

Bereaved Parents of Madison, Inc.

January 2025



50th Anniversary

In honor of our 50th Anniversary of bereaved parents supporting each other in the Madison, WI area, we are proud to share this special newsletter with you highlighting our accomplishments over the last half century. Our ongoing mission at Bereaved Parents of Madison, Inc. is to provide support and resources to grieving families during and after pregnancy loss, termination, stillbirth, infant death, and subsequent pregnancies. We do this by offering personal and group support, as well as programs and events for families. We also provide education and awareness to the community through outreach programs and relationships with area hospitals. We strive to nurture healing and renew hope in these families throughout the grieving process.



“Take courage, friends. The way is often hard, the path is never clear, and the stakes are very high. Take courage. For deep down there is another truth: You are not alone.”

-Wayne B. Arnason



HUGS Program

Hope, Understanding, & Grief Support, or HUGS, began the planning stage in 2014, and is now active in three local hospitals. HUGS volunteers are contacted by clinic/hospital staff when a family is experiencing a loss to help provide companionship, answer questions, and aid in creating keepsakes for the families to take home. Volunteers have all experienced pregnancy or infant loss firsthand, have attended BPOM support group, and are trained to provide support in local hospitals or in the community after patient discharge.



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Our History

1974-2013

Bereaved Parents of Madison (BPoM) started in 1974, when the loss of Carol Fowler's infant son Justin inspired her to support others who were experiencing the grief of losing a child. A group of dedicated parents formed together to start a support group and to donate items to hospitals and bereaved families, such as clothing, cameras and film. These parents also provided meals, hospital visits, and started a lending library. We honor these founding parents, some who still are active in BPOM today, and hope to carry on their legacy of caring for and educating others.

From these beginnings BPOM grew to offer events for grieving families, including an annual holiday remembrance service beginning in 1989. Parent speakers shared their experiences with medical providers at nursing schools to improve patient care. A branch of the organization was founded, focusing on providing support for those pregnant again after experiencing loss. In addition to continuing the long-standing monthly support group, new opportunities arose for support over social media.

2020-Present

The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 brought new challenges to BPoM, as support groups moved online and peer support was no longer possible in hospitals. Still, the organization worked to find ways to connect and support grieving parents through social media platforms, zoom meetings, HUGS volunteers for families after hospital discharge, directly donating books to families, and continuing to partner with other loss organizations. In 2023, support could again be provided in hospitals, and the HUGS program strengthened its ties with SSM Health and UnityPoint Health allowing HUGS volunteers to return to Madison and Monroe hospitals.

2014-2019

In 2014, the President of BPOM Claire Matejka began the ambitious project of creating a peer run grief support program with local hospitals. With the help of Emily Gorud and Jen Pepoy, the direct community outreach program H.U.G.S., Hope, Understanding, and Grief Support, was developed to try to reach more bereaved families. This program would go on to serve patients in area hospitals, as well as offering support for 13 months after discharge. As the program was being created, the need for non-profit status was growing. In 2015, with the help of Rebecca Markert, BPOM became incorporated as a 501 ©3 organization. Looking back on that pivotal time in our history, Emily Gorud, mother of James and Josie and current Chair of the HUGS Committee, remarks:

"The restructuring and growth of Bereaved Parents of Madison benefited many aspects of the organization. We thought very deeply about all aspects of this growth and how it would benefit our loss community. We discussed that when we had our losses, we all had wanted more support right away. Support group was a place for sharing stories with peers and feeling less alone, but we also understood that not everyone would feel comfortable and attend in a group setting. We also understood that some people don't grieve by talking and sharing, some people benefit from hands-on activities or physical activities to help the grief move through them; hence the diverse offerings of monthly activities and events that bloomed. And lastly we knew that proactive support in the hospital setting would help parents get support sooner and with few barriers. If a family doesn't have to research or 'google' about what exists for them, but rather hears and meets with a volunteer who has been through this type of loss right away in the hospital, there can be an instant connection that can lead to parents to feeling welcome at many other events they normally wouldn't think to attend. But ultimately that one on one HUGS connection can be incredibly meaningful to parents who are more introverted or whose grief really isolates them-- to have a fellow parent check in on them each month for 13 months. It eliminates so many barriers to grief support and helps keep parents anchored in knowing they are not alone."

"Grief is a very lonely process. You must work through it on your own, but you need not be alone. Others can help you, even as they grieve themselves."

-Sherokee Ilse

Our Accomplishments

Last Year, BPoM

- Facilitated 14 Support Groups
- Hosted 15 Special Events
- Held 12 Rainbow Pregnancy Meetings
- Supported 37 HUGS Families
- Sent over 50 books to Bereaved Parents
- Trained 9 HUGS Volunteers to support families
- Reached nearly 600 members in the Private Facebook Group

Community Growth

The last 50 years could not have been possible without the work of hundreds of dedicated volunteers, who, in honor of their precious children, have: facilitated support groups, sewn memorial quilts, distributed books and other resources, networked with medical providers and other loss organizations, produced newsletters, shared their stories, served as on-call HUGS coordinators, decorated rocks with other kids who we missing their siblings, sat at the hospital bedsides of those cradling their babies in their arms, planned and hosted events and meetups, trained HUGS volunteers, lobbied for stillbirth tax credits, attended conferences and trainings on how to better support themselves and others, served as board members and committee chairs, updated websites, sang at memorial events, and above all BELIEVED IN THE POWER OF HEALING IN COMMUNITY.

Bereaved Parents of Madison, Inc remains, since its inception, an ENTIRELY VOLUNTEER RUN AND FUNDED ORGANIZATION. We are only as strong as those who donate their time, resources, and money to help themselves and others live in a world irrevocably changed by the deaths of their children. Hundreds of families have been touched by BPOM. As one father shared:



Support Group

BPOM's Monthly Support Group is peer facilitated. All bereaved parents are welcome, regardless of when their loss occurred. This is a safe, non-judgmental place to:

- share your story
- cry and feel whatever emotions are present
- sit quietly
- connect to other parents
- learn about resources
- ask questions and support each other

"Support group was a place of refuge. For one night a month, I could talk about my son with people who acknowledged that he existed. I was allowed to be sad, angry, proud, jealous, or whatever else I wanted to feel. I could share pictures of him. I could talk about my experiences with people who actually understood because they had similar experiences. By going to support group, I realized that even though I felt isolated in my regular life, I wasn't alone."

-Brian, Calvin's Dad

"Perhaps they are not stars, but rather openings in heaven where the love of our lost ones pours through and shines down upon us to let us know they are happy."

-Eskimo Proverb

Our 50th Events



50th Anniversary Family Picnic

In May, around 50 people of all ages came together to celebrate 50 years of BPOM by enjoying delicious food donated by Food Fight Restaurant Group, beautiful flower arrangements from Naly's Flower Shop, playing games, doing memorial crafts, and breaking a pinata. It was a special time to connect with friends from support group and past events, and to honor the work that so many have done in honor of their babies.



Anniversary Pontoon Boat Ride

In September, two boats set out over the waters of Lake Mendota and Lake Monona with parents remembering their precious children and the impact BPOM has had on each of us and our community over the last five decades. As the sun set and the dark sky was lit by the bright moon, we floated together, reflecting symbolically that we were not alone drowning in the waters of grief in the dark. While we honored that each of us grieves in our own way, we found comfort in being together, lighting candles and remembering that our grief is based in the deep love we have for our children.



"Grief belongs to the griever."

- Megan Devine

Spotlights



Programming and Events

BPOM has events and meetups for adults only and for families. Some of these include:

- An Annual Holiday Remembrance Service
- Family Events
- Book Discussion Groups and Film Screenings
- Special Mother and Father's Day Retreats
- Crafting and Journaling Gatherings
- Coffee meetups



Education and Outreach

BPOM Education and Outreach volunteers:

- speak to medical providers, students, and legislators about pregnancy and infant loss
- network with other bereavement organizations
- provide brochures and mailings about BPOM to healthcare providers, clinics, and hospitals
- produce a monthly e-newsletter
- engage in continuing education to learn how to better support our members
- recruit more volunteers



Rainbow Pregnancies of Madison (RPOM)

RPOM provides special support for those pregnant after experiencing a previous loss. RPOM volunteers:

- host support group and events
- connect expecting parents with each other
- offer resources for the unique challenges that come with another pregnancy
- educate healthcare providers about the needs of those who are pregnant after loss



How Your Donations Help



\$20 Sends a Book to a Bereaved Parent

\$45 Provides a Gift Bag For a HUGS Family

\$68 Funds an Entire Support Group Meeting

You can donate online at bereavedparentsofmadison.com

"Alone, we can do so little: Together, we can do so much."

-Helen Keller

Our Advice

If you are a Bereaved Parent, current member or new:

We invite you to join us. Your grief is welcome here. As we say at the opening of our monthly support group:

***"We are so sorry that you had to find this group.
Grief is a difficult journey, but you do not have to travel alone."***

From our monthly support group, events for families and for adults only, our private Facebook page to connect you with other bereaved parents, free books and resources, and support for pregnancy after loss, we have much to offer you. We also have volunteer opportunities for those who wish to provide direct peer support and help to educate others about pregnancy and infant loss.

ALL OF OUR OFFERINGS ARE FREE OF CHARGE. Please visit our website bereavedparentsofmadison.com to learn more. You can also find us on Facebook and Instagram.

"When I suffered the death of my baby, I was so grateful to have a safe and understanding community of support through BPoM. Due to the nature of my circumstances—a fatal fetal diagnosis resulting in termination—I was concerned about how my story might be perceived by others. I was so relieved and comforted to find that BPoM offered nonjudgmental and unconditional compassion, love, and empathy for the devastating loss I had experienced."

- Mother of Newton Rose

"I had no idea when I walked into Bereaved Parents of Madison support group that I was about to meet some of the most important people I would meet in my life. I was accepted as I was—shocked, broken, and mourning. I didn't know how to take the next breath, let alone survive in the face of such a sudden desolating loss. But here were the people who would teach me how to parent a child who only lived in my heart. They wanted to know my son, see his photos, and honor his short life."

- Tanya, Oren's Mom

If you are a Friend or Family Member of a Bereaved Parent:

We invite you to share information about BPoM with them. Please remember that what they do with that information is up to them. Grief is personal and we all grieve differently. Follow your friend's lead. You cannot "fix" this.

You can support those grieving in many ways. Listen, stay present in their life, and offer to provide practical help with burial and funeral arrangements, errands, meals, and laundry. Do not offer platitudes like, "everything happens for a reason" or "you can have another baby." Taking your cues from your friend, find ways to honor their child and remember them. Speaking about their baby is often appreciated as many times people change the topic or are afraid to bring it up. Your support matters. Sometimes, all we can do is cry together or sit silently side by side. That may be exactly what is needed at that moment.

"I remember the room being quiet. I remember the emptiness when he told us the news. I remember the feeling of holding you there. I remember leaving with just a box as now you are my angel."

-Kayla, Alister's Mom

Volunteering

If you want to learn more about volunteer opportunities:

please email us at: bereavedparentsofmadison@gmail.com

Volunteering has many rewards, Emily Gorud, a longtime volunteer with BPOM shares:

"There is a newer term called Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) in the field of psychology and grief. It is in contrast to Post-Traumatic Stress or in contrast to the negative and lasting effects of trauma. PTG comes from deep seated changes in the way you think, live, and function after a traumatic or stressful event.

The five pillars of PTG are personal strength, appreciation for life, deepened relationships, personal transformation, and spiritual growth which provide a roadmap for individuals to navigate their journey toward growth and resilience.

It is currently being studied more and more why some people, and not others, experience this type of growth after trauma. The thing I would like people to know the most is that I see this level growth in all of our volunteers. I can't say why the phenomenon happens or how, but I see the changes develop over time in each of our dedicated volunteers. The board of directors is very proud of the opportunities and flexibility they can offer to volunteers. We sponsor volunteers to attend conferences and workshops, we help volunteers gain the knowledge necessary to grow their role, and simply working on a committee can help individuals develop new skills and competencies. But even these opportunities don't always account for the PTG I see in people who volunteer to help others in memory of their baby(ies), it is deeper and more about connection with others who want to make a difference. I'm so incredibly grateful for all I have learned and how I've grown in the past 14 years, and how I can see PTG in myself."

Current Board Members and Committee Chairs (and their babies):

Jenny Kluge (Violet) - President, Treasurer, and Co-chair of Support Group Committee

Tanya Mudrick (Sam, Oren, and Miriam) - Secretary and Co-chair of Education and Outreach

Chrissy Bennett (Harper and baby) - Vice President and Chair of Programming and Events Committee

Leah McNeely (Isabell) - Director at Large and Co-chair of Education and Outreach

Emily Gorud (James and Josie) Chair of HUGS Committee and Co-chair of Support Group, and Rebecca

Markert (Lilith) Chair of Rainbow Pregnancies of Madison Committee

Thanks to Becky Swance (BJ and Davis), President 2022-2024

"Connecting with a HUGS volunteer through BPoM was a tremendous help to us, and it validated many of the thoughts and feelings we had. By volunteering for HUGS, in turn, I hope I can be that source of reassurance and comfort for others who have experienced the tragedy of losing a child."

-John, father of Maddie and Maia