

Memories



Memories are perhaps the most special and enduring connection we have in both life and death; even when people die, our memories of them live on. We form memories as early as toddlers, and some stay with us throughout our life. Often our five senses act as “memory anchors” that actually work to strengthen these memories in our mind (Cushnie, 2011).

After someone you love dies, it can be comforting to travel back in your mind and remember the good times with your loved one. Although it may seem impossible that you could ever forget someone who was so important to you, memories can fade over time, and prolonged or complicated grief can actually contribute to memory loss (Cheng, 2013). Consider these ways to actively remember your loved one and solidify their memory:

- **Talk about the person who died with family and friends.** Take turns sharing stories and memories about your loved one together. Consider making it a tradition to share stories at holidays or family gatherings. Remember, however, that while some may find it meaningful to talk with family and friends, other will prefer to grieve in private, so be sure to honor each person’s grief journey while keeping your memories fresh.
- **Express yourself through art.** Sometimes it is easier to express what we are feeling through painting or drawing than it is to explain in words. The same applies to memories—you may prefer to draw a picture of you and your loved one instead of writing or talking about them. This is a great way to preserve memories and may be therapeutic as well.
- **Look at family photos together.** Looking at photos of your loved one who died can bring back pleasant memories or times that you shared together. Spend time going through old photo albums as a family and recall stories and memories. Reminiscing can make you feel better during difficult times, and your family can collectively keep memories alive in your hearts.
- **Keep a belonging of your loved one with you.** This can make you feel connected to them on some level at all times. Our senses elicit the strongest memories so pick an object that reminds you what the person who died looked, smelled, felt, or sounded like (for example, an old t-shirt).
- **Re-visit a favorite vacation spot.** If there is a destination that the deceased loved, or if you have great memories from a particular family vacation, take a trip there again. Be prepared for the trip to feel different without your loved one, but use this as an opportunity to remember the good times.
- **Create a personal memorial.** Families may find a shared sense of connection in a small personal memorial. Planting a tree or a garden, making a memory book, or painting a bench to memorialize the person who died may be healing. In the event of the death of a parent, children may be too young to remember everything about the parent who died. As the surviving spouse, take comfort in writing your memories down or memorializing them in some way so your children can remember their mom or dad when they are older.

Further Reading:

- *Chester Raccoon and the Acorn Full of Memories* by Audrey Penn
- *I Will Remember You: What to Do When Someone You Love Dies - A Guidebook Through Grief for Teens* by Laura Dower
- *The Memory String* by Eve Bunting



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- *Pablo Remembers* by George Ancona
- *Still Point of the Turning World* by Emily Rapp
- *Life After the Death of my Son* by Dennis L. Apple

References:

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