

A TOOLKIT  
FROM THE  
MEMBERS OF  
THE NAGC



National Alliance for  
Grieving Children

# NAGC HOLIDAY TOOLKIT

Supporting Grieving Children 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 NAGC as together we celebrate the “SEASON OF FAMILY.”

***The “Season of Family” provides us an opportunity to celebrate and remember those loved ones who have been important to us.***

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### **HOLIDAY CALENDAR**

Thanksgiving Day, Fourth Thursday of November

American Indian Heritage Day Nov 24

The Prophet's Birthday Dec 1

Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day – Dec 7

Chanukah/Hanukkah Dec 13 – Dec 20

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.

### **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 setting for wonderful conversations. Clip out the following questions 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. Acknowledge 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 to focus 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.

### **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.