



KEEPING MEMORIES AND CONTINUING BONDS

Helping Children Stay Connected to Someone Who Died

A relationship does not have to disappear when a person dies. Children can continue to feel connected through memories, stories, traditions, objects, values, photographs, and the ways the person influenced their lives. Continuing bonds are not about pretending the death did not happen; they are about allowing love and connection to have a place in life after loss.

MEMORY CAN BECOME PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Some children want to talk about the person often; others connect quietly. A photograph by the bed, a familiar recipe, a song, a saying, or an activity the person loved can become a natural way of remembering without turning every memory into a formal grief exercise.

WHAT YOU MAY NOTICE

- Wanting to keep an object, clothing item, photograph, recording, or other reminder close.
- Asking for stories about the person or repeating favorite memories.
- Avoiding reminders for a time and returning to them later.

GENTLE REMINDER

There is no required way to remember. A child's connection may be visible, private, frequent, occasional, joyful, painful, or all of these at different times.

FOLLOW THE CHILD'S LEAD

Offer opportunities to remember, but do not require them. A memory box may comfort one child and feel overwhelming to another. Children should be allowed to decide when and how they engage with reminders.

WORDS THAT CAN HELP

Try: "We can talk about Mom whenever you want." "Would you like to hear a story about Grandpa?" "You can keep this somewhere special, or we can put it away for now." "Remembering does not mean you have to feel sad every time."

USE STORIES TO KEEP CONNECTION ALIVE

Tell stories that show the whole person - funny moments, ordinary routines, strengths, imperfections, traditions, and family history. Stories can help younger children know someone they may remember only partly and help older children understand the relationship in new ways.





CREATE FLEXIBLE TRADITIONS

Families may light a candle, cook a favorite meal, visit a meaningful place, celebrate a birthday, donate to a cause, play music, or continue a family custom. Traditions can change over time. The child does not have to participate every year in the same way.

LET THE BOND GROW WITH THE CHILD

- A child may ask new questions as they mature: What was Dad like at my age? What would Grandma think about this? What did my sister love? Memories and stories can take on new meaning as the child develops.
- REMEMBERING DEVELOPMENT MATTERS
- Young children may connect through concrete objects and repeated stories. Older children may connect through values, identity, choices, creativity, faith, service, or understanding how the person shaped their family.

A THOUGHT TO CARRY WITH YOU

Death changes a relationship, but it does not erase the love, influence, memories, and meaning that relationship gave a child's life.

A MOMENT FOR REFLECTION

What memory, story, object, tradition, or quality seems most meaningful to this child right now? How can it remain available without becoming an obligation?

WHEN MORE SUPPORT MAY HELP

If reminders consistently produce overwhelming distress or the child feels unable to engage in ordinary life because of a need to preserve everything exactly as it was, additional support may be useful.

A GENTLE CLOSING

Continuing bonds allow children to carry a relationship forward while still growing and changing. The goal is not to hold the past still, but to make room for love and memory within the life that continues.

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