

A TOOLKIT  
FROM  
THE NAGC



National Alliance for  
Grieving Children

# RESPONDING TO CHANGE & LOSS

In Support of Children, Teens & Families





The experience of change and loss can impact everyone differently and can cause disconnection for families. The NAGC is invested in ensuring everyone has the opportunity to share their feelings and feel validated.

Please use this workbook to process and create space for everyone's emotions and connect your family's stories.

#### **ABOUT THE NAGC**

The National Alliance for Grieving Children (NAGC) is a nonprofit organization that raises awareness about the needs of children and teens who are grieving a death and provides education and resources for anyone who supports them. Through the collective voice of our members and partners we educate, advocate and raise awareness about childhood bereavement.

The NAGC is a nationwide network comprised of professionals, institutions and volunteers who promote best practices, educational programming and critical resources to facilitate the mental, emotional and physical health of grieving children and their families.

**Our Mission** is to raise awareness about the needs of children and teens grieving a death and provide education and resources to anyone who wants to support them.

**Our Vision** is for no child to have to grieve alone. All bereaved children, no matter where they live or their circumstances, should have the support and resources they need to positively adapt to a loss in their lives.

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# How to Support Your Child or Teen: For Parents/Caregivers

**1 Listen to Your Child**  
It is important for your child to have a safe space to talk and share their feelings. Act as a sounding board and validate your child's feelings. This can help them to create their unique story. This story can even be used as a way for your child to support a friend in the future.

**2 Allow Emotional Expression**  
Allow your child to have a safe space to express their emotions. Your child may experience a wide range of emotions: anger, sadness, pain, shame, guilt, or other powerful emotions. Often, children are not able to verbalize what they are feeling. Avoid minimizing these emotions, telling them how they should feel, or trying to put a positive spin on things.

**3 Encourage Coping Skills**  
You can support your child by helping them find healthy ways to cope with the overwhelming emotion. Try out different activities as a family: deep breathing, yoga, taking breaks, going for walks, gratitude jars, artistic expression, etc. Help your child identify the different activities that work well for them and develop a plan for when these feelings arise.

**4 Practice Self-Care**  
Just like the oxygen mask theory, you must take care of yourself first before you can support your child. Implement healthy coping skills, develop a self-care plan, surround yourself with a support system and express your emotions--this way you can serve as a role model for your child.

**5 Understand Grief Comes in Waves**  
Both you and your child will have easier and harder days, and it is important to give yourself and your child grace to grieve. Be open about it if you are having a difficult day and encourage them to do the same, as this can help prevent misunderstanding.

**6 Establish/Maintain Routines**  
Children need routine and normalcy to feel in control, supported and comforted. Keep limits consistent and clear to provide a safe and secure environment for everyone.

**Ask for Help**  
**7** It can be difficult to ask for help. Stay connected with your support system and encourage your child to identify friends and adults that they can go to when they need support. Look for resources in your area that can help your child to build their social support with others who understand what they're going through.

**8 Make New Memories**  
Remind your child that it's okay to be happy and make new memories. Plan family dates: go for walks, visit new places, go to the movies, make new traditions, etc.



# HOW TO HELP YOURSELF: FOR CHILDREN

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS OF THINGS TO DO TO HELP YOURSELF FEEL BETTER WHEN TIMES ARE TOUGH!

## MOVE YOUR BODY

Move your body. Play, run, jump, wiggle, dance, hit a balloon or yell into a pillow.



## RECHARGE

Recharge your strength by getting lots of sleep, good food and water.



## SIT AND BREATHE

Take some deep breaths. Try blowing some bubbles, smell the flowers, or just notice how fast you are breathing and try to slow it down. Breathe out a little longer than you breathe in.

## SLOW DOWN

Try moving with super slow speed for a bit, sit in a quiet space or listen to soft music.

## POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Talk kindly to yourself like you would talk to a friend. Examples: "You can do this." "You're doing the best you can." "You will figure this out."



## STRENGTH

Do something you're good at, whatever that may be, and celebrate the little things. Examples: Making it to school on time, remembering homework, helping a friend, scoring a goal at soccer.

## FIND COMFORT

Choose an object or make something that comforts you. It could be as simple as a stone you find. Keep it with you to feel comforted whenever you need it.

## FIND SUPPORT

Look for people you can talk to when you are feeling down. Examples: friend, family member, teacher, coach or counselor.

## GET CREATIVE

Express yourself through art, writing, drawing, dancing or listening to/playing music.



## ALLOW EMOTIONS

Remember that it's OK to feel sad or angry. You do not need to be strong all the time. Crying is OK, especially when you are talking or thinking about your special person.

# HOW TO HELP YOURSELF: FOR TEENS

HERE ARE SOME SIMPLE THINGS TO TRY TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF:

## MOVE YOUR BODY

Dance, run, play sports, clean, stretch or punch a pillow. A little movement goes a long way.

## RECHARGE YOUR BATTERIES

Try to get plenty of sleep, eat healthy, energizing foods and drink plenty of water.

## REMEMBER TO BREATHE

Take some deep breaths. Start by noticing your breath and try to slow it down. Breathe out a little longer than you breathe in.

## SLOW DOWN

When it feels like everything is moving too fast, take a minute to move slowly, sit in a quiet space or listen to soft music.

## USE SUPPORTIVE SELF-TALK

Talk kindly to yourself like you would talk to a friend. Try saying: "you can do this", "you're doing the best you can in this moment", or "you will figure this out".

## IDENTIFY YOUR STRENGTHS

Do something you're good at, whatever that may be, and celebrate small wins. It could be as simple as making it to school on time, remembering homework, helping a friend or scoring a goal at soccer.

## STAY CONNECTED

Choose an object or make something to remind you of your special person. It may be something of theirs or a special stone you find. Keep it with you to feel connected whenever you need it.

## IDENTIFY SUPPORTIVE ALLIES

Look for the people in your life you trust who you can talk to and will show up to listen. You may need different people for different needs (someone to talk deeply to, make you laugh, and/or be a cheerleader).

## USE CREATIVE OUTLETS

Express yourself through art, journaling, drawing, dancing, or listening to/playing music. Remember this is just for you, so don't worry about how it looks or sounds.

## KNOW THAT BEING EMOTIONAL IS OK

Sometimes you just need to cry. Don't be afraid to release emotions and let it all out. Find safe ways to do this. Examples: cry with a family member/friend or squeeze a stress ball.

# RAINY DAYS HAPPEN

This activity provides a way to engage in conversation about the different moods they might have and what things might trigger these different moods.

## Conversation

**What is a mood?**

**How are moods like the weather?**

**Do you notice when your moods change? What changes them?**

**What does a “bad mood” look like to you?**

**What helps you when you are in a “bad mood”?**

**How can we help each other if we are having a bad**

## Instructions:

Just like the weather, moods change. A mood is how a person feels on the inside, like sad, nervous, scared, or happy. You could be having a bunch of happy-go-lucky, fun, sunny days and then all of a sudden a dreary, rainy, feel-bad day can come along.

1. Draw a picture of something that makes you feel like a dreary, rainy, feel-bad day.
2. Next, draw what makes you feel better when you are in a “bad mood”.



## Supplies Needed

Paper  
Something to write/draw with  
(Pen, Pencils, Markers, or  
Crayons)

## Goal

To explore how to manage different moods, just like how we sometimes have to make the most out of rainy days.

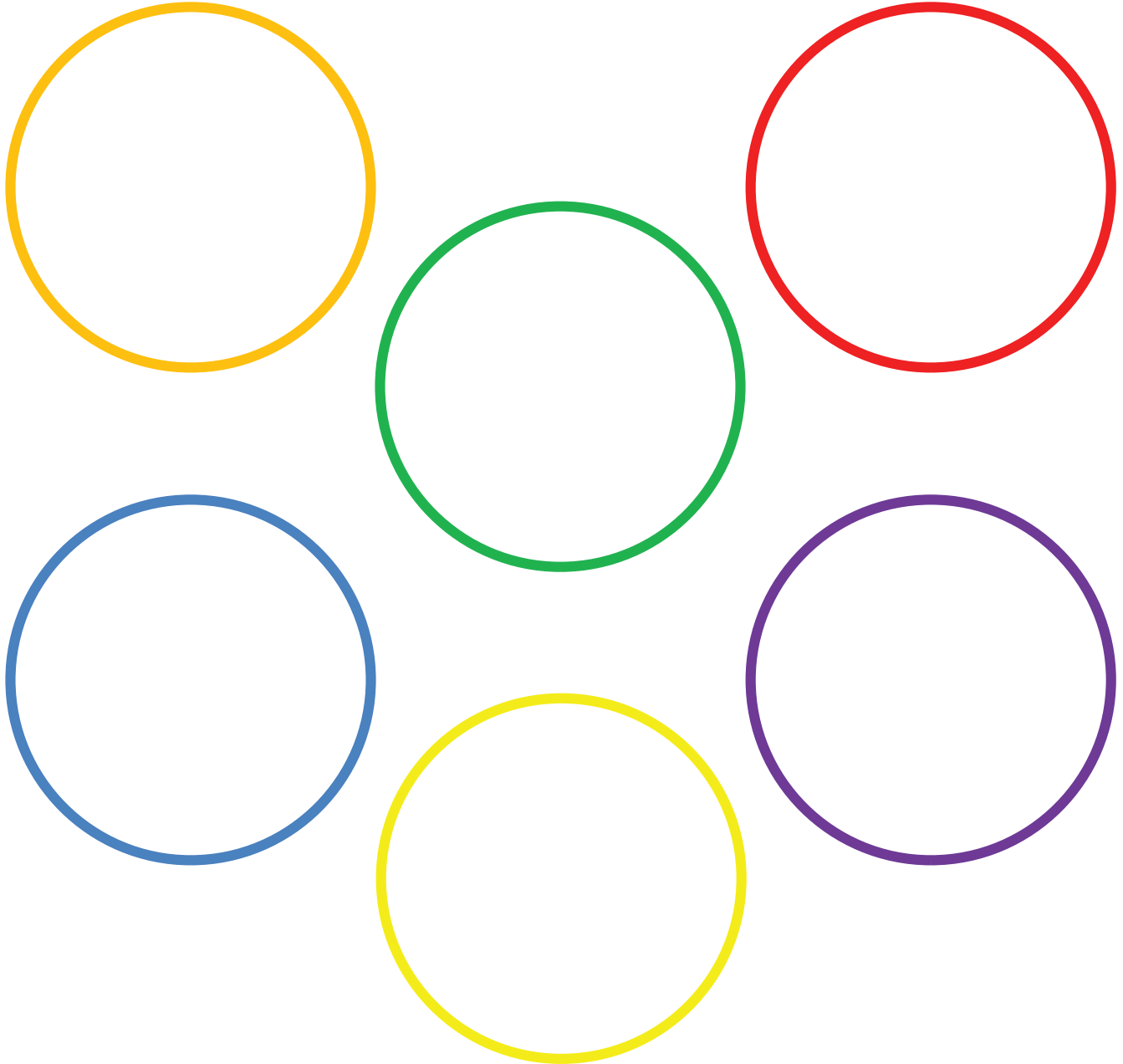
## Time Needed

Approx. 15-30 mins

# RAINY DAYS HAPPEN



# WHAT ARE YOUR MOODS?



## **Some moods to choose from:**

amused - angry - annoyed - ashamed - awkward - bittersweet - blah - bored - calm - cheerful - confused - cranky - depressed - disappointed - energetic - enraged - excited - exhausted - flirty - frustrated - giddy - gloomy - grateful - grumpy - happy - hopeful - indifferent - irritated - jealous - lazy - lonely - loved - mad - moody - nervous - numb - optimistic - peaceful - pessimistic - relaxed - restless - rushed - sad - satisfied - shocked - silly - sleepy - smart - sneaky - stressed - surprised - thankful - touched - uncomfortable - weird



# WHAT COMFORTS YOU?

Everyone likes to feel comfortable. But sometimes we have to work to feel comfort. When you are having a rough day what are the things you like to do to comfort yourself? Maybe wrap up in a blanket and watch your favorite movie or spend time with your best friend? Have you ever thought of what comfort feels like, tastes like, or sounds like?

*Some people may think comfort feels like a warm hug, the first day of spring, or having lots of energy.*

**What does comfort feel like to you?**

*Some people may think comfort tastes like Marshmallows, ices cream, chocolate, or a snow cone.*

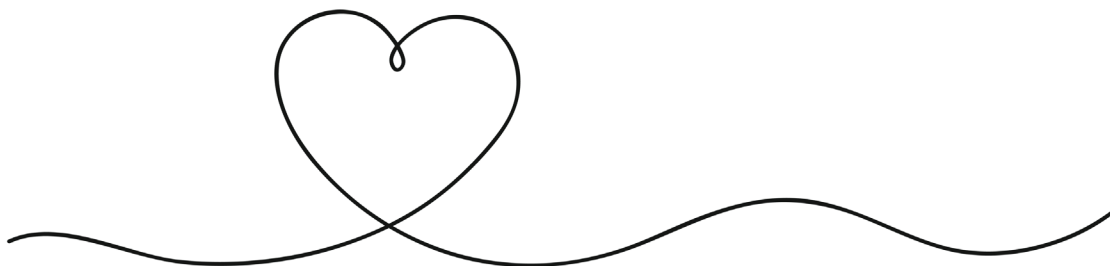
**What does comfort taste like to you?**

*Some people may think comfort sounds like a stream, walks on the sand, music, or the quiet.*

**What does Comfort sound like to you?**

*Some people think if comfort could speak it would say everything will be OK. You can do it, I'm here for you.*

**If comfort could talk, what would it say to you?**



## Bringing Your Fears to Light

If you were in a dark room and it scared you, what would you do?

You could turn on the light, so you could see if something were really there. "Shining a light on" (or talking about) scary things might help make them a little less scary.

If something scary were to really happen, how would you react? What would happen next?

Who are your support people?

Do you think these people could help you when you are scared? How could they help?

### Conversation

What is something you are scared of?

Do you get scared at bed time? What are some things that scare you at night?

What is something you can do that helps you when you feel afraid?

Share as a family some things you are scared of and find out what makes your family members feel better when they feel scared.

### Instructions:

Sometimes children have a difficult time understanding why they are afraid. When asked why, they might simply answer, "because it's dark," or "I'm scared of the closet." You can help your child by further exploring what might be scary to them about these things. This will help "shed a light on their fears."

1. Draw a picture of something that makes you feel scared.
2. Next, draw what makes you feel better.

### Supplies Needed

Paper  
Something to write/draw with  
(Pen, Pencils, Markers, or Crayons)

### Goal

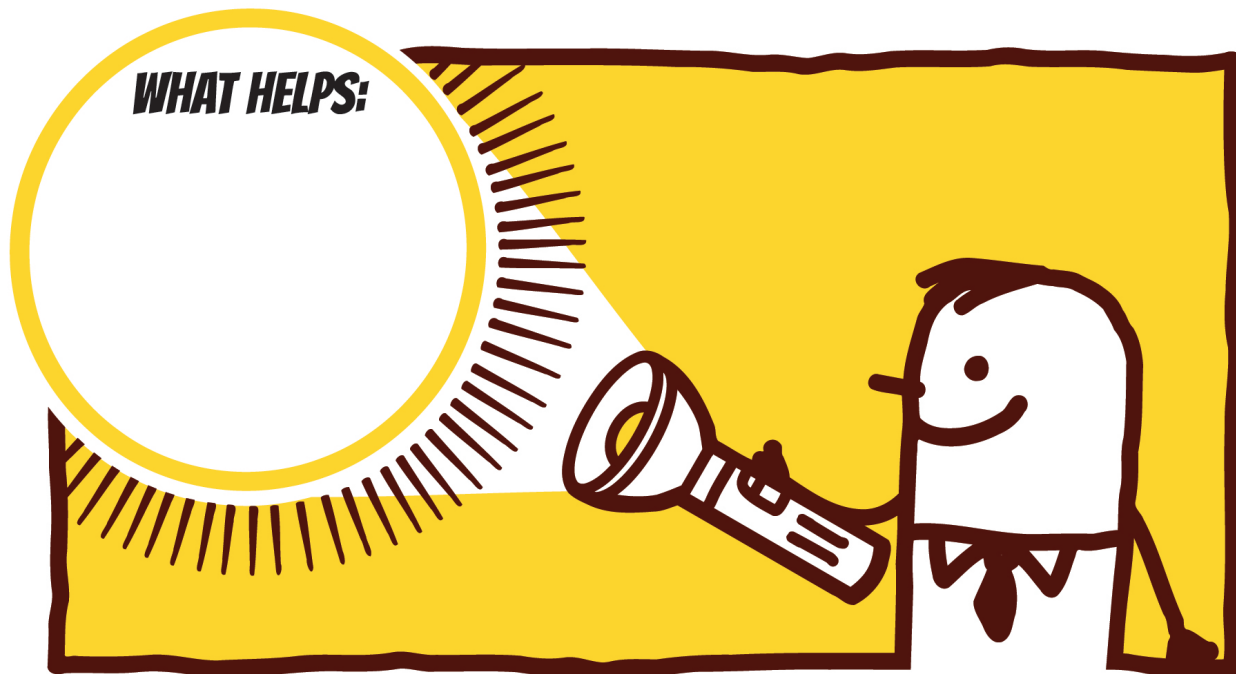
To explore fears that are "real" and fears that are "not real."

### Time Needed

Approx. 15-30 mins

# BRING YOUR FEARS TO LIGHT

Write down one of your fears and what helps you when you are feeling scared.



## Calming Exercise

There is a very physical component to fear. In fact, this is true of other feelings as well, i.e. sadness, anger, or frustration. This calming exercise teaches children a way to “calm” themselves in a very physical way.

Practice relaxation exercises with your child. Teach them to take their time as they take a deep breath, breathing in the smell of their make-believe flowers, and then blowing out as if they are blowing out candles. Have your child repeat this exercise a few times.

Individuals who participate in this activity will often find themselves calming down and learn a new technique for coping with the difficult emotions that grief might bring.

### Supplies Needed

Handout

### Goal

To explore ways to physically calm the body .

### Time Needed

Varies

### Instructions:

Sometimes children have a difficult time understanding why they are afraid. When asked why, they might simply answer, “because it’s dark,” or “I’m scared of the closet.” You can help your child by further exploring what might be scary to them about these things. This will help “shed a light on their fears.”

1. In the handout provided, color in the flowers and the candles.
2. Keep breathing in and out a few times and see how your body feels.
3. Next time you get upset remember this exercise to help calm your body down.

# CALMING EXERCISE

Color in the flowers and the candles. Keep breathing in and out a few times and see how your body feels. Next time you get upset remember this exercise to help calm your body down.

## Step 1:

Close your eyes  
and take a deep  
breath in - just like  
you are smelling  
beautiful  
flowers.

## Step 2:

Now blow all the  
air out - just like  
you are blowing out  
birthday  
candles.

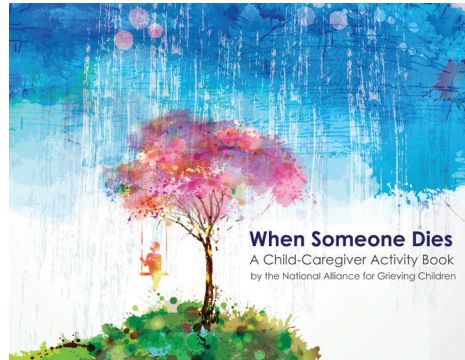


Additional Coloring.





National Alliance for  
**Grieving Children**



Available at  
**amazon**

The activities used in this booklet have been adapted from the NAGC's book  
*When Someone Dies: A Child-Caregiver Activity Book.*

The activity book targets elementary school aged children and provides valuable information to parents and caregivers about how grief impacts children. Contained within the pages of the book are activities for children designed to help them better express, understand, and cope with their grief. Each page also offers guidance about how adults can connect with their child on the very difficult subjects of death, dying, and bereavement.



*Special Thanks to Amy Liebman Rapp/Alex Cares for Grieving Youth  
for supporting this booklet.*

**Alex Cares for Grieving Youth®**, a creator of innovative initiatives and partnerships is a non profit foundation that partners with people and organizations seeking to ignite transformative social change in the fields of childhood bereavement, loss and grief and youth development. We have a demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, especially along lines of race and gender.