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For Immediate Release

Hospice Austin Offers Grief Counseling in Wake of Shootings

A tragedy as horrific and public as the shooting at Virginia Tech affects us all; in fact, it can trigger a significant grief response in many of us who are far removed from the actual victims in Blacksburg. It may also remind us of previous losses we have suffered. Shock, sorrow, anger, helplessness—in the wake of such senseless brutality, these feelings can seem overwhelming.

Hospice Austin has more than 25 years' experience in helping children, young people and adults cope with trauma and loss. Offering ongoing support to survivors of public tragedy is a natural extension of hospice's mission and community focus. To that end, Hospice Austin is offering free seminars on dealing with trauma, grief and loss both in schools and the workplace. Hospice Austin can also provide resources on coping with grief as well as bereavement support groups and short-term individual counseling.

Young people, in particular, are likely to be affected by this tragedy. David Zuniga, Hospice Austin's director of programs, advises parents to keep the lines of communication open.

“We provide a lot of grief and loss counseling to children throughout the year, both in our bereavement programs and at Camp Brave Heart, our summer camp for grieving children,” Zuniga said. “Kids need to feel safe. Talk to your children in an age-appropriate way, listen to their feelings, reassure them about their safety, and minimize the imagery on TV.”

According to the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, typical cognitive reactions to public traumatic events may include confusion, indecision, difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, and flashbacks. Physical symptoms can include headaches, fatigue, and changes in sleeping and eating patterns. Common interpersonal reactions such as conflict, distrust, withdrawal, and sensitivity often occur. Generally these symptoms dissipate at some point after the event, with each individual's reaction and recovery time frame being unique.

Additional literature on coping with this event may be found on the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization's website, Caring Connections, at www.caringinfo.org. It includes the articles,



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“Tragedy at Blacksburg,” “Common Responses after a Traumatic Event,” “Understanding Your Child’s Grief in Crisis,” and “Coping with Sudden Death.”

Hospice Austin has provided compassionate medical, emotional and spiritual care for terminally ill people in Central Texas and their loved ones since 1980. Hospice Austin patients live at home, in nursing facilities or at its in-patient facility, Hospice Austin's Christopher House. Hospice Austin is one of the oldest and largest hospice programs in Texas and the only hospice in the area operated as a nonprofit organization. This allows Hospice Austin to provide care for all, regardless of their ability to pay.

To find out more about the grief and loss seminars for young people and adults or other ways that Hospice Austin can help, call (512) 342-4700.

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