

ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES TO DO TOGETHER AFTER THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE



Children grieve just as adults do. Any child old enough to form a relationship will experience some form of grief when a relationship is severed and a loved one dies. When a death occurs children need to be surrounded by feelings of warmth, acceptance and understanding. This can of course be difficult when adults are experiencing grief themselves, and when their natural instinct is to protect the child from painful feelings. Families who can share grief and undertake activities together to adjust to a new environment without the deceased often have better outcomes.

Parents and care givers who openly talk about their grief, who cry, and express frustration, send a message to their children that it is okay for them to do so as well.

Of course children cannot carry the burden of all the adults' pain, and it is important that they can still play and talk without the conversation being just about the dead person. Families need to balance, as best they can, the sharing of sad feelings, with the sharing of more pleasant activities and remembering happy times.

Caring adults can guide children through the difficult time after the death of a loved one and when the child is experiencing feelings which are new and can be painful and at times overwhelming. In a very real way, this time can be a growth experience for the child, teaching about love and relationships.

Undertaking shared activities to remember the loved one can be a very special experience for families.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

The following are some ideas for what families might do together to cope after a bereavement and to honour their loved one

Making a memory box

The family might decorate a box together and fill it with keepsakes, mementos, photographs, stories, pictures etc. that have relevance and meaning to them



Making a memory journal

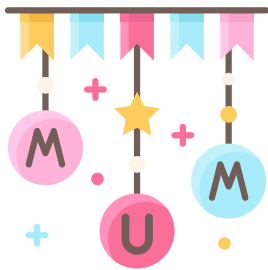
Instead of a box of keepsakes, some families opt for a journal – where everyone records memories and sticks in pictures, tickets from trips and shows, brochures from holidays and outings, jokes shared, photographs etc.



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Making a memory mobile

Each member of the family could decorate one or two pieces of the mobile, either with writing or a drawing or both. The shapes on the mobile might be special to the family and to the memory of their loved one – e.g. birds, stars, leaves, flowers, animals etc.



Making a memory collage

A collage is a simple way of working together as a family to create a visual memorial following the death of a loved one.



Plant a memory garden

If you have the space, it might be helpful to set aside a small area in your garden to plant up a 'memory garden'. The whole family can be involved in designing, planting and caring for this memorial. It can change over time as plants grow and different things are added. It can be particularly appropriate if the loved one was a keen gardener or loved garden lover.



Making a memory salt jar

Children can sometimes find it difficult to talk about a loved one who has died. One way to encourage them to express how they feel is to create a memory jar. This simple activity helps children think about happy memories while creating something beautiful. Create a jar layered with different coloured salt and chalk to trigger different memories. You can choose to add objects to the jar that have significant meanings. The end result will be a way of remembering a special person and will allow children an opportunity to communicate their feelings.



Making 'memorial' figures

It can be helpful to honour the memory of a loved one with a modelled 'scene' or set of figures, made from Plasticine, air dried clay etc. This might be appropriate where there is a particular theme which resonates with the family, e.g. if the loved one was a farmer or a fisherman etc.



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Movie night

Families might want to hold a movie night, showing the favourite movies of their loved one and the movies they watched with them.



Favourite songs

Families might make a playlist of their loved ones favourite songs as a way of remembering them and feeling close to them.

