New Hope for Kids

Dave Joswick knows what the face of grief looks like. He lost his youngest son, John, at the age of 16 to leukemia. Joswick says he tried for years to find the good in John's death. Then he found his answer.

Joswick owned a software company and was involved in local charity work. One of the organizations he worked with was the Hospice of Central Florida. When the organization was sold in 1996, Joswick convinced the new owners to give him some seed money to start a grief program for kids. Three years later, New Hope for Kids was up and running, and in 2000 Joswick left the private sector and took over as executive director.

"I really enjoyed working with the kids. I can identify with them," he says.

Inside the small house on Maitland Avenue is a refuge for families coping with the loss of a loved one, whether through illness or by suicide, murder or other special circumstances. The home's walls are crowded with paintings and pictures of loved ones who have passed. Themed rooms are used to help cope with the grieving process. There's the Hurricane Room, a padded room where children are free to express their feelings. Boxing, kicking, screaming and pounding fists into the padded walls are encouraged. Children write in journals or make memory books to keep the memory of their loved one alive.

The staff at New Hope for Kids

While adults may push away the need for grieving and subscribe to "out of sight, out of mind," children need to get their feelings out. —Dave Joswick, founder

While adults may push away the need for grieving and subscribe to "out of sight, out of mind," Joswick says children need to get their feelings out. He says when someone dies in the family and there are children involved, "the children are petrified that someone else is going to die."

New Hope for Kids moves the entire family through the grieving process. One night every other week for a year, two groups of families work with counselors to talk about their pain, anger and sorrow. Joswick says families are encouraged to attend for one year so they can work through celebrating different anniversaries, birthdays and holidays without their loved one.

"[Author] Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life*—this is the epitome of it here. It really is—look for the good. There is a good side to this. Take this terrible experience and there's some good, and you are going to benefit from it [and] your kids are going to benefit from it," Joswick explains.

Joswick tells how one boy was so moved by his experience at New Hope that he wanted to come back and help others. He told his mom, "I really want to stay longer because I see these new kids coming in and I know how I felt when Dad died and how much better I feel. I think I can help them understand better and how it's going to get better."

New Hope's sister program, the Children's Wish Program, helps grant about 50 wishes a year for seriously ill children. Wishes include cruises or computers, a new pet, a chance to see snow for the first time or even to meet the President of the United States. To date, both organizations have helped 3,000 families get their lives back on track.

New Hope is in the process of building a new home on Wymore Road so that even more families may take advantage of the programs offered.

"This really works. It has value in the community," Joswick says. "The more families we serve, the more people in the community see what we do and who we help."