

For Immediate Release

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GUIDING CHILDREN & TEENS THROUGH THE GRIEVING PROCESS

Tips for Supporting Bereaved Children during Children's Grief Awareness Month & Beyond

Stuart, FL – November 13, 2014 - Throughout November, which is [Children's Grief Awareness Month](#), the [National Alliance for Grieving Children](#) (NAGC) is raising awareness for the needs of children and teens grieving a death. Leading up to the holiday season, the NAGC aims to share insights about how to be sensitive to the needs of grieving children and their families now and throughout the year.

Although the holidays are typically a joyful time for many families throughout the country, the season of celebration can also be particularly difficult for bereaved children and teens. Often referred to as the "forgotten mourners," children who are grieving the death of a loved one frequently feel isolated and alone, while family members and friends overcome with their own grief may struggle to provide the necessary support that children need.

Since it is estimated that approximately one out of 20 children in the United States will experience the death of a parent or sibling before the age of 18¹, childhood grief is a widespread issue that can have a lifelong impact on the affected child's emotional well-being. In fact, according to a 2014 study² that surveyed more than 27,000 people, the unexpected death of a loved one is the most frequently reported traumatic event in one's life. With the help of caring adults most bereaved children not only survive but thrive after the death of a parent. However, for those who are in the minority, approximately one out of 10, their emotional well-being may be significantly affected and they can benefit from additional support and professional help.³

The following tips were developed based on research and practice among children's grief support professionals and volunteers. It is important to note that grief reactions in children are

¹ Griese, B., Talmi, A., and Law, R. (2013). *Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model*. Judi's House, Denver, CO. Unpublished data.

² Keyes, K. M., Pratt, C., Galea, S., McLaughlin, K. A., Koenen, K. C., & Shear, M. K. (2014). The Burden of Loss: Unexpected Death of a Loved One and Psychiatric Disorders Across the Life Course in a National Study. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, (171(8)), 864-871

³ Downey, L. (2000) annotation: childhood bereavement following parental death. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 41 (7), 819-830. And Melhem, N. M., Porta, G., Shamseddeen, W., Payne, M. W., & Brent, D. A. (2011). Grief in children and adolescents bereaved by sudden parental death. *Archives of general psychiatry*, 68(9), 911-919.

varied, wide ranging and unique to each individual. These tips offer a helpful guide for providing understanding and compassion to children living with grief.

Tips for Guiding Children through Grief:

- **Be Patient.** The emotions of the grieving process are natural and expected, even for children. When the death of someone significant occurs it is normal for them to struggle. Bereavement is not a problem to be fixed for a child; it is an experience they are living. Children need adults to be patient with them as they adjust to these changes.
- **Children Grieve Differently.** Each child's grief experience is unique. Age, stage of development, cultural and social experiences and his or her relationship with the deceased are important factors that shape the way children experience and express their grief. Reactions vary from sadness, anger, fear, guilt and even relief. It is important to listen to children, meet them on their terms and come to understand their unique grief reactions. Remember that children "revisit" their losses as they grow up. With maturity they will understand more, experience changing emotions and ask different questions.
- **Create New Traditions.** Rituals can provide your family tangible ways to acknowledge your grief and honor the memory of those who have died. Lighting candles, recognizing special occasions, sharing stories about those who have died or volunteering with a local charity as a family are some of the ways you can incorporate new traditions or rituals.
- **Honesty is the Best Policy.** Children need to know the truth. Most parents and caregivers would agree that they would prefer that their children not have to deal with the difficult truths that might accompany a death. Unfortunately, in doing so, we often create other problems. Although it may be challenging to share the truth about how someone died, honest answers build trust, help provide understanding and allow children to feel comfortable approaching us with questions because they know they can trust us to tell them the truth.
- **Don't Avoid It, Talk About It.** Grieving children often feel alone and misunderstood. Many well-meaning adults avoid talking about the deceased person in fear that doing so will exacerbate the grief children are experiencing. In doing so, children might feel as though talking about or even expressing their grief is not acceptable. When children feel understood by family and friends and when they have the opportunity to express their grief in their own unique way, they feel less alone and, in turn, fare better than they would otherwise.
- **Provide the Chance to Connect.** Greater than any education, information or advice we can give to children who are grieving is to allow them to connect with other children going through a similar experience. It is also important for children to have adults in their lives who

provide a safe environment that is consistent, teaches resilience and encourages accountability, while allowing children the freedom to express their grief.

- **You're Not Alone.** Parents and caregivers of grieving children do not have to be alone. There are many resources available online and local grief support programs for bereaved children. To find local children's grief support programs visit www.ChildrenGrieve.org/find-support.

During the month of November, the NAGC also proudly observes [Children's Grief Awareness Day](#). On November 20, 2014, children and adults are encouraged to wear blue to show their support for grieving children. In addition, many NAGC members, donors and supporters host awareness events surrounding this important issue in their communities. Both Children's Grief Awareness Month and Children's Grief Awareness Day provide an opportunity to ensure that bereaved children know they are not forgotten and that there is support, hope and healing to be found.

For more information about the NAGC, Children's Grief Awareness Month and Children's Grief Awareness Day, or to find a local grief support center visit www.ChildrenGrieve.org or visit NAGC on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NAGCnews or on Twitter at www.twitter.com/nagcnews.

About The National Alliance for Grieving Children

The National Alliance for Grieving Children (NAGC) is a not for profit organization that promotes awareness of the needs of children and teens grieving a death and provides education and resources for anyone who wants to support them. Through the collective voice of its members and partners the Alliance exist to advocate, educate and raise awareness of issues related to childhood bereavement. NAGC has more than 500 members across the United States who advocate in their own local communities and work to build relationships with local schools, social service agencies and after school care programs. www.ChildrenGrieve.org.

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