A RESOURCE FROM NACG MEMBERS

NACG
NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR CHILDREN'S GRIEF

NACG HOLIDAY TOOLKIT

SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHO ARE GRIEVING DURING THE SEASON OF FAMILY



A Season of Family

The season that begins Thanksgiving and continues through the New Year could be called the "season of family." During this time of year, regardless of which holidays you celebrate, what faith or culture you honor, there is an emphasis on family – a heightened awareness of the importance of family while we gather and celebrate. The reverse is also true, there is a heightened awareness of those missing, those not at the table or at the special gathering. It is important we recognize and honor our traditions and celebrate family while honoring the loved shared and memories of family members that have died.

The "Season of Family" provides us an opportunity to celebrate and remember those loved ones who have been important to us. During the season, we have an opportunity to decide as family units to hold on to past traditions that have been important to us, to let go of the traditions that are no longer feasible, and to create new traditions that honor the past as well as move us forward as a family.

This holiday toolkit is provided with the hopes it will provide ideas and inspiration for families to celebrate loved ones, those present and those who have died. We hope together your family will create conversations and activities to honor the holiday season and your loved ones.

Please join NACG as together we celebrate the "Season of Family."

The staff of the National Alliance for Children's Grief would like to thank the following organizations and individuals who contributed ideas and/or activities for this toolkit:

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Holiday Calendar

Thanksgiving Day, Fourth Thursday of November
American Indian Heritage Day, Fifth Thursday of November
The Prophet's Birthday, dates vary
Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, Dec 7
Chanukah/Hanukkah, Dec dates vary
Christmas Eve and Day, Dec 24 & 25
Kwanzaa, Dec 26 – Jan 1
New Year's Day, Jan 1

Thanksgiving is a time to show our gratitude and count blessings.
The New Year is a time to take steps for move forward.
Those holidays in between (Christmas – Hanukkah - Kwanzaa - other special holidays) are opportunities to celebrate faith and culture.

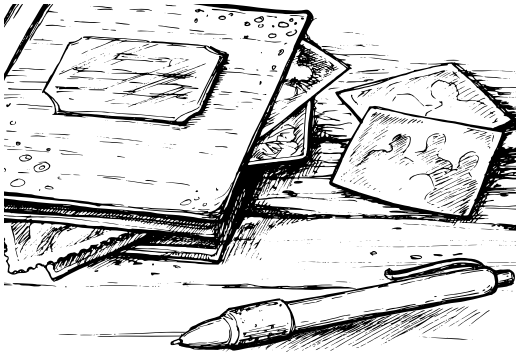
Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is a time for giving thanks for our blessings. As your family gathers around the table, it is a great time to discuss the blessings each of you individually and collectively have received from your loved one that died. Family members could be encouraged to write the blessings and place them in a special box, bowl or other container. Blessings could then be read and shared at future dates of significance.

New Years

The New Year brings opportunities to look ahead, anticipate new adventures, and plan our futures. During this time, it is wonderful to discuss how your loved one has prepared your family for the future.

Looking back, what are you taking forward from your time with your loved one?
What lessons did you learn from them?
What did they teach you?
What do you want to remember and hold on to?
How will their legacy affect your future?
What do you want future generations to know about your loved one?



Activities for the Holiday Season

Share a Silly Holiday Memory
Share a silly memory of your loved one during the holiday season.

Discuss Traditions
Are there any traditions that you want to change this holiday season?

Gift giving
If gift giving is a part of your holiday celebration, before the gifts are exchanged, have each family talk about a special gift the loved one has given to them. It could be a tangible gift or perhaps even more meaningful would be an intangible gift.

Incorporating
Ask family members for ways they would like to incorporate the loved one that has died into the "season of family." This could mean including a portrait or belonging to be a part of the decorations, positioning an empty chair at the table, setting out their favorite coffee mug, or an array of other meaningful items. Look for ways to honor and remember your loved one as you go through the holiday season.

Memory Candles
Purchase cylinder candles. Use a variety of materials such as self-adhesive foamy shapes, letters, jewels to decorate candle. Written words /phrases and scrapbooking supplies can be attached with Modge-Podge. Especially meaningful could be including photos or pictures of loved ones and family that can be attached with Modge-Podge. The family can choose a way to incorporate a family ritual when lighting this candle to remember your loved one.

Collage book
Staple blank pages to make a booklet. Have each family member make their own blank booklet. Create a book with the following:
Cover=Title
Page 1 - What the last holiday spent with the person who died looked like
Page 2 – What I imagine this holiday to look like
Page 3 - Gifts my special person gave me (talents traits, interests)
Page 4 – Future
Find a special time to share your booklets as a family.

Activities for the Holiday Season

All About _____
Place a notebook, journal, scrapbook in a place that is accessible to all family members through the season. Invite family members to write, draw, paste, thoughts and memories about your loved one. Choose a special time to share the book with each other.

Remember when . . .
Place a multitude of photos of your deceased loved one in a basket. Gather family members and take turns sharing photos and telling stories about your loved one.

Table Talk
Often when families gather for holidays, food and meal time are at the center of the gathering. It may be the time when it is most obvious that loved ones are missing. It also may provide the perfect set-ting for wonderful conversations. Clip out the questions on the next page and use as conversation starters.



"What is your favorite memory of _____?"

"What is a funny memory of _____ ?

"What was their favorite holiday food?

"What special touch did they add to the holiday?"

What could they do better than anyone else?"

"If you could say something now to them, what would you say?"

"If they were here, what would be different?"

"What do you wish they knew about you today?"

"What will you always remember about them?"

"Who in the family has a similar personality to them?"

"What was the best time you ever had with them?"

What was their favorite holiday or holiday tradition?

What special travel, trips, or vacation do you remember about them?

What special story can you share about them?
(Great time to discuss favorite foods, dishes and heirlooms that have been passed down through the family)

What is your favorite part of the holiday season?

What do you like least about the holiday season?

What are you looking forward to this holiday season?

Is there anything you dread or fear about the holidays?

What will be the most difficult thing you will have to do during the holidays without your loved one?

What can you do to feel close to your loved one this holiday season?

Discuss a holiday tradition that you want your family to continue.

Share a special holiday memory.

Tips for the Holiday Season

Give Yourself and Your Family Permission to Celebrate
Suppress the urge to ignore the holidays because they seem too painful to endure. It's important that children are given the opportunity to celebrate the holidays without feeling bad or feeling guilty. After all, they still have a need to "just be a kid," especially during the holidays.

Acknowledge Feelings as Natural
It is natural for children to experience a wide range of emotions when grieving the death of someone significant. Acknowlegde these feelings and assure your child that having these feelings are natural.

Emotional Expression
Accept expressions of emotion. Children may express sadness, pain, frustration, anger or other powerful emotions. Avoid minimizing their feelings or trying to put a "positive" spin on their expressions. For example, saying, "It's important tofocus on the good times you had with your dad," is likely to communicate that you don't want to hear a child talk about painful things.

Traditions
Plan ahead. Create new traditions, or choose to embrace the old as a way to stay connected. Involve children in creating new traditions. Come together and decide what traditions still work for your family, what traditions it's time to let go of, and what new traditions you can create together.

Memories
Include the memory of your loved one in your celebration. Encourage your children to make something meaningful, such as a holiday card or special gift, specifically for your loved one. Decide as a family where these items should be placed during the holidays. Your children might want to place them under the tree, on the fireplace mantle, or in their room. Some children might want to take these items to the cemetery. There are lots of ways to remember your loved one during the holidays, by cooking their favorite food, listening to their favorite songs, and taking part in their favorite traditions. Some people like to decorate and light candles in remembrance of their loved ones during the holidays as well. Some other ideas are: Memory books, quality time to share stories and photos, or creating a holiday item in their memory.

Give Back
Caring for others can be very therapeutic when you are grieving. Take time to volunteer at a local non-profit, or make a donation to a child in need this holiday season in the name of your loved one.



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Tips for the Holiday Season continued

Self-Care
Always remember to take care of yourself. Give yourself a break, surround yourself with a strong support system, and take time to recharge. Remember you have to take care of yourself first so that you can take care of others around you.

Lower Expectations
The holidays will look different without your loved one. Do only what you can – it's OK to change how you celebrate. Do only as much as you can manage comfortably.



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