

When a Loved One Dies

Ways to Create Memorial and Meaning When Separated During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly changed many aspects of our world, including ways we connect with our loved ones. This can be especially difficult when a loved one is nearing the end of their life. As state and local governments continue to promote social distancing practices, you and/or your child might not be able to be present with your loved one at their time of death. The difficult decision to change funeral and/or memorial service plans might become a reality for your family. It can feel extremely unfair that you are not able to be present in the way you imagined, but it is important to note that you can still connect with your loved and honor their life in different ways.

The goal of this resource is to provide suggestions about other ways you and your family can be emotionally present, while being physically distant during time of death along with ways you can memorialize your loved one.

Utilize Technology

Technology can be a wonderful tool to help connect us with loved ones. Implement video calls or speaker phone calls to feel connected to your loved one. This can be helpful when your loved one is nearing the end of their life as a medium for you to be able to communicate with them. Even if your loved one is unable to respond to you, hearing your voice in conversation, song, or prayer will help them to know you are near. Technology can also be helpful to connect you with family and friends after a death as occurred. You might consider using some conversation prompts to help you reflect upon special times you shared with your person (see "Let's Remember" page attached). Grief can be an isolating experience; technology can help to connect you with those who care about you.

Keep a Memento

If you cannot be physically with your loved one, keeping an item of their clothing, a special blanket, a piece of jewelry, or their photo close to you can help you feel connected when you are apart. Invite everyone in your family to select something that helps them to remember and feel close to this loved one. If you are unable to keep a physical item, hold on to a memory or thought of the item, write down a special memory of your loved one, or think of a phrase or saying that helps you feel close to them.

Engage Children

Invite your children to write their loved one a special message or draw them a picture. You can provide them with a message template, like the one attached, or simply give them a blank piece of paper. Allow your children to express their love for their dying family member in whatever way they feel comfortable. Give them a choice in how they would like to say goodbye and express their feelings. During times of uncertainty, children need opportunities to make choices in their worlds to help them feel more in control.





When a Loved One Dies

Ways to Create Memorial and Meaning When Separated During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Allow Yourself Time to Grieve

It might feel difficult to distinguish between your personal grief over the death of your loved one and the grief and pain that is being experienced by our broader society during this pandemic. When our grief coincides with a time of crisis, it can be hard to allow ourselves time and space to feel our grief feelings. Please know you can take the time you need to process this loss. Your grief feelings are real and important. Additional grief care support is available to you at Transitions GriefCare by calling 919.719.7199.

Create a Memorial

As a community, we have been asked to practice social distancing as a tool to limit the spread of COVID-19. This may directly impact your family's plans to hold a funeral, memorial service, or celebration of life event. Even though those plans might need to be postponed to a later date, know that you still have control to memorialize your loved one in a way that feels meaningful to you. You can plant a special flower or tree in honor of your loved one, play their favorite song, light a candle in their honor, frame a special picture of them, cook/eat their favorite meal, or find a place in your home that helps you to feel close to them. With the use of technology, you can be connected virtually with other family members and take time sharing stories about your loved one that honor their memory. Know that you can hold a more traditional funeral service or memorial service in the future, but there are still ways you can honor their memory now.

Be Kind to Yourself

Your feelings of grief may be intensified by this stressful time in our global community. Take time to process all these changes. Be patient with yourself and your feelings. The more you can take time to care for yourself, the better able you will be to support your loved ones. If you are concerned about your ability to care for your mental health at this time, consider reaching out to a mental health professional. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, please call Mobile Crisis Management Crisis Line at 1.877.626.1772.

Know that you are not alone. Reach out to support when you need it. If you need grief counseling support, call Transitions GriefCare at 919.719.7199. You can also find additional resources online at transitionslifecare.org/grief-care.





Let's Remember

Share about a favorite holiday you spent with your special person.

Share about a food that reminds you of your special person.

Share the ways you are like your special person.

Share something important you learned from your special person.

Share a way your special person made you laugh.

Dear _____

It's been _____ since you died. If you were here, I would tell you _____

And you would tell me _____

You would be so proud that I've _____

I know that you would want me to _____

I will never forget you. My favorite way to remember you is _____

If grief has taught me anything, it's that _____

Thank you for _____

Love, _____

