

Valerie's House Family Newsletter

A Message From Our Founder & CEO

Dear Valerie's House Families,

On behalf of all of us at Valerie's House, I want to say how grateful we are for your family being a part of Valerie's House. Whether it be coming together in person at groups in Fort Myers, Naples or Punta Gorda, or joining families online in a virtual group, we are encouraged knowing so many of you have found friendship and support at Valerie's House.

I know I am not the only one who is ready for a fresh start in 2021 and to move forward from so much that happened in 2020. For many at Valerie's House, 2020 was not just the year of a pandemic, it was the year that you lost your loved one. Healing and a sense of normalcy are not going to happen with a vaccine, or children not having to wear masks at school anymore. Your life is forever different. Most people cannot imagine the suffering that you have endured as you had to keep your children feeling loved and cared for during their unimaginable loss, in addition to a time of national crisis. What I can tell you is that you are stronger than you realize, and I know this, because you have reached out to become a part of Valerie's House. It takes a lot of courage to come to Valerie's House. I imagine some of the children in your families might not have wanted to come on that first night, and you might have had to coerce them a bit. I would also bet that many of those same children are now counting the days until their next Valerie's House group night, as they have finally found children like them and a place they belong. We are not ever going to tell you what is right and wrong about your family's grief, as no one truly knows your experience and therefore cannot make judgments. What we can promise you is that you will always have unconditional support and we will build you up so you and your family can see a future ahead of them that is bright and full of hope.

As a child of grief myself, I believe, like all of us at Valerie's House, that Grieving Children Can do Big Things. We consider it a privilege to be in your lives with you at this time. We look forward to a new time of togetherness and have some special group nights planned for you and your family to connect with others. Please enjoy reading a bit about some of our incredible volunteers and families who have come very far in their grief journey. They are here to let you know you can make it too.

Forever your friend,



Angela Melvin | Founder and CEO of Valerie's House
angela@valerieshouse.org



VH Birthday Celebrations!

January Birthdays

| | | |
|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| Kendall S. | Brennan B. | Caleb W. |
| Marissa B. | Tyrese G. | Edith R.H. |
| Matthew Z. | Noah C. | Kayden E. |
| Tatsiana S. | Moises Q. | Mia P. |
| Sam M. | Zara B. | Estefany R.H. |
| Dakota C. | Welsey D. | Dominick G. |
| Aniya L. | Lily S. | Arigana O. |
| Zane Z. | Steven G. | Julianna M. |
| Gregory J. | Leah S. | Nevaeh C. |
| Eljah M. | Ajden R. | Baylee W. |
| Julian J. | Gabrielle J. | Tyler J.F. |
| Sadie S. | Mackenzie S. | |

February Birthdays

| | | |
|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| Imarri J. | Samantha T. | Eislee T. |
| Auron A. | Alliana T. | Jude T. |
| Hadley W. | Keith B. | William W. |
| Isabella V. | Isabela B. | Jasmine M. |
| Carlisle W. | Layla B. | Lamar M. |
| Mya G.D. | Divana N. | Kylie J. |
| Frega T. | Brooklyn M. | Antwone W. |
| Sela G. | Joshua G. | Stella R. |
| Emma W. | Melany M. | Jordynn V. |
| Marc L. | Declan O. | Zhy'Eire C. |
| Paige L. | Giovanny J. | Necho L. |
| Houston B. | Isaiah H.D. | Max B. |
| Valeria B. | Christopher D. | |

March Birthdays

| | | |
|------------|-------------|--------------|
| Kesny G. | Sydney E. | Haylee C. |
| Kaitlyn S. | Tori H. | Nathaniel D. |
| Jason C. | Kaylee B. | Avery P. |
| Zada R. | Caden B. | John C. |
| Cianna C. | Savannah H. | Kiya L. |
| Jaglie S. | Sofia B. | Maya N. |
| George P. | Abigail S. | Mario S. |
| Max M. | Zoe B. | Ariana R. |
| | Savannah H. | |



Angela (left) enjoys treats from Norman Love Confections with Valerie's House teens.

Family Spotlight

Jeanne & Jason



Jeanne and Jason on a trip to New York City in August 2019

Favorite Family Activities

- Doing jigsaw puzzles
- Singing
- Traveling - Favorite vacation spot:
 - Hampton Beach, NH

Thursday night grandmother, Jeanne, lost her son to a drug overdose in May 2018. She has been coming to Valerie's House with her grandson, Jason, since then. Tragedy struck again when Jason lost his mother unexpectedly to a car accident earlier this year. Jason has gained self-confidence and coping skills through attending group night.

"Valerie's House is healing for both of us. It is a place of acceptance and understanding where others have felt loss, just like we have," Jeanne said.

Jeanne also said Valerie's House has made her better equipped to help Jason as he struggles with grieving the loss of both parents. Coming to Valerie's House has allowed Jason to focus on the positive side of things. In the future, Jason aspires to follow his dreams of becoming a substance abuse counselor.

"[I've learned that] I'm not alone, and I don't have to face everything on my own," Jason said.

Winter/Spring Group Themes

January



1st Group: Sharing the Grief We Carry
Connect with one another as you share and reflect on your stories of loss.



2nd Group: Healing Hearts
Despite the losses, together as a group, let's learn how we can heal.

February



1st Group: Telling Our Grief Stories
Create a take-home sensory tool that is a stress reliever and coping mechanism.



2nd Group: Scream Box
Practice a way to vent intense emotions like anger, fear, and stress.

March



1st Group: Colors of Emotion Puzzle
Answer questions about grief to put pieces of a puzzle together.



2nd Group: Addressing Our Triggers
Learn skills to recognize your grief triggers and help resolve them.

Group Buddy Spotlight

Tim B.

Tim is the Director of Youth Ministry at 1st United Methodist Church in Punta Gorda, which is what led to his involvement with Valerie's House. In the spring of 2018, three young girls in the church's youth ministry each lost a parent. Without any grief resources to provide them in Punta Gorda, one of their school guidance counselors gave Valerie's House Founder & CEO Angela Melvin Tim's information and mentioned that he may be a good point of contact for extending Valerie's House's services to Charlotte County.

Tim experienced the sudden loss of his father when he was a teenager and remembers feeling like he and his sister had nowhere to go to process the loss.

"We needed to understand then that being sad, crying, and having all sorts of emotions about it was okay," said Tim. "It's so important for kids to learn to cope with emotions in a healthy manner and have positive influences."

-Continued on next page -



Tim (far left) with some of the Punta Gorda teens.

Group Buddy Spotlight

Jennifer C.



After losing her father at just nine years old, Jen dedicated her life's work to helping others through a career in the nonprofit sector. While working with other nonprofit organizations in Naples, Florida, Jen had often heard about Angela and her work with Valerie's House.

"I was immediately drawn to it," said Jen. "I exactly wasn't sure how get, but I knew I wanted to be involved."

When Angela and Jen finally met, they were both excited to learn the other's grief story and discover their shared passion for giving back.

"It was just an immediate match," said Jen.

Jen joined the Valerie's House team in November of 2019. She is the Director of Strategic Initiatives and a Lead Facilitator and Group Nuddy on Thursdays in Naples. She loves spending time with Valerie's House families and typically facilitates the Teen group.

In her professional role, Jen focuses on expanding Valerie's House's reach through fundraising and relationship building.

-Continued on next page -

Group Buddy Spotlight

Tim B.

-Continued from previous page -



Tim was passionate about the Valerie's House mission right away and began spreading the word about the organization to Charlotte County hospitals, schools, counselors and more to get the new chapter up-and-running. It was his connection with the 1st United Methodist Church that

made it the meeting place for the new Valerie's House Punta Gorda chapter. Now that the chapter is operational, Tim acts as a liaison between the church and Valerie's House to help plan events for the families using the church's space, in addition to facilitating the Punta Gorda Middles group.

The Punta Gorda chapter now has about 17 families enrolled, thanks in large part to Tim's dedication to providing grief resources to the families of Charlotte County.

"Valerie's House brings these kids hope," said Tim. "It's a happy place where they feel comfortable and know they get to see their friends who—while no two losses are the same—can better understand what they're feeling than those at school could."

Group Buddy Spotlight

Jennifer C.

-Continued from previous page -

Jen has been integral in raising awareness about childhood bereavement and the Valerie's House mission, especially among her Collier County network. She often welcomes new and potential donors to the Naples house to give them an up-close look at what our families experience during group night and shares stories from her moving experiences during group with Valerie's House teens.

Happy one-year Valerie's House anniversary, Jen!



Jen (center) participates in the Virtual Hero 5K walk in November 2020 with her sons (right), Collier County Program Coordinator Mary Cross (left) and Mary's son (far left).

New Episode of Grieve Love Heal Podcast

In this emotional episode of Grieve Love Heal, we're joined by members of the Valerie's House community to discuss the signs they have received from their loved ones who have passed away. From dragonflies to actually feeling the touch of their deceased loved one, these first-hand accounts about grief and signs from their late family members are honest and bittersweet. Special thanks to Stori, Christine, Bernice, April, and Aman for joining Angela on this episode. Listen now on our website, Spotify, or Apple or Google Podcasts.

Listen and subscribe to Grieve Love Heal at valereshouse.org/grieve-love-heal or on your favorite podcast app by searching "Grieve Love Heal." Help the podcast reach more people who want to be part of these honest discussions about grief by rating and reviewing the show and sharing episodes that speak to you.

Have a topic you would like us to discuss in an upcoming podcast? Contact Alexa@valereshouse.org.

Spring 2021 Group Night Calendar

| January | | | | | | |
|---------|------|-------|-------|--------|------|------|
| Sun. | Mon. | Tues. | Weds. | Thurs. | Fri. | Sat. |
| | | | | | 1 | 2 |
| 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
| 31 | | | | | | |

| February | | | | | | |
|----------|------|-------|-------|--------|------|------|
| Sun. | Mon. | Tues. | Weds. | Thurs. | Fri. | Sat. |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 |
| 28 | | | | | | |

| | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| | Monday Sibling Naples (1st & 3rd) |
| | Monday PG (1st & 3rd) |
| | Monday FM (2nd & 4th) |
| | Tuesday FM (1st and 3rd) |
| | Tuesday Sibling FM (2nd & 4th) |
| | Wednesday FM (1st and 3rd) |
| | Wednesday Naples (1st & 3rd) |
| | Wednesday FM (2nd and 4th) |
| | Thursday FM (1st and 3rd) |
| | Thursday Naples (2nd and 4th) |

| March | | | | | | |
|-------|------|-------|-------|--------|------|------|
| Sun. | Mon. | Tues. | Weds. | Thurs. | Fri. | Sat. |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 |
| 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | | | |

6 Needs of Mourning

Many people have heard of the stages of grief, but more recently, those who understand loss and grieving have begun to see things differently.

Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. writes, "Everyone grieves and mourns differently, but there are some steps along the way that we all must encounter."

We at Valerie's House agree. According to Dr. Wolfelt, meeting the six needs of mourning one day at a time will help you move toward a life of meaning and purpose again.

Acknowledge the reality of the death

Embrace the pain of the loss

Remember the person who died

Develop a new self-identity

Search for meaning

Receive ongoing support from others

Learn more about each of the six needs in Dr. Wolfelt's book, *The Journey Through Grief: Reflections On Healing*, or at Centerforloss.com.

Happy New Year!

For a complete list of Valerie's House programs, visit Valeriahouse.org

Join our Valerie's House Private Family FB Page facebook.com/groups/valeriahousefamilies