



# Donor Family Services Summer 2025 Newsletter

Dear Donor Families,

Every day, our Donor Family Advocates are here to walk alongside families who have experienced the loss of a loved one through donation. Summer is no exception, our commitment to providing support, resources, and connection remains constant, no matter the season.

Whether you're looking to connect with an Advocate, explore grief support resources, or simply need someone to talk to, we're here for you.

Visit [www.lifenethealth.org/healingthespirit](http://www.lifenethealth.org/healingthespirit) or email us at [DFS@lifenethealth.org](mailto:DFS@lifenethealth.org), and a member of our team will respond with care.

In this issue, we're focusing on:

- Supporting children as they navigate the early stages of grief
- Simple and budget-friendly self-care ideas to help you through the summer

Please share your thoughts about events and workshops at [DFS@lifenethealth.org](mailto:DFS@lifenethealth.org). Your feedback helps us plan better support experiences for you!

To register, scan QR code or visit:

<https://www.lifenethealth.org/healingthespirit/events>

## Upcoming Events

### IC&R Ceremonies

Sept 7 – Jacksonville, FL  
Sept 28 – Pensacola, FL  
Oct 12 – Spokane, WA

### Tree of Remembrance Ceremonies

Dec 7 – Virginia Beach, VA  
Dec 10 – Richmond, VA  
Dec 14 – Roanoke, VA

### Donor Family Hike

Sept 27 - Western  
Washington

If you would like more information about any of our programs, contact us at 800-847-8731 or [DFS@lifenethealth.org](mailto:DFS@lifenethealth.org)





## Dear Dr. Leary: Disappointed about not hearing from recipients

Dear Dr. Leary:

*I have not heard from the recipient families after we donated my husband's organs and tissue six months ago. I know it's a good thing and we carried out his wishes, but I can't help feeling extremely disappointed and angry that the families have not reached out to thank us. How can I get over these feelings?*

*-Disappointed and Angry*

Dear Disappointed and Angry:

My condolences on the recent death of your husband. In addition to the anguish of separation and your grief, you are also suffering the complications of unfulfilled expectations. Your letter indicates you want or need something that has not happened. When you chose the gift of donation, you were given the information that the donors and recipients had the promise of anonymity unless they chose to reach out and it was mutually reciprocal. We only have control of what we choose and our responses.

You may not know why you can't talk or write to the recipient yet. They may still be healing and grieving their own set of losses, of which we know nothing. They may not have the words to express their gratitude. They may not have the skills to be witness to your grief. They may feel overwhelmed or unworthy to receive such a gift. If we can let go of needing to know, then we may also let go of our assumptions about their silence, and by extension, the anger and disappointment those assumptions cause. I encourage you to celebrate what you do have right now: the knowledge that your husband made a difference in many lives and the lives of their families; that his generosity lives on in the world; and that many families' lives are whole and good because of him.

I encourage you to investigate whether you have assumptions that may not be true and are causing you great pain. Are you assuming the recipients do not value the enormous gift of life? Do you know that is true? Could they be demonstrating their gratitude by doing something or being the person they always hoped to be, rather than putting it into words?

Are you assuming that the recipients do not value your sacrifice? Do you know that is true? Might they be overwhelmed with emotions they never experienced before and are still trying to understand what has happened to them? Might they need time to adjust?

Are you assuming that they have made no effort to be in touch? Do you know that is true? They may have sat down to write you a hundred times but always came up feeling inadequate or unable to express their profound appreciation. They may not know these new emotions, have the words to describe them, or have the skills to express them. Are you assuming that because they have not tried to contact you after 6 months, that you will never hear from them? Do you know that is true? They may need a hundred rehearsals and re-writes to describe the new life your husband gave them. You could receive that letter when you least expect it.

You may not be able to speak with the recipients, but you may know others who suffer from a debilitating disease. You can imagine the faces of those people, and trust that your husband's donation directly touches them. The impact of donation is significant, widespread, and lasts far into the future. Your gift touches not just one organ recipient or their family but improves lives across the globe. New medical findings from research will impact thousands across the globe and create a ripple effect of possibilities.

Can you imagine the future and all the possibilities for happiness that have been sown because of your husband's generosity of spirit? Disappointment and anger result from expectations that things or others "should" be different than they are. Your anger might be justified but not in the face of assumptions that block the possibilities for understanding, forgiveness, and peace.

I wish you peace,

Lani



Lani Leary, Ph.D., specializes in work with chronically ill, dying and bereaved clients. Dr. Leary has worked for the past 35 years as a psychotherapist in private practice and in eight hospices across the country. Have a question for Dr. Leary? Contact us at [DFS@lifenethealth.org](mailto:DFS@lifenethealth.org).



HEALING THE SPIRIT



## Talking with a Child About Death: A Gentle Guide

No parent or caregiver wants to imagine a moment when they must explain the death of a loved one to a child. But having a plan for how to approach this difficult conversation can offer comfort and clarity when it's most needed. Here are a few helpful tips:

- Choose a calm, quiet space with minimal distractions.
- Use clear and simple language, avoid euphemisms like “went to sleep” or “passed on.”
- Explain what death means in age-appropriate terms.
- Answer their questions honestly and patiently, even if the questions are repeated.
- Allow space for all emotions. Children may show sadness, anger, confusion or even appear unaffected. All reactions are valid.

Remember: A child’s understanding of death varies depending on their age and development. For more guidance, [The Organ Donation and Transplantation Alliance](#) offers a one-page summary on how to talk about death across different developmental stages.



## Race for Hope 5K/1-Mile Run/Walk

LifeNet Health Global Headquarters | 1864 Concert Drive, Virginia Beach, VA 23453

The LifeNet Health Foundation is proud to host the annual Race for Hope 5K/1-Mile Run/Walk, a community fundraiser that supports our mission to honor the gift of donation and provide meaningful programs for donor families and transplant recipients.

As part of our continued gratitude to our donor families, you are invited to participate in this year’s race free of charge. Complimentary registrations are reserved for immediate family members of donors.

**How to Register (Donor Families Only):** To reserve your free registration and receive the official 2025 Race for Hope T-shirt and finisher medal, please register by September 1, 2025.

Contact:

- Aaron Janke, Foundation Assistant – [anna\\_janke@lifenethealth.org](mailto:anna_janke@lifenethealth.org)
- Will Driscoll, Foundation Director – [william\\_driscoll@lifenethealth.org](mailto:william_driscoll@lifenethealth.org)

In addition to participating in the race, there are other meaningful ways to show your support:

- Create a Fundraising Team - Rally friends and family to join you and form a fundraising team. (Individual registration required before creating a team.)
- Volunteer - Help us make the Race for Hope a welcoming, impactful event for all participants.
- Become an Event Sponsor - Sponsorships start at just \$150 and directly support the LifeNet Health Foundation’s work.

For full event details including hotel room blocks, race day schedule, and fundraising tools, visit the official Race for Hope website: <https://www.lifenethealth.org/race-hope>

We hope you’ll join us this fall as we celebrate hope, healing, and the life-saving legacy of donation.







## 2026 Rose Parade Floragraph Honoree: Nominations Now Open!

Each year, the LifeNet Health Foundation proudly sponsors a floragraph on the Donate Life Float in the world-renowned Rose Parade, a beautiful tribute that honors the legacy of a donor hero.

We're currently accepting submissions for the 2026 honoree. The selected donor's floragraph will be featured on the float, and two family members will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to Pasadena, California, from December 29, 2025, through January 2, 2026, to participate in this once-in-a-lifetime celebration.

**Eligibility:** We invite submissions from families whose loved one became a donor prior to January 2024 and who are available to travel during the dates listed above.

To have your loved one considered:

- Submit a biography (350 words max) highlighting their life, personality, and legacy.
- Include a high-quality photo of your loved one (individual image only).
- Review the full guidelines here: OneLegacy Donate Life Float – Guidelines, Timelines & Forms <https://www.donatelifefloat.org/si/guides-timelines.html>

All materials must be emailed to [DFS@lifenethealth.org](mailto:DFS@lifenethealth.org) by this date. Late submissions cannot be accepted due to strict external deadlines.

Questions? We're here to help.

Email: [DFS@lifenethealth.org](mailto:DFS@lifenethealth.org) or call: Debbie Hutt at 757-777-6134



**Deadline:**  
Aug 7, 2025

## Budget-Friendly Self-Care Activities

Summer often invites us to enjoy vacations, farmers markets, and outdoor gatherings. But for those who are grieving, these experiences may feel bittersweet or even painful. The first beach trip or campground visit without your loved one, the absence of their favorite dish at the family cookout, or the ache you feel on even the sunniest days, these are all common and valid experiences.

Grief can also make it harder to find time, energy, or financial resources for self-care. While professional care is valuable, it's not always accessible. That's why we're sharing a few simple, budget-friendly self-care ideas you can try on your own or with family and friends this summer.

### Create a Self-Care Collage

Supplies:

- A 4x6 or 5x8 piece of cardboard or cardstock
- Scissors
- Glue or glue stick
- Magazines, printed images, or photos (Tip: Check local libraries, thrift stores, or community "Buy Nothing" groups for free or low-cost materials)



Let your self-care be  
gentle, flexible, and  
uniquely yours.





## Budget-Friendly Self-Care Activities (cont.)

Instructions: Cut out images or words that reflect your version of self-care and arrange them on your cardstock. Use the prompts below as inspiration:

- Doing \_\_\_\_\_ (choose 2–3 activities) helps me feel cared for.
- Self-care on my best day would include... (consider the five senses: taste, touch, sight, sound, smell)
- On a meaningful day in my grief journey (e.g., birthday, anniversary, or favorite holiday), I'd like to practice self-care by...

Display your collage somewhere visible as a reminder of what nurtures your well-being.

### Physical Activity

You don't need a gym membership or structured class to enjoy physical activity. Even a short daily walk or gentle stretching at home can make a difference. Try a free YouTube yoga or dance class or head outside for 15–20 minutes of movement.

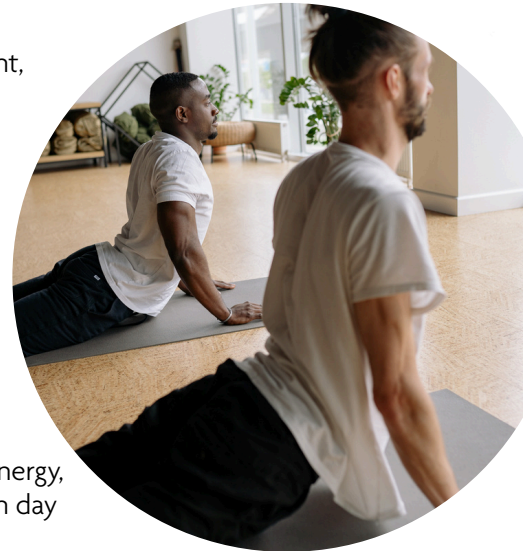
According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), regular physical activity can improve your mood, boost energy, reduce stress, and support overall health. Start small, just moving your body a little each day can be an act of healing.

### Stimulate Your Mind with Puzzles

Activities like crossword puzzles, sudoku, jigsaw puzzles, and word games offer a gentle distraction from heavy emotions. You can find them at low cost at grocery stores, dollar stores, or thrift shops or download free versions online.

These games can give your brain a welcome “break,” support focus, and be done alone or with others. If the weather is nice, bring your puzzle outside for a calming change of scenery.

Whatever activities you choose, we hope you find moments of peace, joy, and reflection this summer. Grief is not linear and neither is healing. Let your self-care be gentle, flexible, and uniquely yours.



*Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time.*

— John Lebbcock