

# Grieving children learn to cope with tragic loss

BY DAN GERINGER, Daily News Staff Writer [geringd@phillynews.com](mailto:geringd@phillynews.com), 215-854-5961

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WHEN DARCY Walker Krause was 15, her mother died suddenly from a heart attack.

Twenty years later, Krause is herself the mother of two, including a newborn, yet there are times when her own mother's death still affects her.

"There are many moments in the last 20 years that I have missed my mom," she said. "What comes to mind the most are major life events like graduations, my wedding and certainly the birth of each child.

"She's not there to visit me at the hospital," Krause said. "She's not there to call and cry to in the tough first days. And she's not there to hold my child now or offer me advice."

Because Krause internally understands the long-term effects of childhood grief, she felt the need to help children who are dealing with a loved one's death.

So, she left her five-year law practice, earned a master's degree in social work and became executive director of The Center for Grieving Children.

Although it had existed in different locations since 1995, Krause said the center's East Falls headquarters, on Henry Avenue near Indian Queen Lane, was only serving 50 children a year when she arrived in 2012.

Since then, it has dramatically grown to grief counseling 450 to 500 children annually and has satellite programs at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's Karabots Pediatric Care Center, on Market Street near 48th and at the St. Christopher's Hospital for Children's Center for the Urban Child, on Erie Avenue near Whitaker.

"We will run more than 40 grief counseling groups this year at 30 to 35 schools in underserved neighborhoods throughout Philadelphia," Krause said.

Grieving children meet in separate peer groups from their caregivers, she said, "so a son is able to say, 'Mom cries all the time and that makes me really sad' or 'Mom's driving me crazy.'"

"One child felt like something was his fault but he didn't tell his mom. He told his peer group. We were able to negotiate that out. We told him, 'We're going to let Mom know. This isn't your fault.'"

Krause said children need that safe space. "They need to be among peers who have gone through what they've gone through and are part of the journey," she said.

That journey, Krause said, is not from grief to closure. She doesn't believe in closure.

"Throughout life, you feel the loss," she said. "Grief is a lifelong journey that doesn't necessarily end at some point.

"I often miss my mom when friends are talking about their moms, or on Mother's Day, or on her birthday," Krause said. "April 9 this year will be the 20th anniversary of her passing. It's on my mind a lot with the new baby and this milestone anniversary."

Instead of closure, Krause said: "I believe there's some acceptance of this is how life will be. You develop a coping mechanism.

"If you keep looking for closure and you don't find it, how frustrating is that? You're going to have difficult days. And you're going to have awesome days. And that's fine."

**On Twitter:** @DanGeringer

