

Media Release

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Back to school after a loss:

Haven's grief support services help children to know they are not alone

(GAINESVILLE) - Some students have returned to school after a recent loss—a parent, sibling or someone else they were close to.

For children who may need special attention this school year, Haven Hospice Bereavement Counselor Vonceil Levine tells guidance counselors about Haven's grief support services. The free services include individual and family counseling as well as Camp Safe Haven, a day that brings children who have experienced a loss together to support each other. "When guidance counselors are aware of kids' needs, we're a resource for them," said Levine. "We're here to support children through grief and loss."

Richard Rowell, a Gainesville father of two, learned about Haven's grief support services at the hospital the day his wife died. "I had no idea Haven Hospice would be able to help me with this," said Rowell, who lost Jill after a 10-month battle with leukemia. "I wasn't aware of the support services Haven provides." Jill had been in remission, but developed an infection and died unexpectedly, which left Rowell wondering how to tell his seven-year-old daughter Carlie and two-year-old son Evan. Carlie knew her mother was sick, but her parents had done all they could to keep things as normal as possible at home and at school.

"For Carlie, her Mommy's death was pretty shocking," Rowell said. "I wondered what to do next." Levine advised him how to tell Carlie what was wrong with Mommy and what had happened. At Levine's suggestion, Rowell enrolled Carlie in the next session of Camp Safe Haven for 6 – 12 year-olds. Carlie met other children who had lost a parent, including a girl her age whose father had died. "She understands," Carlie told her dad.

"Our camps give children the peer support they need," Levine said. "They also help families to know that it's okay to grieve."

"The four parents who attended were all close in age and we had all lost our spouses," Rowell said. "We all had kids around the same age, so it was a nice connection to make."

"One of my concerns about taking Carlie to this camp was that she's doing well," her father added. "I don't want to open something she's not ready to talk about. At the same time, I don't want to miss anything she might want to talk about."

“It’s been good for me to meet with Vonceil to make sure I’m doing what I need to do for my kids,” Rowell said. “I feel like I’m doing pretty well.” He plans to bring Carlie to see Levine every six months or so, “just to make sure I’m not missing anything.”

Camp Safe Haven has served more than 100 children and adults this year and Haven has provided counseling sessions to 25 families with children. Levine also works with children at risk and gives talks to kids. For more information, contact her at 352-692-5105 or 800-727-1889.

About Haven Hospice

Haven Hospice is North Florida’s expert in end-of-life and palliative care and is one of three 2008 Circle of Life Award® winners nationwide to be recognized as leaders in improving the care of patients near the end of life or with life-threatening conditions. Haven Hospice has also been recognized as a Florida Pacesetter for its leadership in promoting living wills. Haven Hospice has served more than 45,000 patients and families since 1979 and has been licensed in Florida as a not-for-profit hospice since 1980. For more information, visit www.havenhospice.org or call 800-727-1889.

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