

## Creative ideas for helping families grieve

Death is something that we know happens, but don't always like to think about. At this time it may present more challenges than usual; especially when unable to attend funerals or say goodbye before, or after someone dies.

It can be good to talk about the person that has died, there may be tears but this is to be expected. Children don't mind if they see adults cry and upset. Remember that we can all handle grief differently and there is no perfect way; what works for one may not work for another. Sometimes we can find comfort in unexpected things.

These ideas may be helpful when a death occurs, but you may also have your own ideas and children may have their own. You could choose to do one at the time that the funeral is taking place if you can't be there, or whenever works for you. The activities have been designed to be flexible in how they are completed, you may wish to make some collaboratively or each person to do their own.

The activities are designed for you to use the things that you have around you, although there may be specific things that you might decide you want to use and may need sourcing.



### **Create A Photo Slide Show**

Look at the pictures you have of the person, choose your favourites and create a photo slideshow. You could add a song that makes you think of the person, or one they enjoyed.

It is worth being aware that these can be quite emotional to watch, but can also provide a chance to think of happy memories about the person that has died.

This could also be developed into a physical or virtual album. Including details of who is in the pictures and where/ when they were taken can be useful, especially as the years go by.



### **Create a Memory Box**



A memory box can be a good way to remember the things about someone that has died and gives you the chance to think about them. They can work for all ages and work particularly well being created whilst memories are fresh. Making memory boxes can sometimes make people feel sad when the bereavement is immediate, but can give great comfort and be a way to remember things about the person that has died. They can be particularly helpful for children, who can sometimes struggle to remember details later. Depending on the person that has died it may be better for individuals to create their own boxes as it can avoid issues of who has it at a later date as they can be kept for years.

The box can be any size or shape, fancy or plain although you can decorate it however you like. You could even create a virtual memory box that can include images and videos. Sometimes having a record of what someone sounds like can make a difference, so it's worth thinking about whether such a recording exists even if you need to get it from someone else; this can be included in a physical memory box via a USB stick/ DVD

(Remember to have a backup copy somewhere). You could also include recordings of people talking about the person that has died, or favourite memories.

Collect together things that you remember about the person that has died, or things that make you think about them. You could include pictures/ photographs of the person, things you did with them, things that they did or pictures that they sent you.

Think about whether there are any smells that you associate with them, it could be perfume/ aftershave or the sweets that they often enjoyed. You could include examples or pictures of them so that you can find the smells in the future as the smell of perfume/ aftershave can change after long term storage.

Think about the physical things that remind you of the person that has died, it can be anything that means something to you. This could include things like pens or pencils, pebbles or shells. If they liked to collect something then you could include something that they might have had in their collection, or pictures of them. Some people find a favourite item of clothing connected with the person that has died is comforting to include in a memory box, while others might create patchwork using bits of fabric from such items if there are a number of people that would like memories in that way.

Think about whether there were books that the person that died particularly enjoyed or that you enjoyed sharing with them. You could write down or record what was special about it.

There is no limit to what you can include; each memory box will be unique as each individual is unique.

Some people choose to add cards and letters for the person that has died either for special occasions such as birthdays and Christmas or whenever someone wants to.



### Create a Memorial



As attending funerals may not be possible, you could create your own memorial to the person that has died. It could be inside or outside, large or small, an image or a three dimensional model and made from whatever materials you have to hand. You can take a picture of your memorial which can be shared with others if appropriate.

Simple ideas could include decorating a heart shape, which could then be made into a magnet, or hung on the wall. Designing a Lego or construction kit memorial, which could be building an object that reminds you of the person that has died or be a collaborative piece where you all add pieces and share memories of the person that has died.

You could change the memorial over time if it's a helpful thing to do.



### Make/ Eat Something



Often we have memories linked to food that remind us of people that have died, which can stay with us for a long time. I remember my Nan introducing me to cheese and apple sandwiches, choosing Mr Kipling Cakes from the bakery van that visited the village where my Granny and Grampy lived and the hot chocolate abyss that I enjoyed with a friend when we were shopping.

Think about the food memories that you have with the person that died and either make or eat whatever it was. You could each pick something and create a feast to enjoy and talk about the person that has died.



## Plant Something



You could think about planting something in the garden, or sponsoring a tree somewhere, to remember someone that has died. There are a variety of plants of all shapes and sizes available, some of which need minimal input for them thrive depending on your gardening skills. You could choose one that flowers, an evergreen plant, a tree or something that produces things to eat.

Even if you can't get hold of the plant immediately, especially if it needs planting at a particular time of the year, you can make plans for what you will plant. Your plans could include making a special plaque to go near the plant.



## Write/ Draw A Memory



You could either write about, or draw a memory about the person that has died. It could be a simple description of them or something that you enjoyed doing together. You could use a notebook of some description for this, which could then be included in a memory box if you are making/ have one, create something electronically or just use paper.

This could be developed by asking others for their memories to create a book, either physical or virtual.



## Questions



Think about questions that you have about the person that has died and write them down. Share the questions with others and see if you can get all the answers to your questions. You could do this by putting questions on individual pieces of paper or card, which could be placed in a bowl or jar and then taking it in turns to pick one to talk about.

This may be more challenging depending on the questions asked; so it may be worth looking at the questions before talking about them. It's also worth being aware that there may be things that are sensitive, so thinking about how to tackle them is worth some time. Children particularly can wonder about all sorts of things that adults rarely think about and may not realise that some things are more uncomfortable for adults to talk about.

## Praying With Sweets

You can pray with any sweets or edible things, there's no right or wrong way and you can use them to pray for anything. These ideas might get you started.

Eat a sweet/ something of your choice and as you do:

Thank God for the person that has died and that they were in your life.

Thank God for all the fun you had with the person that has died.



Ask God to help everyone feeling sad that the person has died.

Thank God for the people that helped the person that has died.

You can also adapt this to pray for others that are dealing with a death.



## Create a prayer

There are lots of different ways to pray, sometimes they use words but others can be more creative: there is no right or wrong way, the limit is your imagination.

Create a prayer to use at a time when you want to think about the person that has died, this could fit with the time of the funeral or be used at another time.

You could do a simple thank you prayer and say the things that you want to thank God for about the person that has died.

You could ask God to help you as you come to terms with the death of the person that has died.

Sometimes words are hard, so think about the toys you have that could be used to pray. Some ideas are:

A marble run or Whirly Ramp, there are ups and downs around the death of someone and we often experience a range of emotions so a marble run/ Whirly Ramp can work well. Think about the person that has died or whatever you want to pray about and as you drop the marble your prayers can go to God.

Construction kit such as Lego, blocks, K-nex or whatever you have. You can add a piece of the kit for each thing you want to pray for, which could include aspects of thanks, asking for help, remembering things or anything else that you think of.

Create a prayer tree and hang things, or pictures of them, on the tree.

You can think about things to say thank you for, things you find hard, the people that love the person that has died, things that were special to the person that has died, the emotions that you feel or whatever seems appropriate for you. You could just tie ribbon on the prayer tree. You could use different colours to represent how you're feeling or think about something different for each colour of ribbon.

You could create a musical prayer using any instruments you have or improvising them, it's amazing what different sounds you can make with just your hands. If there is a group of you then someone could conduct and give prompts to create a collaborative piece. This could draw on happiness and sadness.

Throw, or roll, a ball and each time you do thank God for the things the person that has died liked or that you liked about them or things you want to say thank you for about the person that has died.