

Activity: Planting Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: Bereaved

## TH Activity Plan – Bulb Lasagne Planting

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### Materials

Potting tidy trays

Soil

Grit/gravel for drainage

Terracotta pots (bowl shape works well for this)

Bulbs (e.g. snowdrops, dwarf daffodils, dwarf tulips, dwarf iris)

Bedding plants (e.g. viola)

Labels, markers  
Watering cans, gloves, wipes

**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will plant a spring bulb lasagne in a terracotta pot, with bedding plants on top, in memory of someone who has died.

### THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Process grief in a mindful, reflective manner/activity; reconnect with the life cycle; use nature connections for healing; use mindfulness techniques

**Physical:** Increase exercise using gross and fine motor activities planting bulbs

**Psychological/Emotional:** Reflect on loss, sitting 'with' grief in a positive active way; use coping mechanisms for restoring hope for the future; reduce feelings of isolation/powerlessness

**Sensory:** Recognize interoception internal signals related to loss (sadness, bewilderment, aching) & respond in a positive manner; use sensory inputs of gardening for activity that is aesthetically pleasing

**Social:** Manage social anxiety; share experience of loss with other participants; share memories of loved ones

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials, set up tables/ potting tidy stations with required materials.
2. Facilitator begins session by sharing some background on how/ why gardening can be a helpful & healing activity for grief. If appropriate, the facilitator can share a personal story about why/how gardening has helped them after someone special has died. Sharing a personal story can be very powerful and impactful at this point.
3. Facilitator demonstrates the activity from front of room – talking participants through it as they copy/ join in.
4. Mix soil with hands to remove lumps. Mix grit into soil for drainage.
5. Layer plant bulbs according to size and time they will appear in the spring e.g. layer of tulips, layer of daffodils, layer of snowdrops. The depth planted will depend on the size of the bulb & recommended depth to plant.
6. Add bedding plants to top of planter.
7. Add intentional labelling as a memorial to the special person who as died providing a moment of reflection.
8. Watering, discussions & comments occur throughout.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** The use of therapeutic horticulture to support individuals experiencing grief can be effective. When someone is bereaved, the challenges of daily living can seem insurmountable. After initial outpourings of support and attention when somebody dies, bereaved individuals often report a sense of being marginalized, of being isolated and ‘stuck’, required to ‘move on’ by society’s discomfort which jars with their own need to grieve in a non-linear way. (Divine, 2017). They report feelings of anger, loss of hope (some express suicidal tendencies) and loss of control as the world continues to turn without their loved one in it. Grief can trigger mental health issues like depression and anxiety as well as physical symptoms like lack of strength or stamina or shortness of breath.

Therapeutic gardening activities for grief: **Planting a bulb lasagne** in memory of someone who has died can be a healing, hopeful activity. The hands-on activity can help restore peaceful connections with the rhythms and patterns of the lifecycle to provide hope for the future. Participants can plant the bulbs in the autumn with hopeful intention for a movement *through* grief as the season change. When spring comes and the bulbs begin to sprout and bloom, there is a conscious memory of planting them when in a different phase of grief and therefore represents a journey and a connection with that grieving, healing process as well as a reconnection with nature and the life cycle – which can feel interrupted and extremely painful, especially after traumatic loss.

Having something pretty and attractive to look at initially (with the bedding plant on top of the bulbs) can be a helpful, healing visual ‘memento’ of the person who has died.

When someone dies, bereaved people can often feel like they want to go back in time not forward. The movement of the seasons can be a painful reminder that the world continues to turn without their loved one in it. Therapeutic horticulture can be an effective treatment model for grief with the combination of gardening metaphor and physical, practical work, helping loss to be absorbed in a way that feels safe and manageable, both as a sidestep to and a reflection of personal pain.

Gardening enables an individual to be simultaneously IN the moment, in a physical, active, mindful way, whilst always looking towards the future. In simplest terms, when a seed (or bulb) is planted it is an investment in a flower or vegetable of the future. It is an investment in a tomorrow and a simple act of faith which can be very empowering.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.** Supervision is needed with children. It is not recommended for people whose cognitive function is diminished and where soil/bulbs might be ingested. Many bulbs are poisonous so consideration of who will be participating and their ability to understand and manage bulbs in a safe manner is required.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** Recommended bulbs: snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*), dwarf daffodils (*Narcissus* spp.), dwarf tulips (*Tulipa* ‘pulchella’ or ‘batalini-linifolia’), and dwarf iris (*Iris pumila* and *Iris reticulata*). Alternative summer bulbs that can be used: small varieties of dahlia (*Dahlia pinnata*) sparaxis (*Sparaxis bulbifera*), ixia (*Ixia* spp.) (corn lilies). Dwarf ornamental plant varieties grow well in compact spaces like containers.

#### **REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

Divine, M. (2017). *It’s ok not to be ok: Meeting grief and loss in a culture that doesn’t understand*. Sounds True Inc. Florida Horticulture for Health Network. (2024). [Grief and bereaved populations and programs](#). Resource Hub. Patterson, P., McDonald, F.E.J., Kelly-Dalgety, E. et al. (2021). Development and evaluation of the Good Grief program for young people bereaved by familial cancer. *BMC Palliative Care*, 20(1), 64.

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