

Remembering

“Grief is not about forgetting the person who has died, but about finding ways to remember them. Remembering brings healing. When someone dies, our feelings for them and memories of them stay alive and active inside us. We need to find ways of expressing those feelings so that we can move on in our lives” says Julia Samuel, an experienced bereavement counsellor.

When you lose someone important in your life, you may fear you will be unable to conjure up all the happy memories of your life with them. This fear is very common. By taking an active part in creating ways of remembering, you can turn those memories into your most prized possessions. This is as true for children as it is for adults.

Finding ways to remember can help you. There is no right way or wrong way of remembering, nor is this a question of seeking perfection in whatever you have chosen to create. At its best, this process is a deeply personal expression of love for the special person in your life who has died but who lives on in your memories.

The funeral

The funeral is a way of saying goodbye and is also an occasion to look back on and to remember. Because of its importance do make sure you know about the wide range of choices which are available these days. A funeral service no longer needs to follow a fixed format. You can create a ceremony that really expresses the spirit of the person who has died. Take time to consider the options. Whatever you decide, the memory of a beautiful service that felt absolutely right will bring you comfort in the future. Different types of funeral are discussed in detail in separate articles.

Visiting the grave

This can be a way of 'visiting' the person who has died. For many people it is a chance to put the rest of the world aside. You may find that telling them your news, expressing your feelings to them and showing your love through flowers and other gifts becomes an integral part of your mourning.

A memory box

You can make or buy a special box in which to put precious possessions. These could include letters or cards from friends or dried flowers from the funeral. You could also put into the box treasured things which belonged to the person who has died such as diaries or letters. Ready-made memory boxes often have sections for different keepsakes and a clear plastic cover on the lid for a photograph.

A remembrance book

Creating a book in memory of the person who has died can be a healing process. Include photographs, poems, letters or your own thoughts. In the future the book will bring your memories back to life.

A journal

Writing a diary of your grieving process is useful for a number of reasons. The writing itself is cathartic: putting your feelings into words can help to release some of the pain. Later, you will be able to look back on how you felt and to realise that however bad it was, you survived. That knowledge can help you to realise that whatever you are going through now will also pass. How you use the journal is, of course, up to you - some people sketch, others write down memories, others pour out feelings, yet others do a combination of all of these. You may choose to fill your journal with something entirely original.

Artwork

If you like sewing, stitching a sampler, and framing it can be a lovely option. You could paint a picture and frame that. Making anything in the memory of the person who has died connects you to them and gives you something to treasure.

A candle

Lighting a candle and reading a special prayer or poem can be a simple but powerful way of commemorating an anniversary.

A special walk

One family sent a beautifully illustrated leaflet about a special walk in memory of a little girl. The leaflet showed the route, described the girl and invited anyone who was interested to go on the walk. It was about two miles long, followed roads, went through a wood and ended by a river. Along the way were little hand-carved commemorative plaques with a few lines of a poem or a line drawing. You could create your own special walk.

Planting trees or shrubs

Some people plant a tree or a shrub and have a commemorative plaque set up beside it as a way of remembering. Choose a hardy shrub or tree and make sure you plant it in a place that you will always be able to visit. If you have no place of your own to plant a tree, you may be able to get permission to plant one in a park or other public area.

In memory of....

Some families, particularly when a child has died, like to create a charity or a scholarship in their memory - a living memorial to the person. This can be a way of healing the wounds of the person's death. You can invest in a cure for the disease that led to their death, develop their field of interest or continue their work.

Remembrance service

Many organisations like Child Bereavement UK, Cruse (www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk) and Sands (Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity - www.uk-sands.org) hold national annual memorial services. Hospitals often hold a remembrance service each year.

You can organise your own service for your hospital or an organisation connected with the person who has died. These services are usually very beautiful and enormously appreciated. There is something deeply moving about a group of people from different backgrounds and with different stories coming together in one place to remember the special people in their lives. The service itself is often non-denominational and simple with a few prayers, poems and hymns, followed by the lighting of candles at the altar by members of the congregation.

For some people who have really moved forward in their lives, this service can be the only time they are able to put aside to remember, to feel the sadness again and to be enriched by the memories.