

## Grief Recovery after Substance Passing (GRASP)

GRASP is an organization founded to provide sources of help, compassion and most of all, understanding, for families or individuals who have lost a love one as a result of substance use or addiction. Additional information about GRASP can be obtained at <http://grasphelp.org/about-us/>. Below is a brief history of GRASP reposted from the GRASP website.

### GRASP History

As with everything there is a beginning, a middle and an end. The history of Grief Recovery After Substance Passing (GRASP) actually comes in the middle.



The beginning, of course, was the tragically early demise in 1994 at age twenty of our youngest daughter, Jennifer Caroline. After five years of struggling to overcome addictions, her body said, "enough" with a final misdose of heroin.

For those of you who've also experienced similar scenarios as ours, there is no need to expound upon the years of frustrations, hopes and heartbreaking defeats.

As parents, Russ and Pat decided that they did not want one more child to die as their daughter had, nor one more family to endure the years before this demise. To this end, in 1996 they created "[Jenny's Journey](#)" as an awareness program and began to give presentations in schools, for church groups, out-patient and residential substance facilities. In fact anywhere that youth could participate. They travelled within the mid-west as well as their home-state of California. A video was professionally produced with the successful intention that Jenny's story could travel across North America and the world.

Now a strange thing began to transpire with audiences at these presentations. Preparing to leave, adults and even some young people would approach Pat and Russ to share their family stories of

struggles and often ensuing deaths. Many times, too, there was an almost physical sigh of body-language in finally being able to confide, with total reassurance, to someone who would understand: parents who had gone through the process.

Because of the video and accompanying facilitator's guide, it was decided that the time had come to answer the other need that Jenny's parents had sought and not found and obviously was needed by many: Support.

There are many excellent support organizations that help grieving parents, partners, siblings and children in all manner of deaths but not one to address the addictions of substances whether it is alcohol, prescriptions or illicit drugs. To many it is not realized or accepted that addictions are as much a disease as any other medical illness. A misconception is that overdose deaths are suicides. In most cases this is simply not true.

Pat had been contacted by two mothers whose children had passed over from drugs. These mothers came to Pat's home with photographs of their precious ones and with coffee at hand, a box of tissues for the ready tears, a sharing of similar stories began. When that afternoon ended it was decided to meet regularly and form support for other families.

In 2002 Pat and Russ approached their minister with the plan and immediately free use of the church's remodeled carriage house was offered. An ideal gathering place for the little circle of new friends, it was comfortably furnished in soft armchairs and couch and even had a small kitchen area for providing snacks.

The name took a little more discussion since it was thought to have something easily remembered and yet saying exactly the kind of support group this would be. Especially in the beginning throes of bereavement, many people cannot even say the word death. Like many others, Jenny's parents also felt that when a death occurs it is like passing through to another dimension, a transition into another life. With this in mind, coupled by needing to be specific, plus helping others to cope with all that grief entails, the name became – Grief Recovery After Substance Passing or GRASP.

The website that eventually followed was easier to name: GraspHelp.org and was linked into the already well-used [Jenny's Journey](#).

With help from a local newspaper providing advertising, families, chiefly mothers but also some fathers came to GRASP. Music softly playing, the atmosphere was warm, welcoming and soothing providing solace within a circle where anything could be shared in complete confidence. Where, at times, tears would be mixed with laughter as stories of our beloved children were told. The healing within this room and participants was almost palpable. And that is how the next phase of this remarkable circle was dictated for Jenny's parents.

Like everyone else who met together, one of the first questions was, "where can I buy a book to help cope with this death?" Jenny's parents had sought in vain as well. Just as there were no support groups for addiction passing's, neither did the guidance books for coping with death mention overdose accidents. Once more, it was not quite accepted or "nice". Their book, "When a Child Dies From Drugs" just had to be written. The book was first published in 2004.

Through the years GRASP has been linked online to many self-help support and resource websites as well as being a founding member of the San Diego Bereavement Consortium.

In 2007 strides in acceptance were made when Pat was asked to be a keynote speaker at the three day Chicago Gathering of Bereaved Parents/USA . This was a landmark step for being the first time substance deaths had a national recognition.

At the start of this account it was said that there is a beginning, middle and end. Well, with GRASP there is no end in the foreseeable future. Unfortunately we continue to have the scourge of substances abuses and until that ceases, deaths will occur and families will need GRASP to help them in coping.

Thankfully chapters are forming in many states to offer solace where there had been none.

In January 2010, GRASP was passed to Gary and Denise Cullen. Pat is right; there is no end to GRASP in sight and we will continue what Pat and Russ started.