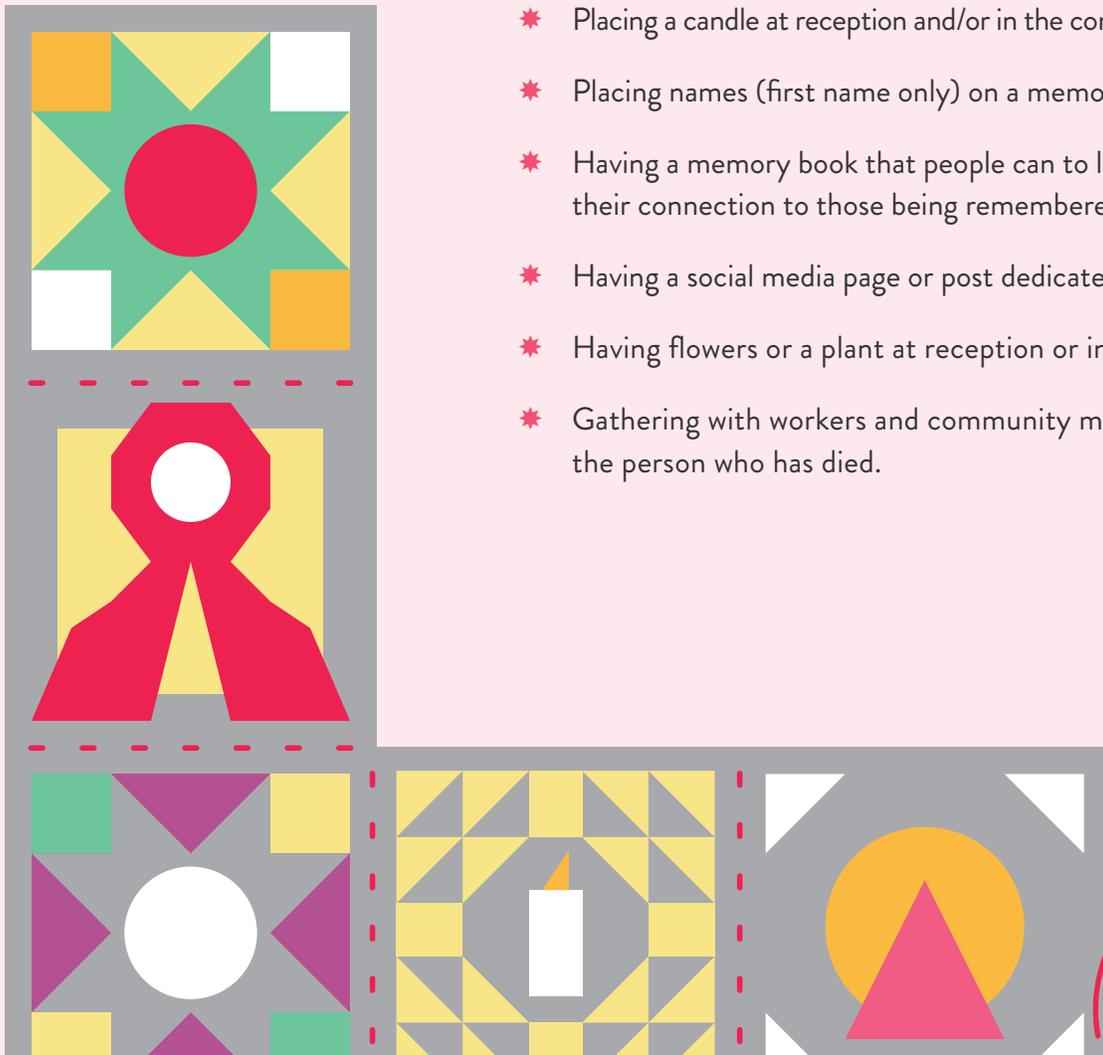
“

Grief does not
belong to the
past, the future,
it is always with
us in the present.

”

- Victoria Chang

OTHER WAYS TO ACKNOWLEDGE LOSSES IN THE WORKPLACE



- * Placing a candle at reception and/or in the community room (if you have one).
- * Placing names (first name only) on a memorial board.
- * Having a memory book that people can leave messages/share stories of their connection to those being remembered.
- * Having a social media page or post dedicated to remembering losses.
- * Having flowers or a plant at reception or in the community space.
- * Gathering with workers and community members to write an obituary for the person who has died.

MOURNER'S BILL OF RIGHTS

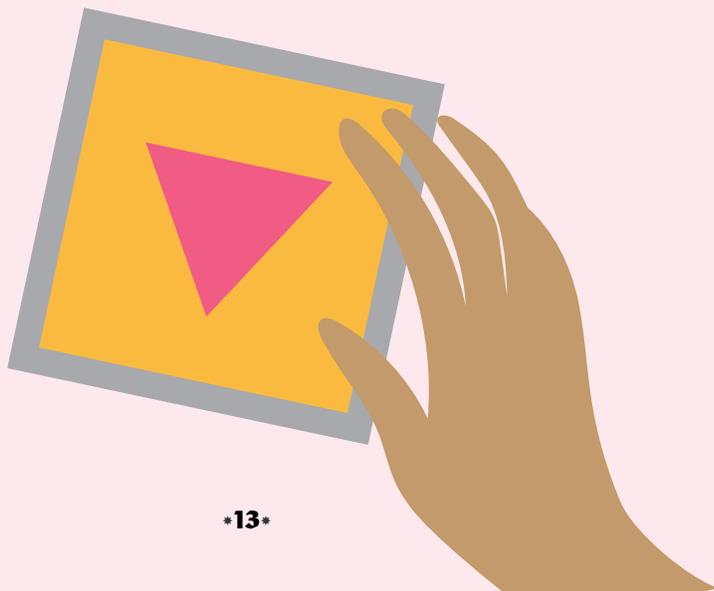
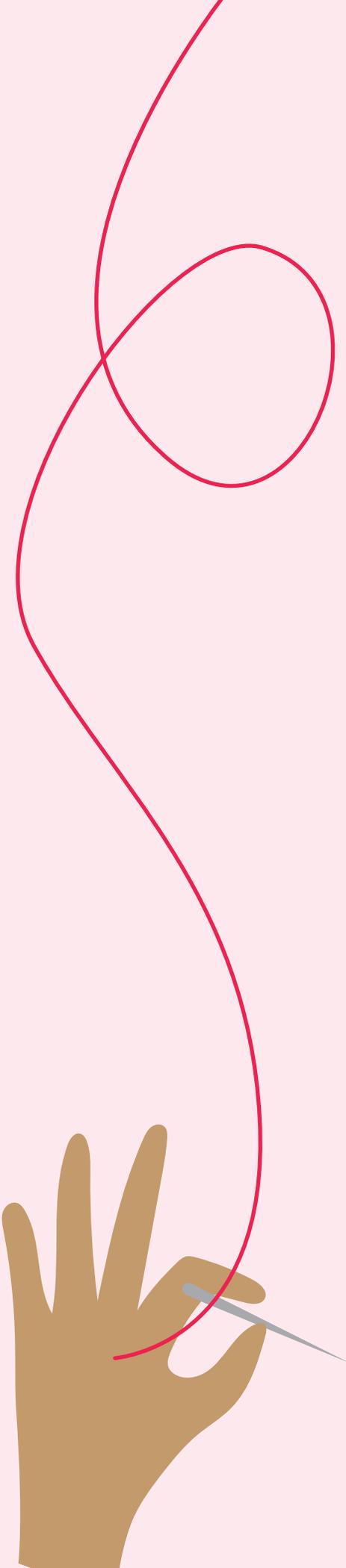
Though you should reach out to others as you do the work of mourning, you should not feel obligated to accept the unhelpful responses you may receive from some people. You are the one who is grieving, and as such, you have certain “rights” no one should try to take away from you.

The following list is intended both to empower you to heal and to decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.



1. You have the right to experience your own unique grief. No one else will grieve in the exact same way you do. So, when you turn to others for help, don't allow them to tell you what you should or should not be feeling.
2. You have the right to talk about your grief. Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as you want about your grief. If at times you do not feel like talking, you also have the right to be silent.
3. You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions. Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt, and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. Others may try to tell you that feeling angry, for example, is wrong. Don't take these judgmental responses to heart. Instead, find listeners who will accept your feelings without conditions.
4. You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits. Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.
5. You have the right to experience “griefbursts”. Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but it is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.

6. You have the right to make use of ritual. The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. More importantly, the funeral is a way for you to mourn. If others tell you the funeral or other healing rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary, don't listen.
7. You have the right to embrace your spirituality. If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry at God, find someone to talk with who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.
8. You have the right to search for meaning. You may find yourself asking, "Why did he or she die? Why this way? Why now?" Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. And watch out for the clichéd responses some people may give you. Comments like, "It was God's will" or "Think of what you have to be thankful for" are not helpful and you do not have to accept them.
9. You have the right to treasure your memories. Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. You will always remember. Instead of ignoring your memories, find others with whom you can share them.
10. You have the right to move toward your grief and heal. Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever.



WORKSHEET:



CREATE YOUR OWN MEMORIAL

Songs for grief & remembrance

*Community Members
who could participate
in planning the event*

*Elders, Knowledge Helpers, Knowledge
Keepers, or Community Facilitators
who could help guide a memorial*

WORKSHEET:



Activities for a memorial (candle, food/meal, spiritual practices, art/craft, poems...)

Everyday memorial options (candle at front desk, memorial board, memory book...)

MEMORIAL ACTIVITY:

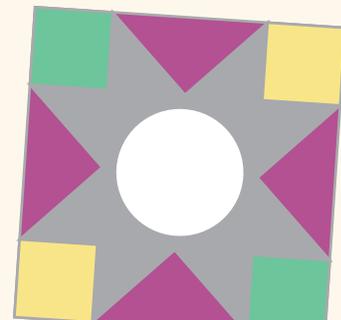
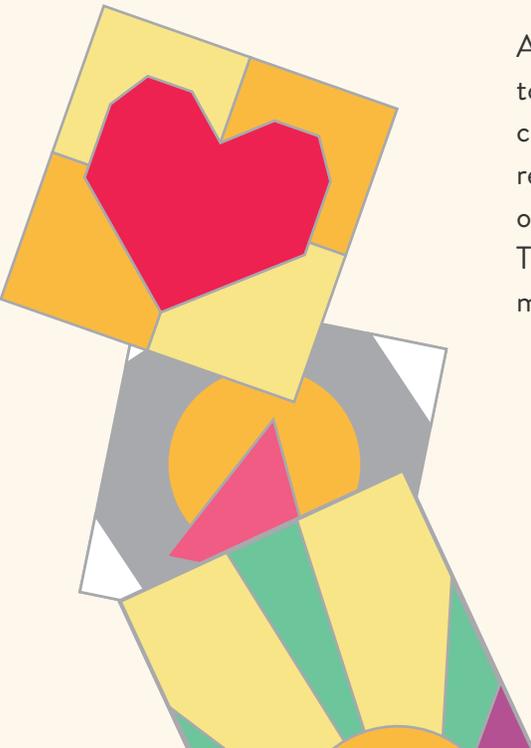


MAKING A PAPER QUILT



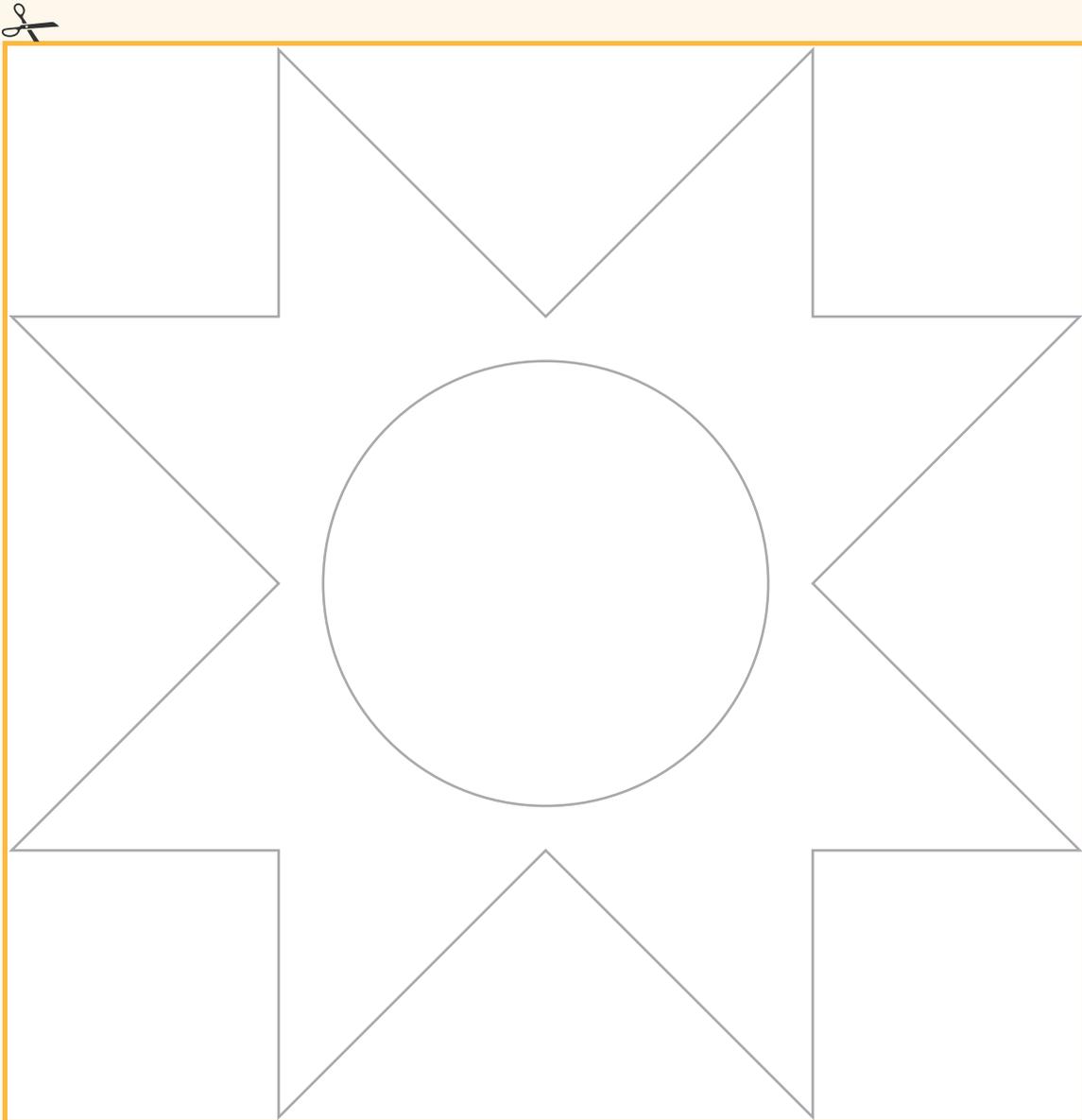
Quilts have a long history in HIV/AIDS activism, and are a powerful and tangible way to both remember and resist the disappearance of our loved ones who continue to die of both HIV complications and AIDS. The American AIDS Memorial Quilt was conceived in the mid 1980's by the NAMES Project as an opportunity to memorialize and remember people in America who had died of AIDS - often without the dignity of a funeral or memorial. Stigma and prejudice often meant excluding community members from official death rituals, such as funerals. The quilt panels were a way that community members could honour and grief the ones they lost. Quilt panels were made by families and friends as a way to resist the deaths of their loved ones, while also celebrating their lives through art. Quilt panels have been added to the quilt for the last 35 years, now totalling almost 50,000. Canada also has an AIDS Memorial Quilt, as do 35 other countries.

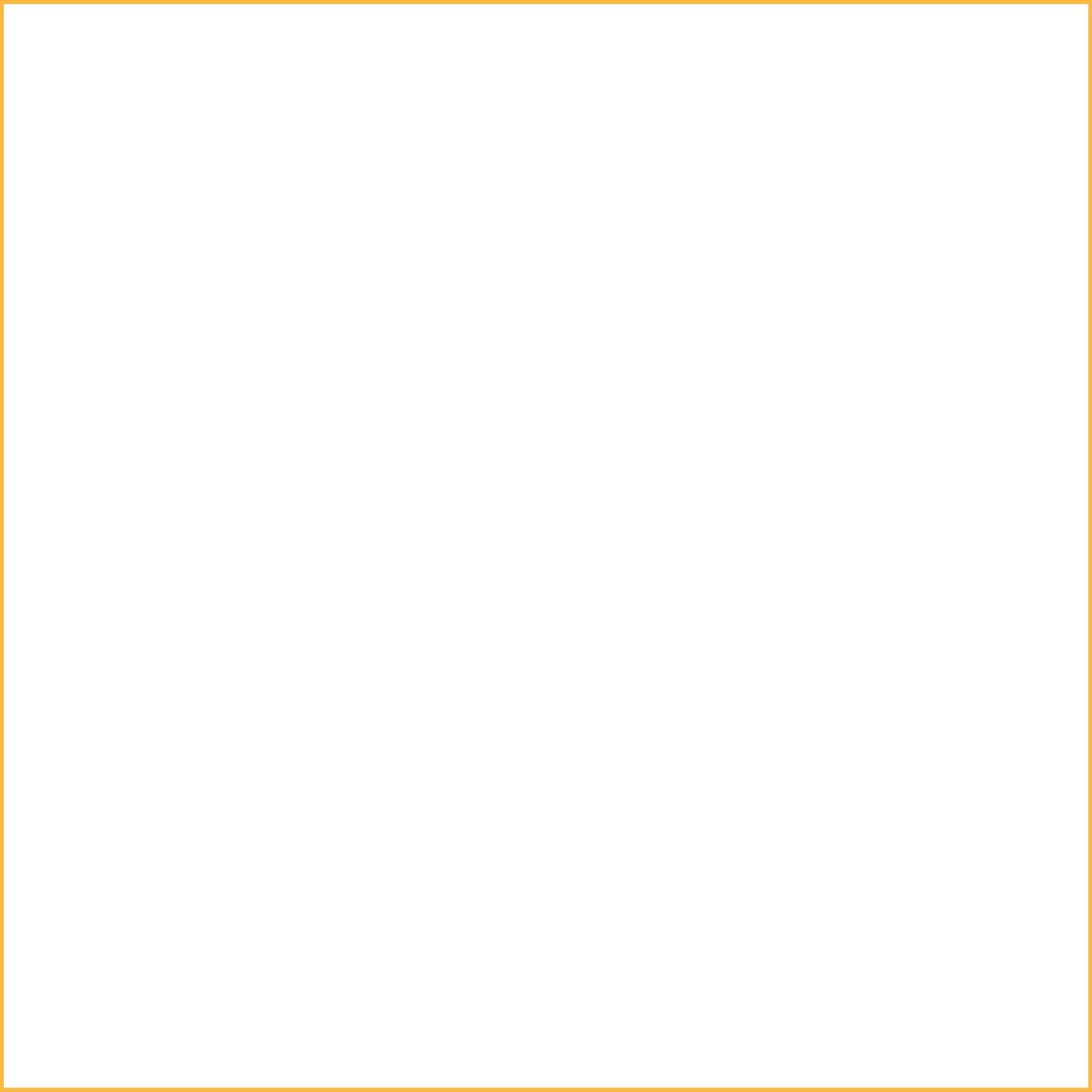
A quilt is not only a way to honour unjust deaths, but also serves as a memorial tool - we each bring our individual grief and bind it together into a tangible communal offering. In this spirit, we offer this activity to make a paper quilt to remember friends, family members, colleagues, community members and loved ones who have died of AIDS, HIV-related illness, overdose and drug poisoning. This paper quilt can be displayed in your workplace and added to during memorials.



INSTRUCTIONS:

- ✦ Cut out the quilt panel templates. There are blank templates included for people who want to make their own design.
- ✦ Decorate your quilt panel in a way that honours the person or people you are grieving. Use markers, pencil crayons, collage, sparkles. Whatever feels right for your grief.
- ✦ Once all the paper quilt panels are decorated, arrange them together into the quilt.
- ✦ Glue the arranged panels to a large piece(s) of bristol board or flip chart paper. You can also flip over the panels and tape them together at the “seams”.
- ✦ Display your quilt in a common area where people can visit it to remember and grieve.
- ✦ You can also bring the quilt to future memorials and add new panels to it for new losses you are grieving.





RESOURCES

Yvette Perreault, When Grief Comes to Work

Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., C.T., Mourner's Bill of Rights, www.centerforloss.com

Victoria Chang, Dear Memory

Canadian AIDS Society, <http://quilt.ca/history/>

National AIDS Memorial, <https://www.aidsmemorial.org/quilt-history>

Vikki Reynolds, Zone of Fabulousness Workshop

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**AIDS Bereavement and Resiliency
Program of Ontario**

Presence. Compassion. Change.