

A RESOURCE  
FROM  
NACG  
MEMBERS



# HOLIDAY TOOLKIT

SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHO ARE GRIEVING DURING THE SEASON OF FAMILY



## A Season of Family

The season that begins with Thanksgiving and continues through the New Year is often called the “season of family”. During this time of year, regardless of which holidays, faith, or culture you honor, there is an emphasis on family – with a heightened awareness of who is missing at the table when we gather. It is important we recognize and honor our traditions and family while remembering the relationship and memories of those who have died.



The “Season of Family” provides an opportunity to remember those who have been important to us. It also allows us to decide as a family which past traditions to hold on to, which ones are no longer feasible, and what new traditions we want to create that honor the past as well as move us forward.

This holiday toolkit offers ideas and inspiration for families to honor the person who has died and the holiday season.

As your family gathers around the table, it is a great time to discuss what each of you individually, and collectively, have received from the person who died. We encourage you to share conversations and incorporate activities about your person throughout the season.

Please join the NACG as, together, we honor the “Season of Family”.



## Tips for the Holiday Season

### **Acknowledge Feelings as Normal**

It is normal 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 is normal.

### **Emotional Expression**

Accept expression of all emotions. Children may express sadness, pain, frustration, anger or other emotions. Avoid minimizing their feelings or trying to put a “positive” spin on them. For example, saying, “It’s important to focus on the good times you had with your dad,” may communicate that you do not want to hear a child talk about painful things.

### **Manage Expectations**

The holidays will look different without your person. Do only what you can – it is okay to change how you celebrate. Do only as much as you can comfortably manage.

### **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 is time to let go of, and what new traditions you can create together.

### **Memories**

Include the memory of the person who died in your celebration. Invite children to make something meaningful, such as a holiday card or gift, specifically for your person. 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 person during the holidays, by cooking their favorite food, listening to their favorite songs, or taking part in their favorite traditions. Some people like to decorate and light candles in remembrance of the people who have died 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.

### **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 you can take care of others around you.

### **Give Back**

Caring for others can be very therapeutic when you are grieving. Consider taking time to volunteer at a local non-profit, or make a donation in your person’s memory or honor.

## Activities for the Holiday Season

### **Incorporating Your Person**

Ask family members for ways they would like to incorporate the person who has died into the “season of family”. This could mean including a portrait or personal item 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 person as you go through the holiday season.

### **Creating Memory Candles**

Purchase cylinder candles. Use a variety of materials such as self-adhesive foamy shapes, letters, or jewels to decorate candle. Consider including written words or phrases, scrapbooking supplies, or photos of your person and family that can be attached. The family can choose a way to incorporate a ritual when lighting this candle to remember your person.

### **Making a Collage Book**

Staple blank pages together to make a booklet. Have each family member make their own booklet. Create a book and consider including things like:

- Cover
- Title
- What the last holiday spent with the person who died looked like
- What I imagine this holiday will look like
- Gifts my person gave me (talents traits, interests)
- Future

Find a time to share your booklets as a family.

### **Giving Gifts**

If gift giving is a part of your holiday celebration, consider having each family member talk about a gift your person has given to them before gifts are exchanged. This could be a tangible gift or intangible gift.

## Conversations for the Holiday Season

### **Share a Holiday Memory**

Share a memory of your person from the holiday season.

### **Discuss Traditions**

Are there any traditions you want to change this holiday season? Are there any you want to keep the same?

### **All About \_\_\_\_\_**

Place a notebook, journal, or scrapbook in an accessible place for family members throughout the season. Invite everyone to write, draw, or paste thoughts and memories about the person who died. Choose a time to share the book with each other.

### **Remember when . . .**

Place a multitude of photos of your person in a basket. Gather family members and take turns sharing photos and telling stories about the person who died.

### **Table Talk**

Often when families gather for holidays, food and meals are at the center of the gathering. It may be the time when it is most obvious your person is missing. It also may provide a great setting for wonderful conversations. Clip out the questions on the next page to use as conversation starters during the holiday season.

Additional questions you may consider discussing:

- Looking back, what are you taking forward from your time with your person?
- 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 the person who died?

What is your favorite memory of \_\_\_\_\_?

What was their favorite holiday food?

What was something they added to the holiday?

What could they do better than anyone else?

If you could say something to them now, 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 trips, travel, or vacations do you remember about them?

What 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 person?

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

Discuss a holiday tradition you want your family to continue.

Share a holiday memory.

**Inclusive Gender Statement:** In the context of this document, the use of the term “child(ren)” encompasses both boys and girls, as well as any other gender identity or gender expression that falls within the spectrum of childhood. This language choice is intended to promote inclusion and respect for the diversity of gender identities and non-binary genders.

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