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chesapeakelifecenter.org

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Dear Editor,

As parents, we often feel pretty confident in knowing when our children need help. We can figure out a fever and certainly a skinned knee, but mental health needs, especially those like grief, can be harder to identify. Additionally, as a child experiences mental health differently than adults, it can be difficult for us to relate.

As a clinical mental health professional specializing in working with kids and families who are grieving, I was encouraged when British royalty's Prince Harry shared that he sought counseling when grieving his mother, Princess Diana, who died traumatically in 1997. What can't be overlooked, however, is that he didn't seek counseling for nearly two decades after his loss. We can speculate about all the reasons why he wasn't encouraged to seek help, but while the reasons are likely vastly different, many children today are disenfranchised in their grief and without access to counseling, support and resources.

Today, when resources in health care are already stretched thin, research indicates that nationally one in five children experience a diagnosable mental health disorder each year, yet only 20 percent are identified and receive treatment.

The month of May is Children's National Mental Health Awareness month. In Maryland, Children's Mental Health Awareness Week is recognized May 1 to 7. Prince Harry's story gives us an opportunity to talk about children dealing with grief. Yes, children will grieve the death of significant people at different times throughout their lives as they grow, but no child should wonder if their grief is valid or real or wait 20 years to have their grief acknowledged. We can change the narrative now and make children's mental health needs a priority so that no kid suffers alone in silence.

To learn more, visit www.chesapeakelifecenter.org or www.childrensmentalhealthmatters.org.

Sincerely,

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