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## Multigenerational legacy projects

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## Multigenerational legacy projects

### Abstract

Multigenerational legacy projects and activities facilitate meaning making and instill hope for further generations. Hospice and palliative care entities can use legacy projects to help terminally ill clients share how they want to be remembered. Legacy projects come in many forms including but not limited to scrapbooks, holiday rituals, and storytelling. In this perspective piece, examples of legacy projects will be explored as ways to process loss.

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### Cover Page Footnote

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PERSPECTIVE ARTICLE

# Multigenerational Legacy Projects

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**Abstract**

Multigenerational legacy projects and activities facilitate meaning making and instill hope for further generations. Hospice and palliative care entities can use legacy projects to help terminally ill clients share how they want to be remembered. Legacy projects come in many forms, including scrapbooks, holiday rituals, and storytelling. In this perspective piece, examples of legacy projects are explored as ways to process loss.

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## Multigenerational Legacy Projects

Multigenerational legacy projects are creative endeavors aimed at making lasting differences and offering positive contributions (Beghetto, 2017). These contributions can benefit individual families or the culture at large. These contributions might be beneficial in the following ways: (a) multigenerational art projects can address the complex nature of grief, (b) time spent on multigenerational projects can reduce ageism by bridging gaps between generations through reverse mentoring programs, and (c) storytelling can build social connection to address isolation and loneliness. In this piece, the focus will illuminate how multigenerational projects address the complex nature of grief.

Multi-generational legacy projects can facilitate healthy grieving, which is illustrated in this piece through two intervention examples. The first intervention described is an expressive arts project known as the memory box. The memory box intervention is grounded in an expressive arts theoretical paradigm. The benefits of expressive arts in counseling is expansive, including expansion of client worldview, facilitation of emotional expression, and development of self-efficacy (Otting & Prosek, 2016). Expressive arts in bereavement counseling is also beneficial and can provide unique and creative strategies to processing loss (Coenen & Pimas, 2020). The second intervention is a narrative counseling approach to bereavement known as narrative storytelling. Narrative counseling is a social-constructivist theory that emphasizes collaboration, client strengths, and the cultural stories a client is embedded in (White & Epston, 1990). Multi-generational storytelling parallels the goals of narrative counseling by encouraging collaboration and creating space for diverse stories and conversations to emerge. Storytelling can be beneficial in bereavement counseling because it encourages two individuals to honor and validate the complexity of grief (Wolfelt, 2006).

### Addressing Grief Through Memory Boxes

Multigenerational art projects can link generations by setting aside time to remember those who have died. Families can provide spaces for one another by engaging in creative endeavors such as memory boxes. Memory boxes provide a simple participatory strategy that allows families to convey memories of loved ones who have died. Family members can participate by putting something meaningful in the box. Children can help decorate the box, drawing memories and placing them in the box or asking adults in the family to share a story. To start this conversation and generate ideas on how to develop their memory box, families can read the children's book *The Memory Box* by Joanna Rowland. Overall, this intervention can be useful throughout the grief process by engaging the entire family and creating space for individuals to express their grief in unique and creative ways.

This intervention can be useful throughout the grief process by engaging the entire family and creating space for individuals to express their grief in unique and creative ways. Families might consider revisiting the memory box during meaningful anniversary dates (e.g., birthdays, death dates, wedding anniversaries, etc.). *In my work as a Hospice bereavement coordinator, I used this intervention in groups for elementary school children. Students would receive a small wooden box that they could decorate however they wanted. If they desired, they could share with the group what they would put in their memory box, or if they had something with them at school that they wanted to place in the box, they could do so. The kids in these groups enjoyed the activity and found that it allowed them to remember their loved ones and engage creatively with their grief process.* This intervention empowers kids to discuss their grief in ways that feel creative and engaging to them. In the school groups, participants responded well to this intervention and enjoyed being able to share with their peers in the group about their loved ones who were deceased.

### Building Connections and Honoring Grief Through Storytelling

Storytelling is one example of how to foster social connection. It is also a profound way to honor grief. When individuals engage in storytelling, they are taking time to share, which decreases isolation and increases opportunities to share legacies across generations. The goal of storytelling activities is to open conversation between two or more individuals to bridge gaps between generations with empathy and compassion. Storytelling can occur when two people engage in an interview and can be done informally or recorded. Younger individuals might begin exploring an older individual's life experience. To get started, here are a few sample questions:

1. What do you remember most about your childhood?
2. What was your hometown like?

3. What did you want to be when you grow up?
4. What historical event do you recall most vividly?
5. What was your favorite song when you were my age?
6. What was your favorite television show?

Next, the older individual interviews the younger and could use some of the questions below:

1. What do you wish my generation knew or understood about yours?
2. What is meaningful to you in your life right now?
3. What is your favorite TV show right now?
4. What type of music do you like?
5. Can you share with me what school is like?

This process can be done at the end of life as part of a life-review. This process of life-review can be cathartic for both parties involved in the conversation (Vollandes, 2020). The sample questions are not exhaustive but are merely an invitation to begin conversation.

*Life review activities were used in my tenure as a hospice bereavement coordinator during my initial meetings with families. We would often sit, enjoy coffee or tea and I would facilitate conversations between the family that would allow them to share, emote, and gather strength from one another. Families often commented to me that this process of having the space to share stories was a unique element of hospice care. Not all families were interested in this intervention, but I often asked families under our care whether they desired to engage in life-review processes. This was done simply by asking gently, with room for families to either affirm that this might be something they enjoy or something they did not desire. Often, families who were dealing with a sudden diagnosis shared that they were too in shock to share or engage in life-review processes.*

Overall, engaging with life-review processes provided families autonomy to decide what would be helpful for them and facilitated rapport and allowed them to feel safe to share. Families who did engage with life-review processes reported that it was helpful to them throughout their grief process and the process of navigating life-limiting illnesses. Follow up with families was a part of my role as a hospice bereavement coordinator and many families shared that engaging in life-review processes was something distinctive about hospice and palliative care, and that it allowed them to consider how they themselves might want to be remembered.

## Conclusion

This perspective piece provided examples of multigenerational legacy projects in the forms of memory boxes and narrative storytelling. Each of these activities could encourage interaction, growth, and mutual learning across the lifespan. The examples provided are not an exhaustive list of the many creative ways in which legacy projects and multigenerational interactions can occur. These two interventions were selected because they illuminate how multigenerational projects can be helpful in bereavement. Readers are encouraged to use this perspective piece to spark an ongoing conversation about the importance of legacies and how we can better engage intergenerationally. Additional reading could include end of life memoirs, such as *When Breath Becomes Air*, *Being Moral*, and *No Cure For Being Human*

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