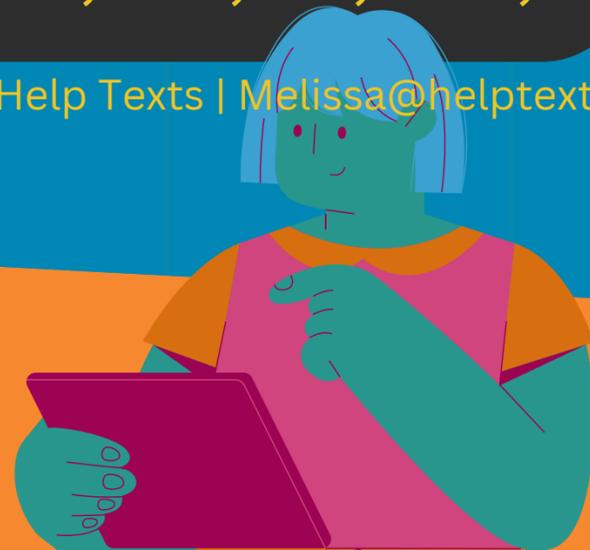# DIGITAL SUPPORT FOR GRIEVING YOUTH: THE GRIEF-TECH ERA HAS ARRIVED

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# TODAY'S DIGITAL REALITY

- Digital spaces aren't just tools - they're essential parts of our youth's identity
- A teenager averages 9+ hours daily in digital spaces
- Grief happens 24/7, not just during support hours
- Today's youth are digital natives and need support where they naturally go to express themselves
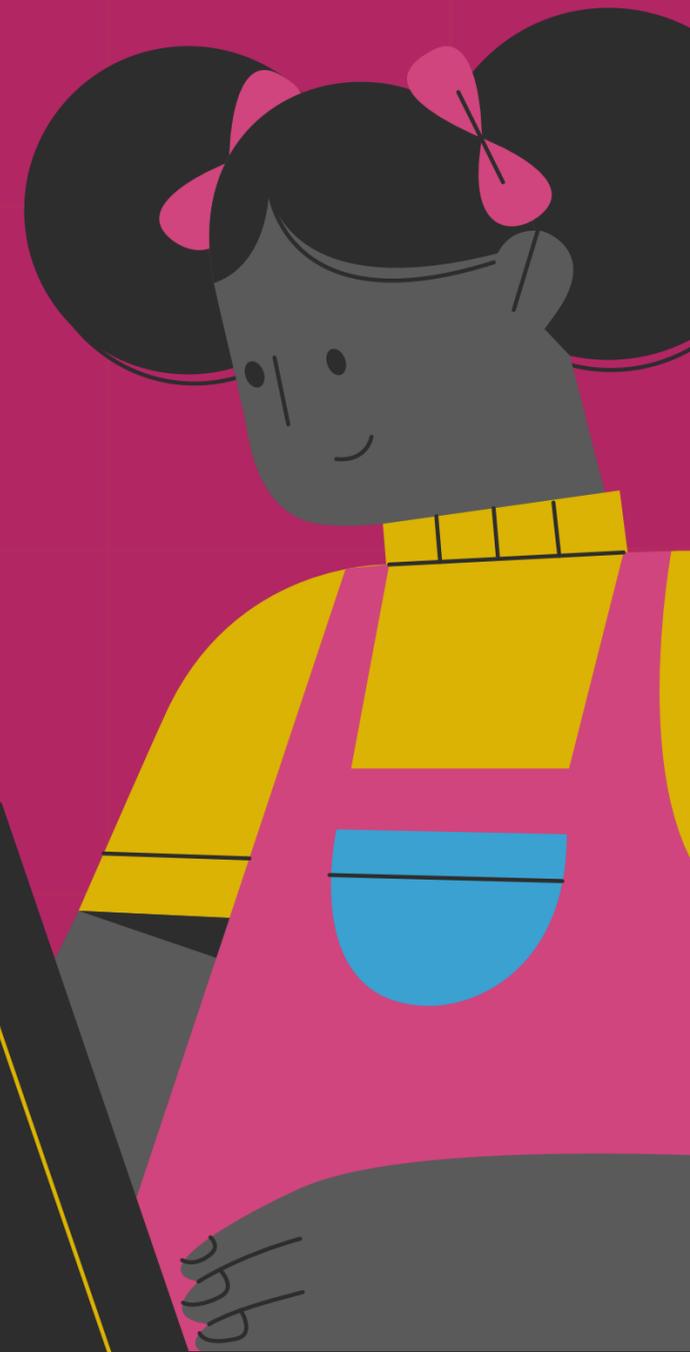
# WHY DIGITAL GRIEF EXPRESSION WORKS

Allows control over when and how much to share

Provides safe distance while processing intense emotions

Enables connection with peers who understand

Offers multiple ways to remember and honor loved ones

Creates space for both public and private grief

# EXAMPLES OF DIGITAL GRIEF SPACES

| Memorial FB/IG Accounts | TikTok, IG, Snap, Kik, etc. | Online support groups |
|---|---|---|
| Websites | Apps | Gaming Communities |
| Texting | AR/VR | LLMs/ AI /GEN AI/ Griefbots |

# MORE ABOUT TEXTING

- Example: Help Texts

- Ages 13+

- One-way grief education that includes coping strategies, ritual ideas, and vetted resources

- Personalized and customized based on age, relationship, and time since death

- Clinically sound, rooted in current theoretical bereavement and mental health models

- 100+ experts helped to curate the texts, and many specialize in childhood bereavement

- Acknowledges important dates  (birthdays, holidays, deathiversaries)

- 24/7 crisis monitoring and intervention to 988

# MORE ABOUT AR/VR

- Augmented Reality
- You're still in the real world but with digital additions
- Can be accessed via phones, headsets, or projectors
- Example: Halograms, or seeing your loved one through your phone at a real location

- Virtual Reality
- You're in a digitally designed space
- Access via special headsets or eyewea
- Example: Go into a created situation or memory with your simulated loved one (ex. mother Jang Ji-Sun meeting with her daughter in the documentary Meeting You)

# MORE ABOUT LLMS

- Example AI: ChatGPT, Gemini, Grok, ClaudeAi, Perplexity

- Youth are using LLMs for companionship and mental health support (1:8)

- People are using LLMS to manage grief, process emotions, coping strategies, and address "unfinished business."

- Ethical concerns
  - Safety - it isn't designed to be a grief counselor
  - Privacy and Data
  - Informed consent
  - Safeguards/crisis response

- Teach Prompting: "What would you suggest to a 9-year-old who is having a hard time sleeping after the death of their mom?"
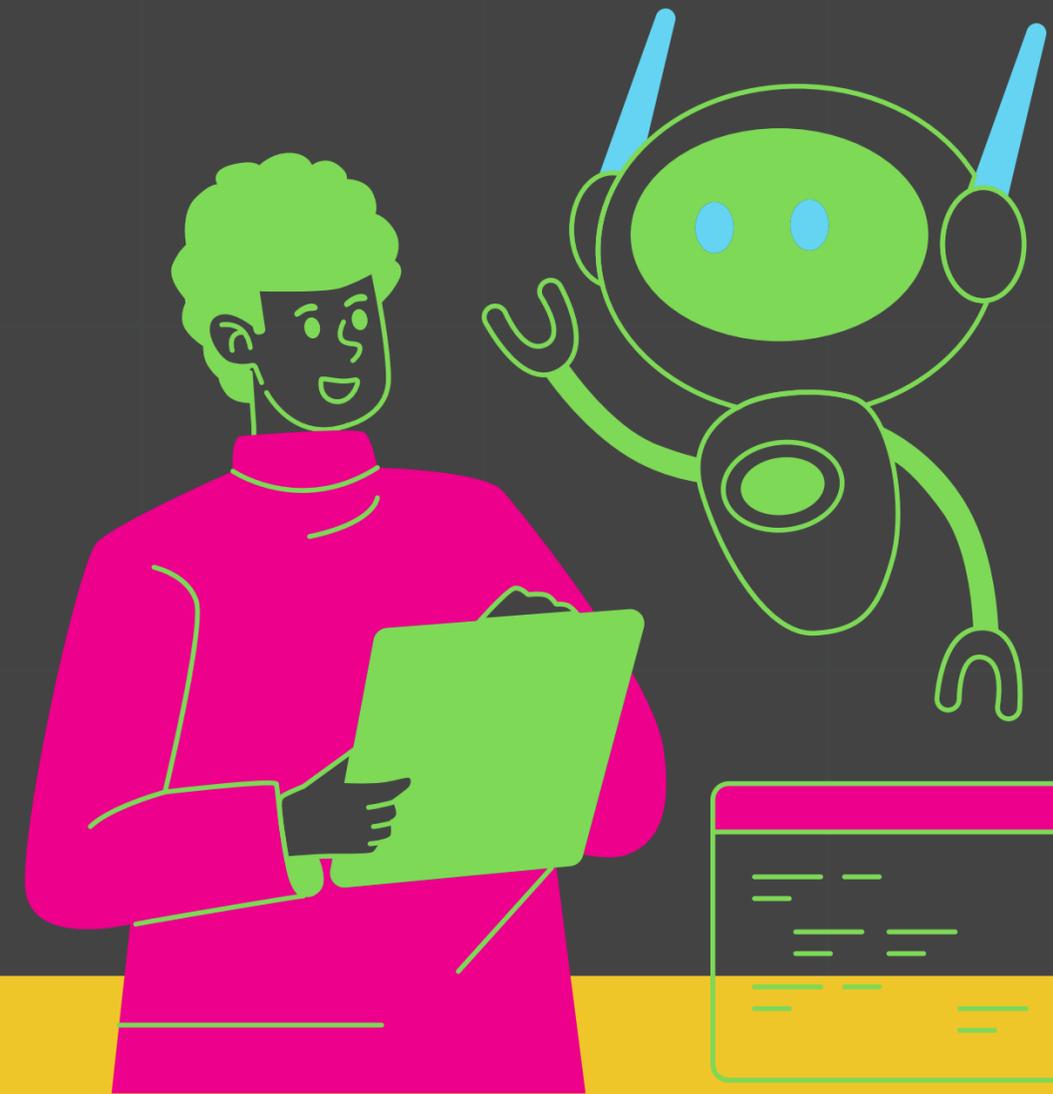
# MORE ABOUT AI-GRIEFBOTS

- "Griefbots," "Deadbots," "Deathbots," "Postmortem Avatars," "Generative Ghosts," or "Versonas"

- Examples: You, Only Virtual, 2Wai, CharacterAi, Reflekta, Eternos, Replika, HereAfter AI, or StoryFile

- Trained on voice recordings, uploaded texts, videos, social posts, and pre-records to mimic personality

- An AI avatar can text, send audio messages, and call over the phone

- Can only answer certain questions or evolve and continue to learn

- Cost: Varies, most are monthly subscriptions averaging about $25/mo

- Major ethical concerns due to a lack of or limited regulations

  - Age verifications & access to personal data

  - Digital legacy consent concerns

  - Unknown clinical implications regarding prolonged grief or other effects

  - Commercialization of vulnerable populations

  - Cultural implications
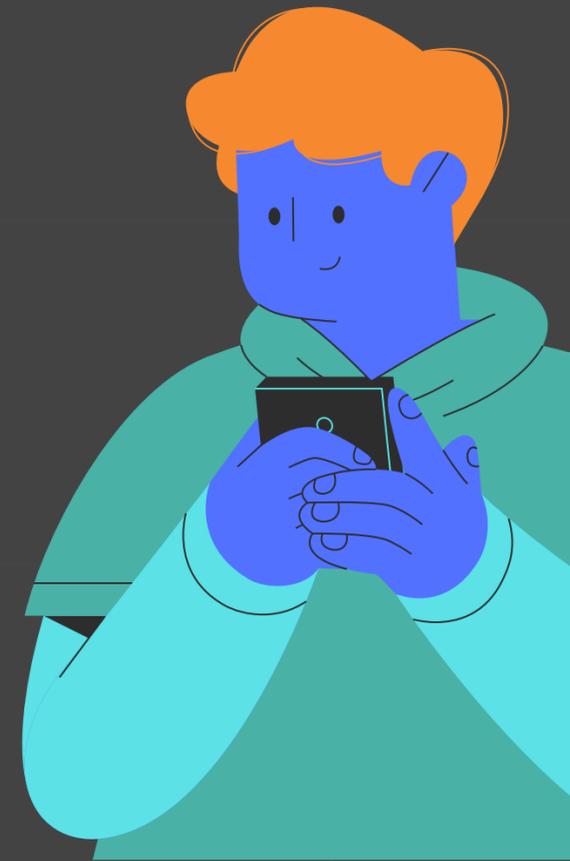
**Watch video on YouTube**

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# WHAT DIGITAL GRIEF ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE

## HEALTHY GRIEF LANGUAGE

- "I miss you so much today"
- "Wish I could tell you about..."
- "It's hard, but I'm trying"
- "Your favorite song came on"
- "I'm learning to live with this"
- "Some days are harder than others"
- "I wonder if you're proud of me"

Expresses specific emotions
Shares concrete memories/photos
Acknowledges the passage of time
Includes connection to the deceased
Shares more than grief-related content

## CONCERNING GRIEF LANGUAGE

- "I can't do this anymore"
- "There's no point anymore"
- "Nothing matters without you"
- "I want to join you" or "I give up"
- "I just want to be with you"
- "I have no one to talk to"
- "Everyone would be better off..."

Persistent hopelessness
Withdrawal from everything
Shares dark/disturbing/cryptic images
No social support network
Direct or indirect references to self-harm
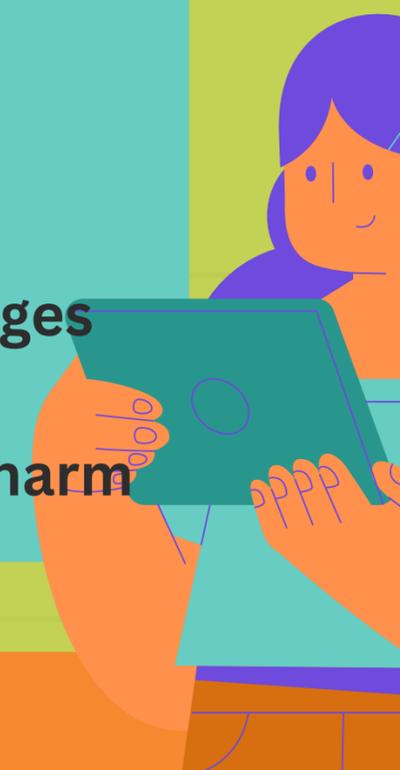
# SIGNS DIGITAL GRIEF SUPPORT IS HELPING

## Connecting with Understanding

- Finding peers who "get it"
- Sharing stories without explaining
- Feeling less alone in the experience
- "Feeling seen, heard, and understood"

## Creating & Honoring

- Making digital memorials/tributes
- Sharing photos and memories
- Participating in remembrance rituals
- Finding creative ways to honor loved ones

## Processing at Their Pace

- Accessing support when they need it (3am or 3pm)
- Choosing when to engage vs. step back
- Control over their grief narrative
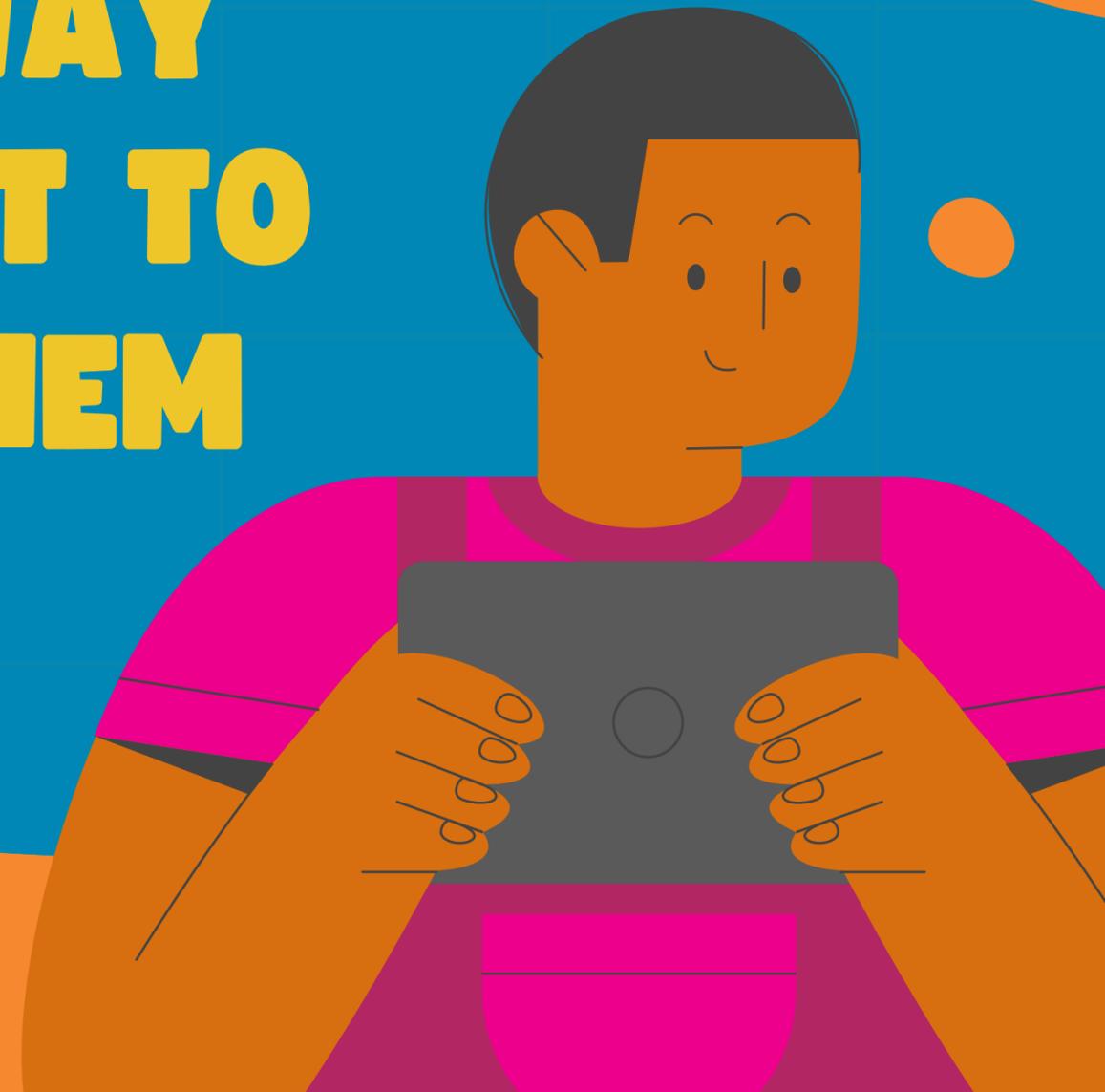- Safe distance when emotions are intense

## Finding Comfort & Community

- Receiving validation and support
- Learning healthy coping strategies
- Seeing others survive similar losses
- Building meaningful connections
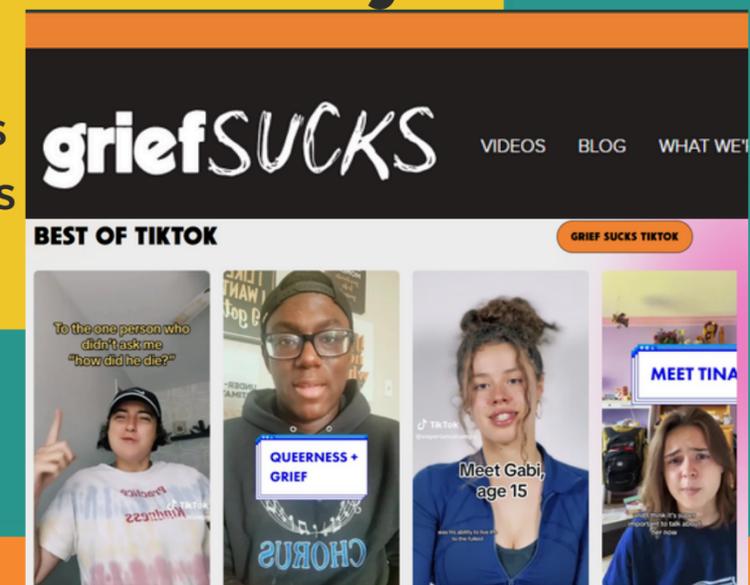
# OUR CHALLENGE:
ISN'T TO PULL YOUTH AWAY FROM DIGITAL SPACES BUT TO EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT THEM WITHIN THESE SPACES

# HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION

## Lead with Curiosity, Not Control

- "I've been learning about how teens use technology when they're grieving..."
- "Can you help me understand what that's like for you?"
- "I'm curious about the spaces where you feel most comfortable"

## Acknowledge the Power Dynamic

- "You probably know way more about these apps than I do and that's okay"
- "I'm not trying to spy or take things away"
- "I want to learn from you"

## Ask Questions, Don't Lecture

- ❌ "You shouldn't be posting about that"
- ✅ "How does it feel when you share about [loved one] online?"
- ❌ "That app is dangerous"
- ✅ "What do you like about that app? What concerns you?"

## Start Small & Stay Open

- Pick ONE question to start
- Don't expect to solve everything in one conversation
- Let them guide the pace
- Thank them for opening up

Use the discussion starter handout

# SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

- Grief & youth-brain affects online decision-making
- Digital footprints are permanent
- Emotional vulnerability can attract predatory behavior
- Comparison with others' grief journeys can be harmful
- Over-reliance on digital connections risks isolation
- Lack of professional oversight

# SIGNS OF CONCERNING DIGITAL BEHAVIOR

- Excessive time spent viewing the deceased's social media
- Obsessive posting about the loss
- Withdrawal from in-person connections in favor of online-only support
- Sharing concerning content or unsafe emotions online
- Using technology to avoid processing grief

# DIGITAL SAFETY IN ACTION

- Help youth create private vs. public memorial spaces
- As a family, set digital remembrance boundaries
- Help youth develop healthy digital grief practices
- Monitor for signs of unhealthy online grief behaviors
- Support balanced online/offline grief expression

Use the Digital Safety Guidelines for Grieving Youth

# DIGITAL SAFETY GUIDELINES

## Personal Information Protection

- Use nicknames or partial names in grief forums
- Never share location, school, or identifying details
- Set social media memorial accounts to private
- Use strong passwords for grief support accounts
- Be cautious with photos that show locations/schools

## Content Sharing Guidelines

- Follow the "pause and reflect" rule before posting
- Ask trusted adults before sharing memorial content
- Consider future impact of shared grief content
- Use content warnings for triggering grief posts
- Know how to remove or untag unwanted content

## Online Interaction Safety

- Only join moderated support groups
- Never meet online grief contacts in person without adult supervision
- Block and report inappropriate messages
- Don't accept friend requests from unknown grief "supporters"
- Be wary of private message requests in grief forums

## Digital Boundaries

- Set time limits for visiting memorial pages
- Take breaks from grief-related social media
- Create separate grief support accounts if needed
- Establish "tech-free" grief processing times
- Know how to mute/snooze overwhelming content

**Copy Available Digital Safety Guidelines for Grieving Youth**

# PROFESSIONAL/CAREGIVER ACTION STEPS

- Create curated lists of age-appropriate digital grief spaces
- Know which online communities to safely recommend
- Establish digital safety protocols with families
- Build a resource library of digital grief tools
- Stay informed about digital expression and emerging technologies
- Know how to evaluate digital tools

**Use the Framework for Evaluating Digital Tools**

# EVALUATING DIGITAL TOOLS

## Safety Assessment Criteria
- Privacy policy clarity and accessibility
- Data collection/sharing practices
- Age verification methods
- Moderation policies and enforcement
- Emergency resource availability
- Reporting system effectiveness

## User Experience Considerations
- Ease of use for target age group
- Accessibility features
- Cost and subscription model transparency
- Advertisement policies
- Technical support availability
- Update frequency

## Content Evaluation
- Age-appropriate material
- Evidence-based grief support approaches
- Regular content moderation
- Trigger warning practices
- Professional oversight/involvement
- Cultural sensitivity/inclusivity

## Professional Credibility Markers
- Mental health/grief professional involvement
- Organization backing/partnerships
- Published research/effectiveness studies
- Professional endorsements
- Clear organizational mission/values
- Transparent funding sources

**Copy Available of the Framework for Evaluating Digital Tools**

# MOVING FORWARD

- Technology enhances rather than replaces traditional support
- Digital spaces are part of the youth's natural grief environment
- Our role is to guide, not restrict, healthy digital grief
- Safety and support work hand in hand
- Stay current with youth technology trends

THANK YOU

# RESOURCES

Digital Discussion Starter Questions

Digital Safety Guidelines for Grieving Youth

Framework for Evaluating Digital Tools