

What is Legacy Work and Why is it Important?

Legacy Work is a form of meaning based coping which:

- Occurs when people can find meaning and purpose during a stressful event
- Develops awareness of the beauty, value, and significance in the moment
- Allows people to shift focus to positive emotions and priorities that have deeper meaning
- Assists in beginning the process of healing

How Do I Talk to Families About Legacy Work?

This can be the most difficult part of doing Legacy Work - how to offer it and what to say. As you use this practice, you will find your own way of initiating the conversation with families. Here are some helpful tips for getting started:

At end of life, when family is sitting vigil and is aware that their loved one is dying - Take a memory stone with you, or a few to demonstrate the variety of images they can choose from... “I know this is a difficult time for you. I would like to offer something that may be comforting.” Show them the stones. “These are called memory stones/thought stones/prayer stones, they are whatever you want them to be. We can place your loved one’s thumbprint on them, so that you can have it to keep them close to you.” Typically this is all that is needed, hearing this and seeing the memory stones is enough for the family to decide if they want this done. Most do and are very grateful for it.

In situations of chronic illness, long hospitalizations, uncertain or poor prognosis - Again, take a sample memory stone to show the family.... “I know this is a difficult time for you. I would like to offer something that may be comforting.” Show them the stones. “These are called memory stones/thought stones/prayer stones, they are whatever you want them to be. We can place your loved one’s thumbprint on them, so that you can have it with you and feel connected to them, even when you are not at the bedside. You can hold it and pray for them or send them your love and support.” Sometimes in these situations, especially if the patient is awake and alert, you may offer to have family members make memory stones with their own thumbprints and give them to the patient for comfort. **This is especially helpful when the patient is separated from their children or grandchildren.** You can even send the stones and an ink pad home for young children to make them and send them back to the patient via family members.

Other examples of Legacy Work:

- ✓ Letter writing or cards for future events
- ✓ Painted thumbprints on stuffed animals for children or grandchildren
- ✓ Handprints on canvas, decorative paper or other surfaces
- ✓ Photos of loved ones holding each other’s hands
- ✓ Journaling - this is a powerful tool for life review and leaving legacies for loved ones. Offer to help write down stories and memories for patients.
- ✓ ECG strips of the patient’s heart beat
- ✓ Special events - weddings, baptisms, graduations
- ✓ Services of Remembrance



For more information on Legacy Work visit:

<http://www.muschealth.org/palliative-care/index.html>

Developed by MUSC Palliative Care

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How is Legacy Work Done?

Memory Stone Instructions:

Invite families to select their stones. **Have them clean their hands before entering the kit.** They may take as many stones as they want - they are free. Encourage taking stones for family who may not be present. **Do not take the box inside the patient's room;** have family step out to select stones. If you need to take stones inside the room for a family member or patient to look at, put them in a plastic bag, this way they can see them and choose, the unused stones may be returned to the kit. You might ask if the patient is right handed or left handed, offer the choice of finger or thumb print. Offer to use the patient's ring finger for spouses and significant others. Invite family to make the prints as well. Offer music or encourage family to share their favorite stories of their loved one during Legacy work.

- Place the finger onto the ink pad, press a few times to ensure enough ink.
- Make a practice print on a scrap of paper (too much or too little ink will not make a good print).
- Re-apply ink on the finger between each stone.
- Let the prints dry for at least five minutes, the longer the better.
- Paint the entire back of the stone with clear finger nail polish (this will seal and preserve the print and the paper).
- Ink can be removed with baby wipes and/or spray skin cleanser, nail polish remover or alcohol pads.
- **Note:** The glue used to make stones is water soluble, tell families to avoid getting them wet. **If you are out of nail polish, barrier spray can be used to temporarily seal the print until the family gets home and paints it with polish for permanent protection.**



For Bookmarks - same process as memory stones, place print at bottom of bookmark. Use hard surface under the bookmark to get a good print. Let them dry, no need for polish!



- ★ **Nail polish can be reused if the bottle is cleaned between patients. Ink pads can be reused for up to if the patient's hand is washed with soap and water before applying ink from pad.**



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