A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

“No winter lasts forever; no spring skips its turn.” —Hal Borland

Welcome to this issue of our Caring Connections newsletter. The transition from summer to fall to winter is poignant and can be a time of melancholy for those grieving the loss of someone dear. Shorter days, darker and longer nights compel introspection and for many, feelings of dread and loneliness. Anticipating the winter holidays without the one who died can be distressing, as the world and all its rhythms have been forever changed by this death.

We hope to reassure you that this is a normal experience and one of the difficult but necessary changes that enable the new life to emerge. In that spirit of reassurance and support, we invite you to this year’s Grief and the Holidays: Finding Warmth in Winter event featuring Sean Covey, New York Times best selling author and acclaimed speaker. Please join us Tuesday, November 10, at 7:00 pm in the University of Utah College of Nursing Annette Poulson Cumming Building. Grief and the Holidays is an opportunity to gain support and ideas for managing grief through the winter holidays, and to listen to edifying words and uplifting music in the presence of others who understand. We extend our appreciation to Larkin Mortuary for their generous support of this annual Caring Connections tradition.

Please read this issue for articles to support you in your grief, information about our winter grief support groups and our research studies, and more details about Grief and the Holidays on the back page of this newsletter.

“I pray this winter be gentle and kind—a season of rest from the wheel of the mind.” —John Geddes

Warmest wishes,

Kathie Supiano, PhD, Director
To register for any class or location, please call 801.585.9522.

There is a participation fee of $50. If this fee is a hardship, please notify Caring Connections. Scholarships are available.

Should there not be enough people registered for a particular group, the group may be postponed.

SALT LAKE CITY
Wednesday, January 13th and ends on Wednesday, March 2nd from 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm
Weekly meetings on Wednesday evenings for 8 weeks
University of Utah College of Nursing
Annette Poulson Cumming Building
10 South 2000 East

MIDVALE
Thursday, January 14th and ends on Thursday, March 3rd from 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm
Weekly meetings on Thursday evenings for 8 weeks
UUHC Greenwood Health Center
7495 South State Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84047

OREM
Wednesday, January 13th and ends on Wednesday, March 2nd from 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm
Weekly meetings on Wednesday evenings for 8 weeks
University of Utah Parkway Health Center
145 West University Parkway
Orem, UT 84058

LAYTON
Adult grief group for those adjusting to the suicide death of someone close beginning Monday, February 8th and ends on Monday, March 28th from 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm
The group will meet at Jessie Jeans Coffee House (which is closed while the group meets) at 5128 South 1900 West in Roy, Utah

SPANISH GRIEF GROUPS
Call Caring Connection for more Information 801-585-9522
University Neighborhood Partners
1060 South 900 West
Salt Lake City, UT 84104
This study sheds light on the end-of-life care needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The authors note that the number of individuals aging with IDD is expected to increase twofold from 2000 to 2030 reaching nearly 1.28 million adults aged 60 years or older. They note that, “Many practitioners are unsure if they should disclose to persons with IDD that they are dying…(that) complex family dynamics may interfere with this process, where family members for instance may not want to explicitly let their loved one with disabilities know they are dying in order to protect them from the distressing news. This is reflective of predominant societal values aiming to protect persons with IDD, which consequently removes the ability of these individuals to exert a sense of control over their own decision making, in this specific case regarding end-of-life planning.” (p. 383). The authors suggest that the optimal setting for goals of care discussions might be Adult Day Service (ADS) programs, and conducted focus groups of ADS programs and hospice providers. In their conclusions, the authors noted the serious lack of understanding between these programs and recommended promoting collaboration between ADS and hospice programs such as marketing, reciprocal education and training, and ways in which to identify existing policy barriers to address this gap in care for persons with IDD.

Participants wanted for Complicated Grief Studies

Adults who have been Caregivers for a family member or close friend with dementia, and are struggling with grief or experiencing distress since the death of the person with dementia are invited to contact Caring Connections: A Hope and Comfort in Grief Program to discuss participation in a research study. For information contact Kathie Supiano or Shawna Rees at 801-585-9522.

Adults who have experienced the death of a close friend or family member by suicide more than 6 months ago and are struggling with grief or experiencing distress are invited to contact Caring Connections: A Hope and Comfort in Grief Program to discuss participation in a research study. For information contact Kathie Supiano or Shawna Rees at 801-585-9522.

“Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark.”
—Rabindranath Tagore
My name is May Linn Nara. I’ve worked as a Registered Nurse primarily in community-based substance abuse and recovery, acute psychiatric settings for adult and geriatric patients, and home health. My military service drives my desire to work with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse & recovery. The culmination of these experiences led me to pursue specialty as a Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner. I am currently a second year student. I was encouraged to explore Caring Connections by one of my instructors, Margo Stevens.

Working with Kathie Supiano provided a rich opportunity to better understand the value and benefit of group work using an integrated approach. She also provided insight into research processes. I was paired with the very talented Paul Callister as my professional facilitator. He demonstrated how to create a safe and healing environment. He is truly gifted at working with patients not only from cognitive and affective perspectives, but via bodily sensations. He very patiently helped me make connections between theory and its application to therapy.

Grief is a common theme and I feel more adept in understanding what grief means to my patients. Grief is individual, yet universal. Grief has many unexpected emotions. Grief is a transition as well as an ongoing process of adaption. Without a doubt this experience will benefit me through my upcoming clinical rotations and directly into practice. More importantly this experience will benefit my future patients. I would like to thank the staff, providers and amazing patients of Caring Connections for this rare and much appreciated opportunity.

I was referred to Caring Connections by someone familiar with Kathie. I had lost several family members to illnesses over a fairly brief period and was struggling to function at all. I just kept working harder and harder to avoid the grieving process until work became unbearable and all of my time outside of work was spent crying or just “hiding” from the world. It felt like any type of enjoyment or laughter would never return and I wanted no contact with anyone. Things that previously gave me pleasure no longer did. I felt completely stuck in an abyss of sadness and was very angry because I felt like I should just “get over it” as everyone else seemed to believe—many of whom were not exactly subtle about it, either.

Feeling very hopeless, I had to force myself to attend the first session. And it was very difficult that first time. But, with a great facilitator and some wonderful participants, not only did it become easier each time, but I actually began to look forward to sharing experiences with my new friends. I began to understand I wasn’t crazy, or alone in my overwhelming sadness. Learning some great coping exercises and skills from the facilitator and the very helpful workbook, in addition to a safe and encouraging environment, made a huge difference in my ability to make progress with my grieving and take back control of my life. Although I’m still working through the grieving process, I no longer fear it and I’m actually enjoying my life again and feeling gratitude and hope.

I would recommend Caring Connections to anyone who is grieving for a loved one and identifies with any of the hopeless, joyless, isolated or paralyzing feelings that makes life seem beyond your control. I’m so grateful for the experience that has helped me begin to recover my laughter and future.
I worked as a Child Advocate at the YWCA for five years prior to receiving my MSW. After graduating from the MSW program at the U of U, I began employment at a long term care nursing facility as their social worker. I am now working as a social worker at Intermountain Medical Center.

I became involved in Caring Connections five years ago, through the Department of Health’s Zero Fatalities Program. I became connected with Zero Fatalities after I survived a car accident, which caused the death of my most beloved and closest friend. I was the driver and my dear friend was not wearing her seatbelt.

Grief support group(s) bring a sense of normal to the unfamiliar after the death of a loved one. I believe it offers comfort to those who need not only psychoeducational tools but also those who need others to lean on in their time of sorrow. Grief support groups offer information to help you as a group member feel educated and even empowered regarding your journey through grief. For that hour and a half of group, you have the opportunity to let everything that you’re presently faced with go and just be you, whether that be sad, angry, depressed, what have you. Often times you just feel better after learning from others who are also grieving and feeling their love and support.

Helping others in their grief means that I am helping my own journey in grief. I am still grieving the death of my best friend and thus, helping others with their grief not only brings me closer to her it also helps me to guide others along this difficult and trying path.

Kimberly Clark invites her readers on a journey starting at the beginning with her own birth and growing up years. Her path takes her from Southern California to Northern California, through different friends and different faith experiences. While she is young, she has two daughters, and then later during her second marriage has two sons, one of which is BJ… whose wish is to not be forgotten.

If you weren’t aware of the title of this book and the heartache that comes with it, you may start reading and find yourself lost in a young mom’s life of change, growth and love of her children. It is very relatable and intriguing. As a mother myself, I could picture my own children doing the same things Kim writes about in her pages. From school work to grocery shopping, from hobbies to heartache, a family lives and grows together. This family travels from place to place across the country with job changes and life changes and the hardest change of all—loss. Kim’s son BJ suddenly becomes terminally ill and his one wish is “Just don’t forget me.” This book is certainly a remembrance of BJ. Kim Cutler paints her grief with poems from her heart that are interspersed between chapters.

Parents who have lost children will relate to her story and will feel the connection she brings to grief in the heart of a mother. It is an easy, quick read that lingers on in the soul.
I keep reading in the newspapers about survivors of tragedy or death seeking “closure.” Yet no one really defines what closure means, whether it is possible or how to get there.

For many in our society, closure means leaving grief behind, a milestone usually expected within a matter of weeks or months. Closure means being “normal,” getting back to your old self, no longer crying or being affected by the death. It means “moving on with life” and leaving the past behind, even to the extent of forgetting it or ignoring it. For we who have experienced death, this kind of closure is not only impossible but indeed undesirable.

Closure, if one even chooses to use the term, is actually more a process than a defined moment. The initial part of closure is accepting the reality. At first, we keep hoping or wishing that it wasn’t true. We expect our loved ones to walk through the door. We wait for someone to tell us it was all a huge mistake. We just can’t accept that this person has died, that we will never physically see them again on earth, that we will not hear their voices, feel their hugs, or get their input on a tough decision. Usually it takes weeks or even months for the reality to finally sink in. We come to know—in both our heads and our hearts—that our loved one has died and is not coming back. We still don’t like it, but we accept it as true.

As the reality sinks in, we can more actively heal. We begin making decisions, and start to envision a life different from what we had planned before, a life in which we no longer expect our loved one to be there. We grow, struggle, cry, and change. We form fresh goals. We face our loneliness. We feel the pain and loss, but except for short periods of time, we aren’t crippled by it. We also make a shift in memory. Memories of our loved ones, rather than being painful as they were at first, sometimes make us smile or even laugh.

This healing phase takes a very long time, and involves a lot of back-and-forthing. We alternate between tears and joy, fear and confidence, despair and hope. We take two steps forward and one step back. We wonder whether we’ll ever be truly happy again, and often doubt that we will.

Eventually we realize we are taking the past, with all its pain and pleasure, into a new tomorrow. We never forget, and in fact we carry our beloved with us; he or she is forever a cherished part of who we are. We are changed—by the experience of having loved this person, by the knowledge of life’s transience, and by grief itself. We become different, and hopefully better, more compassionate, more appreciative, more tolerant people. We fully embrace life again, connecting, laughing, and loving with a full heart.

Still, there is no point of “final closure,” no point at which we can say, “Ah, now I have finally completed my grief,” Or, “Yes, now I have healed.” There is no point at which we will never cry again, although as time goes on the tears are bittersweet and less common. Healing is a lifelong process, one in which we often don’t even realize we are healing until we look back and see how far we have come.

“Closure?” I don’t think so. Acceptance—yes. Peace—yes. Hope—definitely. But putting a period behind the final sentence and closing the book on it? No! Life and love are much too complex for that. The story does not end; instead it awaits the next chapter.


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OUR MISSION

The mission of Caring Connections is to provide excellent evidence-based bereavement care to grieving persons in the intermountain west through clinician facilitated support groups, with particular attention to the care of families served by the University of Utah Hospitals and Clinics; and, in keeping with the academic mission of the University and the College of Nursing, to provide opportunity for clinical education in grief and loss to students in the health care professions, and to conduct research which promotes greater understanding of loss, grief and bereavement.

Visit us online at www.nursing.utah.edu/caring-connections
De-Stressing the Holidays

For many people, the holiday season can mean stress and frustration instead of peace and joy. Family issues, time constraints, finances, and a sense that everything must be “perfect” can lead to feelings of depression and a sense of feeling overwhelmed. In today’s society we are so inundated with visual images of the perfect family, the perfect home, the perfect holiday gathering, that it can be difficult to set realistic expectations for ourselves. The holiday “season” begins earlier and earlier every year. Stores are creating their holiday displays well before Halloween. The season grows longer and longer every year and our patience grows shorter.

The good news is we can simplify the holidays, reduce our stress, and create more quality time with family and friends.

First, we need to set realistic expectations and not compare ourselves to others. Whatever way you choose to celebrate is right for you. Sometimes we think that we must have things a certain way because that is how we’ve “always done it.” Really, it is okay to change to eliminate some things, especially if they are causing stress. For example, there’s no need to spend so much money during the holidays. The things that we desire the most: love, friendship, companionship, cannot be bought. Try a gift “lottery” or a white-elephant gift exchange instead of buying gifts for every member of your family this year. Or decide as a family that you are all going to donate to a charity in lieu of giving gifts. Then have a family meeting where you talk about the charity and your reasons for giving.

It is unfortunate but true that the times we are stressed tend to be the times that we don’t do what we know will help us. Even if we know what we should be doing, it doesn’t help unless we actually do it. Following are some strategies that can help us cope.

1. **Accept your feelings.** Feelings are neither right nor wrong. They are just feelings. We need to laugh and to cry. It is normal to express your feelings and you do not have to be in a good mood just because it is the holiday season.

2. **Reach out to others.** If you are feeling down or lonely, call a friend and go out for a cup of coffee. You may want to get involved with your church, sign up for class or volunteer. Even if you do not have many family members, you do not have to go through the holidays alone.

3. **Get organized.** Develop your holiday plan ahead of time when you are not busy. Set aside time for all of your activities and schedule it on your calendar. Schedule in all of the preparation time you need as well. This will help to avoid last minute scrambles.

4. **Know thyself.** Learn to say no if you need to. We all have limits. People really do understand when you cannot commit to everything. Don’t take on more than you can handle or you may become angry and resentful.

5. **Take time to breathe.** Spending even ten minutes alone just relaxing and focusing on your breathing can be a huge stress reducer. You can also listen to soothing music to enhance relaxation.

6. **Move it.** Schedule time for exercise. Walking is great exercise and the perfect activity to start an exercise program. Gentle stretching before going to sleep at night will promote relaxation and help you get a better night’s sleep. You will wake up feeling refreshed and more focused.

7. **Delegate.** You do not have to do everything yourself. Enlist other family members to take on tasks.

8. **Zzzzz.** Healthy sleep habits are essential. Try to get eight hours of sleep per night, and do not consume any caffeine after 3:00 pm.

9. **Healthy eating.** We are so tempted throughout this season to consume more than we are used to. Watch the sweets. Try drinking a large glass of water before the next holiday party so you will feel more full and not want to pick.

10. **Seek professional help if needed.** If you find you have a permeating sadness that you cannot shake or if you plagued by feelings of helplessness, anxiety, or despair, you may need the advice of a professional. Talk to your doctor and he or she can assist you.

Above all, go easy on yourself. It’s okay to make mistakes. Try and incorporate one positive idea into each day and then reflect on the day before you go to bed to see how you could improve or pat yourself on the back for a job well done. If you take the time to remember what is most important and seek support if you need it, you can truly have a happy holiday.

Okay, so you’ve given yourself permission to grieve freely, even established a conviction that it is your right as a human being. In order to process grief effectively, we can help ourselves by carving out something I like to call “Responsibility-Free” time. This is something very few of us normally do for ourselves without feeling guilty, but it is what every grieving person craves. The brain is on such complete overload with the new questions and doubts and fears about life after the loss, and our deepest yearning is often to simply have time to sit and think. The intense need to be left alone is a healthy and normal reaction. But there seems to be no end to the busywork and tasks that can occupy us, so we don’t have to consider these questions, not to mention well-meaning people who are afraid to leave us alone. In order to give ourselves the gift of “responsibility-free time,” we may need to plan time off from work, perhaps even find a way to get away from our usual home environment.

Why is Responsibility-Free time so important?

This is important because of the unending series of projects, chores, and tasks, not to mention family members, phones, computers, and TVs that try to pull us away and interrupt our thoughts. We must be responsible for nothing but our own comfort during these special times, so that the natural process of grieving can occur.

Remember, the purpose is not to get your mind OFF your sadness and confusion. The purpose is to have nothing to distract you from it all.

I know a woman recovering from the loss of both of her parents who had the means to treat herself to a resort/spa destination when she needed to be alone. I highly recommend this option because of the focus health, exercise, and pampering that permeates every spa experience. If you can possibly do this for yourself, even for just a day or two, make it happen.

But we don’t need to spend money to flee our responsibilities and have time to ourselves. Camping out, going for long drives, spending the day at a beach or zoo—I’m sure you can think of lots of ways to provide the physical and emotional distance that you need. However, keep in mind some suggestions for what you do NOT need as you seek this time alone.

Suggested “Don’ts” when you need to get away from it all:

Don’t fall into the trap of visiting friends or relatives. No matter how wonderful they are, their problems, day-to-day schedules, and mere presence will interfere with your ability to focus solely on YOU. Plus, the energy expended trying to assure everyone that you are “OK” will wear you out.

Don’t make excuses for why you can wait to do this. I’ve met many numbers of people who agree that this is a good idea, but have a million and one reasons why it can wait until it’s convenient. Trust me; this is avoidance, pure and simple. Stop thinking of the best time to get away and see if you figure out the absolute soonest you can get away. Treat this as a necessary step in your healing process, not as a luxury.

Don’t assume a few long drives in the country or a couple of extra rounds of golf are going to suffice. Under-estimating our own need for solitude is a very common mistake. I remember when I was at my most distraught, my grief counselor insisted...
I find a way to get time to myself and she didn’t rest until I brought her a plan to go away for an entire week. This was while my mother was ill and I had to hire people to care for her 24 hours a day while I was gone. Little did I know that I would later need more and more time for myself.

Don’t feel bad about asking people to cover for you while you’re gone. This one is really tough, I know. Remember all those well-intentioned friends and relatives at the funeral who echoed that refrain, “Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help?” Well, it may have been said at a time when you didn’t know how to respond, but you need help now. Let them help you by bringing in your mail and newspapers. Let them feed your fish and walk your dog. I’ll bet someone will even watch your children for you if you explain that you need some time to get away and sort things out after your loss.

Don’t get fooled by the excuse that you can’t leave right now—that “my kids need me” or “there’s so much going on at work right now.” Consider how they will manage if you don’t take care of yourself and you end up missing weeks or months of work due to serious illness brought on by stress. Or worse, the long-term impact on your family because you have a mental breakdown. Impossible, you say? Maybe so. But why take the chance?

Don’t go empty-handed. It’s one thing to intentionally insulate yourself from your day-to-day obligations and responsibilities so you can focus on resting, thinking, and healing. But bring some tools along with you when you go. Some people like to bring a journal and record their deepest thoughts and feelings in a safe place that only they need see. Others bring a book that touches on the subject of grief and loss, either as a catalyst for their own thoughts or a way to connect with their pain. Music is a wonderful and often powerfully evocative tool. A friend of mine took along her late husband’s favorite CDs and listened to them while she watched the sunset. Guaranteed to bring on a bout of serious tears, but she found this the only way to bring the pain to the surface. When someone close dies, we feel a part of us die, too. But if we are very quiet, so that we can hear what our heart is telling us, we realize that the human spirit can provide surprising energy for surviving loss. All that is required is time and reflection, and being good to ourselves.

Find ways to give yourself some responsibility-free time, and you will begin your journey back to the living.

Grief Digest: Hope, Information, Support; July 2006; Vol. 4 Issue 1

Helping a Teen Who Has Suffered a Loss

Adolescents and young adults experience the death of a close person in ways often different from adults. No longer children, and not yet adults, teens require a balance of supportive presence and respect for privacy that can be challenging for caring adults to navigate. “Being available to listen without judgment, when I need it” is the request most often heard from grieving teens. As younger children do, teens “take a break” from grief, and this can lead adults to think their teens are “just fine.” Frequent revisits to the feelings and thoughts of teen are necessary, however. In the case of a death in the family, parents may be grieving themselves, and have less time and energy to devote to the needs of their teen and young adult children. Teens, perhaps more than children of other ages, may feel the need to be strong for their parents. In the case of the death of a parent, teens are often told that they must now “be an adult,” and may be pushed to accept responsibility beyond their natural abilities.

Resources for grieving teens and their parents are available thorough Caring Connections: please call us at 801-585-9522 for information.


James’ Story: Helping Children Cope with Loss Due to Suicide. By Beth Vaughn Cole, PhD, 2002. (also available in Spanish).
The Caring Connections Memory Wall is on permanent display at the Annette Poulson Cumming Building in the College of Nursing at 10 South 2000 East on the third floor. The Memory Wall features 4” x 4” handmade tiles with calligraphic names commemorating friends or family members who have died.

This beautiful display is a lovely way to honor the memory of someone dear while supporting the programs of Caring Connections. Proceeds from the sale of the tiles provide scholarships for grief support group participants unable to pay the $50 fee.

We hope that the Memory Wall will be a special place to come and reflect on the person you loved.

REMEMBER YOUR FAMILY & FRIENDS—CARING CONNECTIONS MEMORY WALL ORDER FORM

Memory Wall (Located in entry hallway to Caring Connections) 4” by 4” Tiles: $35.00

Male:
First Name _______________________ Middle Initial _____ Last Name____________________
Birth Year ________ Death Year ________

Female:
First Name _______________________ Middle Initial _____ Last Name____________________
Birth Year ________ Death Year ________

Send checks and information to:
Caring Connections: A Hope and Comfort in Grief Program
University of Utah College of Nursing
10 South 2000 East
Salt Lake City, UT 84112-5880
CARING CONNECTIONS IN OUR COMMUNITY

We are proud to support non-profit organizations that support the care of grieving persons in our community.

LARKIN CHARITY GOLF CLASSIC

As a grateful past recipient of the Larkin Charity Golf Tournament, we were pleased to “man” Hole 6 and greet the golfers at this year’s event.

ALZHEIMER’S ASSOCIATION ANNUAL WALK

Caring Connections staff joined the University of Utah—Gerontology Interdisciplinary Program and the College of Nursing Sigma Theta Tau honor society in the walk to end Alzheimer’s Disease at Library Square on September 12, 2015.

AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE PREVENTION OF SUICIDE—OUT OF THE DARKNESS WALK

On September 19, 2015, we were among many mental health programs supporting the 2,500 people participating in the Out of the Darkness Walk. This annual event is sponsored by the American Foundation for the Prevention of Suicide-Utah chapter. Many of those attending are grieving the death of a family member or friend to suicide, and use the walk to remember and bear loving witness to prevent others for harming themselves.

UPCOMING EVENTS

SAVE THE DATE EARLY WINTER 2016: CARING CONNECTIONS WILL HOST

Hospice Foundation of America’s 23rd Annual National Living With Grief® Educational Program
MANAGING CONFLICT/FINDING MEANING – SUPPORTING FAMILIES AT LIFE’S END

The 2016 program in HFA’s award-winning Living with Grief® series emphasizes strategies to support families as they are dealing with a family member who is dying and grief after a death. This includes identifying and managing sources of conflict that emerge during the dying process as well as helping families find meaning at life’s end. This program is designed for health care clinicians, social service clinicians and others working in the hospice, palliative care, counseling, hospital, nursing home, funeral home or faith community environments. This year’s expert panelists are: Amy Boelk, PhD, MSSW; Kenneth J. Doka, PhD, MDiv; and Betty Ferrell, PhD, MA, FAAN, FPCN.

We will host the telecast at the University of Utah College of Nursing Annette Poulson Cumming Building, 10 South 2000 East, 84112. Details on date, time and CEUs will be forthcoming.

If you are a helping professional and wish to be alerted to details on this program, please call us at 801-585-9522 to be added to our listserv for professionals.

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Grief and the Holidays

Tuesday, November 10, 2015 7:00 pm

Featuring New York Time best selling author Sean Covey
and acclaimed violinist Julie Nelson

University of Utah
The College of Nursing
Annette Poulson Cumming Building
10 South 2000 East in Salt Lake City

This event is free and Open to the Public

Contact Caring Connections at 801-585-9522 or visit www.nursing.utah.edu/caring-connections