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Managing Grief in the Summer Months

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With every change comes some form of loss and subsequent grief; the changing of the seasons is no exception. As summer quickly approaches, grieving families are faced with yet another round of changes and the potential for resurgence in grief reactions. *What will the kids do now that school is ending? How will I manage child care? Can we still afford summer camps or the pool membership? I can't manage the family vacation to the beach without my partner! How will my child manage, now that she doesn't have school work to keep her mind occupied? Should I try to keep the kids busy, so they don't have to think about their mom?*

These are just some of the many questions that a grieving caregiver may contemplate when faced with the upcoming summer and the reality of changing schedules and routines. Mindful planning, along with a healthy dose of self-care and patience, can lend grieving caregivers a greater sense of security and confidence as they approach the summer months.

The natural change of schedule in the summer is an opportunity to engage in new activities and to create new traditions or rituals to aid your family in the grief process. School vacation generally provides greater flexibility in scheduling—consider enrolling your child(ren) in a new sport, hobby, or club. New creative outlets can enhance the opportunity to engage in healthy grief work. Furthermore, these activities grant children permission to step away from their grief and to allow their focus to shift back to the self and one's own personal goals. Remember, as with all grief work, moderation is essential. Children will not benefit from being inundated with scheduled activities—down time is an equally important component of grief work. Strive for healthy balance when structuring the kids' summer schedules.

For children interested in interacting with other grieving children in a fun and light-hearted setting, Camp New Hope run by Delaware Hospice is a good choice. It runs June 19-June 22 this year, at Lums Pond. Contact evann@delawarehospice.org for more information.

Finding ways to keep your children entertained all summer, while also finding the time and means to tend to household tasks can be a major challenge. *Remember, it is OK to ask for help!* Many times our friends, neighbors, coworkers, and extended family members offer assistance, "If there is anything I can do...just let me know." This is a time when it is perfectly reasonable to reach out for support. Consider asking if someone in your network can help out with carpooling or chores around the yard. People in our support networks often do not know what we need, so it is important to speak up and be direct in asking for help.

If your family's typical summer traditions will change as a result of loss, consider ways you and your children can create a new summertime family tradition. Delaware is home to countless summer festivals and fairs, many of which are free! Find time to check out some of these events with your kids. Perhaps your family can participate in your special person's favorite summer activity, such as a trip to the beach or sampling his/her favorite flavor of ice cream (Rockwood Park will host its annual Ice Cream Festival the weekend of July 7-8!).

As the summer months trickle by, remember that grief reactions come in waves. It is important to acknowledge your own needs and to find time for self-care. When you find yourself, or your children, struggling with a bout of intense grief, acknowledge it for what it is, and find solace in knowing that the feelings will change repeatedly over time, just as the seasons do.

Please call us for information about Healing Pathways, our bereavement support group for children and their caregivers, or to discuss individual/family therapy.

We want to make sure that no child grieves alone.