



The
Compassionate
Friends

Handbook of Ideas for Remembering Our Child



A nationwide organisation of bereaved parents
and their families offering support after a child dies.

Contents

Foreword - using the ideas in this handbook	3
Capturing memories.....	4
Remembering through photographs	5
Remembering through art	6
Remembering through music and sound.....	6
Remembering through writing.....	7
Remembering through food and drink.....	8
Remembering in creative ways	8
Remembering with their belongings	9
Remembering through nature	10
Remembering through giving	11
Remembering through travel - literally and virtually	12
Our child's remains	12
Remembering at special places and memorial sites.....	13
Remembering online and digitally.....	14
Involving other people in remembering.....	15
Keeping our child 'in the conversation'	16
APPENDIX: Remembering our child: the gift of "continuing bonds"	17
Who are the Compassionate Friends?	21

Foreword - using the ideas in this handbook

This handbook is designed as a resource that you can dip into when looking for ideas for honouring your child's memory or ways to feel closer to them. Everything here has been suggested by bereaved parents or close family members as something that has worked for them, but that doesn't mean that all of these ideas will appeal to you.

Time stretches out before us; we live our lives without the physical presence of the children we love so much. Nothing can take the place of their actual presence, but in their absence, we find ways to connect with them and experience a sense of closeness. That's what this handbook is aiming for, and hopefully you will find some useful inspiration here.

Memorialising gives us the opportunity to ensure that our child has a lasting presence in our lives, the lives of other people who knew and loved them, and even those whom they never met. There is no wrong or right way to remember, and our own feelings and preferences about this are likely to change as time passes.

It is our personal choice as to what type of 'memorialising' we do or how much time to spend on it. It is wise to be self-aware. We may find that remembrance activities bring home the painfully sad reality of our child's physical absence from this world. If a remembrance activity becomes a trigger for deeply sad memories and flashbacks, or if we are spending long periods of time concentrating only on these activities, we might need to put them aside for a while.

There is a range of ideas in this handbook. Some do not cost anything nor require any particular skills, while others will take some time, ability or money.

Of course, maintaining "continuing bonds"^{*} with our child is not just about practically doing things or going to places. It is also a quiet space within ourselves, where our thoughts turn towards them.

It is our hope that this handbook will serve as a useful springboard for your own unique journey of remembrance of your child.

You are welcome to print this PDF file for your personal use.

^{*} For more on "continuing bonds", see page 17

Capturing memories

Who was our child? They had their life, short or long; their experiences, their achievements, their personality. To reflect on these, we could:

- Create a **tribute scrapbook**. We might begin by collecting information and memorabilia about our child, then think how we could outline their life within the book. We can be as creative as we wish. We can use poems or drawings, ticket stubs, awards belonging to our child, or photos.
- **Write** a blog or a book, or tell our child's story through **photos**.
- **Mark out on a map** or a globe places our child enjoyed visiting and display this in our home. This can be a touching reminder of how our child experienced adventures and felt fulfilled, and also a conversation starter for friends.
- **Play recordings** of their voice or record ourselves talking about them. How we preserve our child's memory does not just have to be about visuals.
- Focus on their **favourite smells**, such as perfumes.
- Do a similar thing with their **favourite tastes** by eating their favourite dish or enjoying their favourite drink.
- Organise an activity on their **birthday** or **anniversary**. These can be such difficult occasions and organising something can give us a focus. It does not have to be a big event - just something to help other people remember our loved one, and exchange memories.
- **Decorate** the Christmas tree in their memory if we have one. We may purchase ornaments each year, or maybe have a small additional tree for them.



Useful Links

wordpress.com - Guidance and help to create a free website or blog.

Remembering through photographs

Photos of our child can help us in many different ways. They can evoke fond and precious memories; our child's birthday, graduation day or first holiday. These special images can be visual reminders of our child's personality, their sense of humour, the things they loved doing or the people they loved being around.

We could:

- Frame some photos and **display** them in our home, either as prints or in a digital photo frame.
- Keep **digital** copies of photos. If so, we might choose to scan our photos onto our computers, maybe set them as our desktop background or save them in a special folder. We can back this up onto a separate drive and/or onto the Cloud, which reduces the risk of losing our precious collection.
- Have photos on our **mobile phone or other device**. We could select a photo to keep as our lock screen or home screen. It's worth making a separate folder in our phone where we can keep photos of our child so that we can add to it easily.
- Make a **scrapbook**, a **collage** or a **printed photo book**. We might want to organise this by themes such as their schooldays, holidays, friends and so on. Meaningful photos do not only have to be of our child, but could be of a meal or craft item they made, their pet, or anything relating to their talents, likes or interests.
- **Connect the past with the present**. We can do this by using a photo with our child in it, and include this picture within the shot when we take a new photo. Some people retake photos that their child was in, such as a photo in the same place, five years later.
- Select a series of photos and put them into a slide show format to create a **video**.
- Get items such as **blankets, cushions, T-shirts, mugs, fridge magnets** made with our child's photos. These could be for us to use and treasure, or to give as gifts.



Useful Links

There are a variety of companies that provide services for printing and creating items from photos, ranging from high street shops such as Tesco and Boots, to numerous online companies such as **helloprint.co.uk**, **snapfish.co.uk** and many more.

Remembering through art

Our skills vary, but that shouldn't stand in our way - the process can be as important as the product. We could:

- Paint a **portrait** of our child, or of a place or animal they liked.
- Combine both **writing and drawing**, maybe design a comic or a storyboard as a way of communicating our child's story. The really creative people amongst us may even go a step further and direct a mini film, if we have the ability.
- Get a **tattoo** dedicated to our child, or a temporary henna tattoo.
- Paint our nails in our child's **favourite colour**, wear an eye shadow or hair band, or any other item of clothing or accessory in colours they liked.
- **Use art to represent our child.** For instance, a forest scene can represent our own journey after a child's death; some areas can be calm and peaceful, others are hard to walk through but we learn to get through the good and the bad times, with our child still firmly in our hearts.



Useful Links

paintingsinhospitals.org.uk - search for art can heal our grief.

Remembering through music and sound

- We may find comfort in listening to our child's favourite **songs or music tracks**, especially if music was important to them. It is worth remembering, however, that music is incredibly evocative and certain music might be painful to hear at times.
- We could make **playlists** or even run a **karaoke** session based on music they enjoyed.
- If we have the skill, we may want to **write and/or perform a song** with or without lyrics about our child, whether it relates to our feelings about their death, their life, or something else.
- We might like to use **dance** as a way of remembering, whether that is learning a routine that already exists or creating our own.



Useful Links

psychcentral.com/lib - has an article on the power of music to reduce stress.

psychologytoday.com/us/blog - has a blog on meaning in motion: why we should dance.

Remembering through writing

We could:

- Make a **quote** book of funny sayings they used, jokes they made, or funny conversations we may have had with them. It could give anyone reading it an insight into their personality and sense of humour, and at the same time, remind us about what made them unique.
- Write a **poem** about them. This could be about the kind of person they were, or a past event that we have fond memories of. It could even be about an experience that was more testing and how they got through it.
- Keep a **diary** of coping with our grief.
- Write our child's **life story**, on paper or on a blog.
- Write **letters** to our child. This can be very therapeutic and the letters do not need to be seen by anyone else.
- Write **articles** for TCF's Compassion magazine or our local paper.
- Write a **tribute** to our child on their anniversary or birthday, perhaps for publication in the memorial section of our local newspaper or on the internet.
- Write a **book** about our child.
- Write about **plants or flowers to symbolise life** and show that our child is still very much alive and growing in our hearts and in our memory.

These are just a few examples. Using language as a tool, whether that is the language of words, pictures or music, to express how we feel about our child can really help us. We can gain a better understanding of our relationship with them, mark memories, and create new ones.



Useful Links

creative-writing-now.com - has an article on how to write poetry.

choosingtherapy.com - has 25 Prompts for starting a grief journal.

Download 'Journey' app - an app for journalling it can be downloaded from **Google Play Store** or **Apple App Store**

Remembering through food and drink

Enjoying our child's favourite food, their favourite snack in their packed lunch, or their favourite recipe to cook, can help us feel closer to them. Preparing our child's favourite dish or walking past a food place they loved can help reinforce the memory of them as a living person.

We could:

- **Cook** dishes where we combine what our child enjoyed with what we like.
- **Spell out** our child's name using the food we are preparing (such as when baking cakes) or make a sandwich in the shape of an animal they loved.
- Occasionally visit our child's favourite **coffee shop** or **restaurant**, where the smells, sights and tastes can evoke happy memories.
- Bake a **cake** with different layers, representing the different aspects of our child's life-story or identity.
- Create a simple **recipe book** based on meals or foods that our child enjoyed eating or preparing.
- **Offer** friends or family a particular dish or snack that our child enjoyed, and let them know why this is special. This gets other people involved in our remembering.



Useful Links

maxphoto.co.uk - has helpful advice how to make a recipe book in 8 easy steps.

buzzfeed.com - search for *Melissa Harrison on cooking with kids* for recipes we could try with our child's siblings or friends.

Remembering in creative ways

Getting involved with what our child used to do.

We could:

- **Finish off something our child started** such as a piece of art or a community project. Even continuing a collection they had started, such as a stamp collection or coin collection.
- Continue their **hobbies**, such as sport or gardening, or even just watching this sport on TV or a gardening show.
- Learn more about the **job** they did and find out what drew them to it. Or we could get an insight into the course they studied at university and find out what they enjoyed about it.

Remembering with their belongings

Our child's belongings are likely to be extremely important to us. After all, they are a part of our child and who they were.

Some of us like to keep our child's belongings, as these objects link us with our memories, but this may not be possible or desirable for everyone. Sometimes sharing our child's belongings with others is a way forward. Items could be shared with friends and family members, or donated to a charity shop or a homeless shelter.

Whatever we decide, it's worth remembering that if and when we choose to give some or all of our child's belongings away, it should be when we feel ready. It doesn't matter how long this takes.

We could:

- Choose to keep a small item that belonged to them and **carry it around** with us wherever we go, such as a keyring, a necklace, a small toy or a watch. This can help reinforce to ourselves that our child is always with us somehow. This can be particularly helpful on a difficult day. Holding onto it in our pocket or taking it out to look at it can be an extreme comfort.
- **Keep an item at home** that we can wear, hug or look at.
- **Use** a special item that belonged to our child, such as a shopping bag.
- Wear our child's **clothes**.
- **Frame** one of our child's garments, or just have a special place in our home where we hang up an item of clothing belonging to our child.
- **Display small meaningful items** such as jewellery - a nice glass jar can be an inexpensive way of doing this.
- **Represent our child's favourite colour or style** of clothing on a toy - for example buy a teddy bear wearing red or a checked shirt.
- Make, or have made, a **cushion, memory quilt** or **tapestry** out of our child's clothing.
- Get our child's name engraved on a **necklace**, or buy jewellery with the first initial of their name.
- Make name **wristbands** with our child's name on and give them to friends to wear and perhaps take a photo in different places when they are travelling.

Remembering through nature

Nature is meaningful for many of us, whether it is the gentle fall of leaves at autumn or the hopeful buds of brightly-coloured spring bulbs. We can incorporate our love of nature into our remembrance of our child.

We could:

- Put up a **bird box**, perhaps decorating it, in our garden or on a balcony.
- Have a corner in our **garden** where we could plant a tree or grow some flowers. We could purchase or even try building a bench or another piece of garden furniture.
- Plant a **bush** or **tree** in their memory. This could be a smaller plant in a pot indoors if we do not have outside space.
- Plant a small **wildflower** corner or some bulbs or flower seeds.
- Arrange for a **memorial tree** or remembrance **meadow** to be planted in our child's memory, with an organisation such as the Woodland Trust or something more local to us. This can be especially helpful if we do not have our own garden. This could also be somewhere specific, such as at our child's school, or a place they would have enjoyed.
- **Care for a pet** - this can bring us joy if our child loved animals.
- **Sponsor/adopt** an animal in a zoo or shelter in our child's memory.



Useful Links

shop.woodlandtrust.org.uk/in-memory

treesforlife.org.uk/support/plant-a-tree

nationalparks.uk/support-us

shop.zsl.org/collections/adopt-animal

bluecross.org.uk/sponsor-pet

Remembering through giving

There are many organisations, big and small, that would appreciate any support we could give or raise for them. Our child may have been a strong supporter of a cause, such as the welfare of animals or children living in poverty. We might want to support a **charity** or **hospice** that helped us or our child during their illness, or an organisation that is doing **research** into the condition from which they died. We may also consider organisations such as **The Compassionate Friends (TCF)** which are supporting us in our grief. We could:

- Organise a small **fundraising event**, such as a **cake sale**, **sports day** or something with friends such as a brunch or **dinner party**.
- Take part in or organise a sponsored walk, run, cycle, football match or motorcycle event in our child's memory. If we have the means and abilities, we could consider setting up a **trust fund** or **fundraising page**.
- **Create items** for a hospice, such as knitted shawls.
- Set up a **table with items for sale**, such as craft, books or cakes, at craft fairs.
- **Sponsor the printing of a TCF leaflet**, with a dedication to our child included.



Useful Links

tcf.org.uk/fundraise - fundraise for TCF.

easyfundraising.org.uk - has 130 fundraising ideas to help you raise money.

Giving our time

We may prefer to give our time rather than money, whether it is through a one-off volunteering opportunity or a longer-term arrangement with a charity.

- We could **raise awareness** via a message/post on **social** media about a particular cause, or through distributing information flyers.
- It is helpful to find out about the variety of ways we could **volunteer**. Examples include helpline work, befriending support, helping support groups or writing an article for a charity.
- We might decide to **reach out** to a friend, a family member or someone else we know who is going through a similar experience to the one our child may have faced, and use this as an opportunity to help someone closer to home.



Useful Links

getvolunteering.co.uk - search for a volunteering opportunity.

theguardian.com - Five ways to turn a social media campaign into a movement.

Remembering through travel - literally and virtually

We could:

- **Take a trip** they always wanted to take. This can evoke mixed emotions for us, because we know this is something our child would have loved to do but never got the chance.
- **Visit a place** they loved and discover it for ourselves. This could be a holiday destination, a city or other specific place.
- Bring back a little **souvenir**, even a rock or a leaf, from any trip we make. We could add it to our child's memorial corner at home or bring it to their grave if we wish.
- **Visit virtually** if actual visits to the places that were special to our child are not an option for us. This could mean visiting websites connected to the location, reading about the culture and history or watching documentaries. We could also do a virtual visit via Google Earth. [google.com/earth](https://www.google.com/earth)

Our child's remains

For those of us who have our child's **ashes** and/or some of their **hair**, we might like to keep them in a special container and/or sprinkle them at a place of special significance.

We could also:

- Arrange for a piece of our child's hair or some of their ashes to be specially transformed into a **permanent keepsake**, such as jewellery or a paperweight. Ashes can even be turned into diamonds.
- Add some of our own hair into the **keepsake** which can increase that feeling of a strong, everlasting connection.
- Arrange to put the ashes into a **special container**, such as a sealed hourglass.
- Take some of our child's ashes to **sprinkle in places we visit**, and take a photo where we leave them.



Useful Links

There are a number of companies that provide these types of services. For a selection, visit: **etsy.com** and search for 'ashes keepsake'.

Remembering at special places and memorial sites

Setting up a memorial corner in our home

We may choose to set up a **memorial corner** where we live.

- We could dedicate a **space in our home** where we put our child's photos, items of clothing, their toys, or their books; we may choose to light some candles from time to time, or decide to have a combination of all these things.
- Another idea could be a '**memory capsule**', where we choose special things related to our child and place them together in a box or chest which we can look at whenever we want to.

Overall, memorial corners give us a safe place to go to if we are having a tough day and a place for people to acknowledge our child when they visit. They give our child a permanent spot in our home.

Our child's grave or other special site

Our child's grave or the location where we scattered their ashes is a very special place for us. Some people visit the grave frequently, others less often – it is entirely up to us. We might sit in silence, or we may pray. Many of us talk to our children. The physical location can have a way of focusing our thoughts.

We could also consider:

- **Bringing items to the grave** such as plants in pots, little ornaments, candles, and so on – although it is worth remembering that some cemeteries have strict regulations about what mourners are allowed to place at graves.
- Arranging for friends or family members to **meet at a significant place** that reminds us of our child, to share stories and remember them.

Setting up a memorial to our child in a public place

We could:

- Arrange for a **memory plaque** to be made. What we choose to have inscribed on it is up to us, whether it's their birthday, the date of their death, a poem, or simply their name.
- Organise a **memory bench** or tree with a plaque. This is another way of sharing our child's memory more publicly and it can also give us a place to go and sit. Our local council should have information about the purchase and placement of benches.

Remembering online and digitally

Setting up an online memorial

We may like to consider sharing our child's memory online. This allows us to connect with friends and family who may live further afield.

We could:

- Set up a **Facebook**, **Instagram** or **YouTube** page to upload and share photos or videos of our child, and give people who knew our child the chance to comment. A **WhatsApp** group chat for our friends and family can be used to share memories of our child through texting. It can also be a way of sharing images, videos, and recordings more privately.
- Create an ongoing or a one-off **blog** or **vlog** (video-blog), to reach out to others in a similar situation.
- Create a personalised **website** to remember our child. Depending on the service we use, this may be free or we may have to pay. A **WordPress** blog is free.
- Start an X (previously Twitter) **hashtag** to raise awareness about something closely connected with our child. This could be something like spreading the word and encouraging people to talk more about mental health, or perhaps suggesting someone post a photo of themselves with a friend to promote the idea of reaching out to people. Some may choose to donate money to a charity.

Staying safe on social media

If we choose **social media** as a way of remembering, there is also the unfortunate issue of **trolling** – that is, someone who posts messages or comments on any form of social media with the intention of causing upset or offence. Trolling may come from people we know or complete strangers, and may come from a fake profile. It is important to consider our privacy settings, and if we choose to make something public, be clear on what support we can get if we do face such a situation.



Useful Links

getsafeonline.org

tcf.org.uk/digital-legacy - TCF Leaflet: *Our digital legacy*

Involving other people in remembering

We could collaborate with other members of our **family**, our **friends** or our **child's spouse** and **friends** on any of the ideas in this Handbook.

We could:

- Make things **intergenerational**. Let's see how both young and older members of our family or friends want to remember our child, share these ideas with one another or maybe even combine these ideas together. For example, the younger members of our family may like to show the older members how they use technology and the digital world to remember our child. Likewise, the older members of our family may like to share ways they like to remember.
- Consider **helping each other** - the younger members could support the older members who might be less mobile and wish to be more active in remembering. Older members could also get a lot out of sharing their own life experiences. We could act as a key facilitator in all of this.
- **Meet up** on a birthday or other significant date, with a group of family and friends to do a fundraising activity for an appropriate charity, or simply enjoy a meal out together, or a fun activity that our child would have enjoyed. Some family groups have gone trampolining, canoeing, zip wiring, done a zumbathon and so on.
- **Be inclusive:** We, or other members of our family or friends may have hearing or visual impairments or learning difficulties, or find remembering things more difficult than others. We could think about alternative activities we could engage in. Sensory experiences can be a way of remembering, such as those described earlier, in relation to taste and food, smells and sights.
- Reach out to our child's **friends** and/or colleagues whom we have never met. This can help us discover and explore another side to our child, and help our child's friends and colleagues get to know their friend's family a bit more. We might think about trying to get in touch via social media or by contacting their workplace or university directly.



Useful Links

TCF Leaflets: **Our child's friends** and **Our adult child's partner and friends**

Keeping our child 'in the conversation'

Our children are never far from our thoughts, and we naturally want other people to remember them too. We might find we need to take the lead with this amongst our family and friends.

- We may choose to **talk** about them to people who knew them well or perhaps those who didn't get the chance to meet them.
- We might consider how we would like to keep our child involved on special occasions such as birthdays, Christmas, and other events that our family and friends celebrate. Perhaps we could **raise a toast** to them or in some way invoke their memory. We could keep a **space at the table** for them, or buy some **decorations** that we know they would have chosen. We might choose to dedicate a **minute's silence** to them or **allocate a time** of the day to talk about them. We could invite everyone to write a short **message** to our child on a paper heart, leaf or flower and later make these into a collage.
- **Creating memorial items to gift to others** is another possibility. For example, fridge or car magnets with maybe a joke they once told or a saying they had or a lyric from their favourite song or film or a quote that inspired them. We could do the same thing with business cards that we could share with friends.
- We might want to include **our child's name** on a Christmas card or any greeting cards we send.

Finding places to talk about our child

It is really helpful to find places where we can freely talk about our child and share our memories. TCF organises meetings and weekend gatherings where we can be amongst other bereaved parents.



Useful Links

tcf.org.uk/inyourarea - find support in your area.

tcf.org.uk/events - supportive events.

APPENDIX

Remembering our child: The gift of 'continuing bonds'

As members of The Compassionate Friends (TCF), we know first-hand the agony of child bereavement, as we are bereaved parents or close family members of a child who has died. We are each unique in our own ways, with our own families, backgrounds, circumstances, religions and cultures, but one thing we have in common is the desire to honour our child or sibling's memory.

This leaflet and the accompanying handbook have been put together to provide some practical suggestions for remembering and honouring the memories of our children. We also look at some of the issues that can arise as we remember. We invite you to select what you find helpful, or perhaps use this as a springboard for activities that are more appropriate for you.

Just as there is no wrong or right way to grieve, there is no wrong or right way to remember.

Memorialising or 'continuing bonds'

"When I eat my child's favourite meal, or when I share their favourite chocolate with friends, they seem just a little bit closer. It is a bittersweet activity, as I miss them so much, but I am glad to remember the times they were happy."

Memorialising is a way of marking the memory of our child, focusing on their life and not just their death. It allows us the opportunity to carry precious memories of our child forward with us. Our child may not be physically with us anymore, but the memory of them will live on and be in our hearts forever. There is no right or wrong way to do this, and there are a variety of things we can do. Whether we choose to remember our child through photos, telling stories about their life on social media or in person, by planting a tree, or some other method, memorialising gives us the opportunity to ensure that our child has an everlasting presence in our lives, the lives of other people who knew and loved them, and even those who never met them.

Some people refer to this type of memorialising as "continuing bonds". This term was first suggested in a book *Continuing Bonds: Another View of Grief* (edited by Klass, Silverman and Nickman), in which the authors proposed that grief isn't about working through "stages" until we accept and "forget", but finding ways to slowly adjust to a changed relationship with the person who died, maintaining a continued bond to the extent the person wishes.

This includes, but is not limited to, common activities such as keeping photos, treasuring certain items and sometimes talking to the deceased person, but also includes more innovative ways, such as running a marathon in their name, starting a charity, dedicating a bench, and so on.

Most of us do this type of activity already, of course, but the “continuing bonds” model explains why this can be a helpful part of our grieving.

For example, we can be creative with memorialising activities, combining what our child liked with what we enjoy, such as incorporating our love of painting with our child’s love of animals, by painting pictures of animals. In a way, we will have created something with them.

You can read more about “continuing bonds” here:

whatsyourgrief.com/continuing-bonds-shifting-the-grief-paradigm

Being aware

“Arranging to do a sponsored walk on behalf of a charity that my child cared about has been a great activity. My friends got involved too. There was quite a bit to do beforehand with training and organising. Now the walk is complete, I’m giving myself a bit of break from so many remembrance activities. I feel I need some time for myself.”

Remembrance activities are a poor substitute for the living presence of our child. None of these activities will bring our child back, but hopefully this type of activity can bring at least some comfort as we adjust to the reality of living without them.

The death of our child can make us feel as though we have lost control over so many things. “Continuing bonds” is a way of taking back some of that control – investing our time, efforts and thoughts into appropriate memorial activities. Hopefully, we will reach a place where precious memories overtake the sadder thoughts relating to their death.

The amount of time we spend on these activities is up to us, but it is good to be self-aware. If at any time a remembrance activity becomes a trigger for really sad memories and flashbacks, or if we are spending long periods of time on it, we might need to give ourselves a bit of a break.

Finding the right balance could mean setting aside time for our remembrance activities, or it might mean keeping those activities within a specified time slot. This, of course, does not mean we will not think or talk about our child at other times, but it is important to live our own lives too. There might be some strategies we could use to help achieve this balance. For example, we could visualise putting our thoughts about our child in a safe place, like a safe or a chest, and closing the door for a while. The thoughts are not lost; they are waiting for us when we are ready to look at them again.

Doing what feels right for us includes not putting ourselves under pressure. There is no wrong or right way to remember. For instance, some of us love to have photographs of our children displayed in our home, whereas others cannot face continually seeing our child's picture. This is also okay. It is our choice.

We may need to be aware that on occasion, particularly when we are feeling overwhelmed by grief, remembrance activities may not be the best for our own wellbeing. If we find that these activities bring us down, rather than strengthen us, we might want to set them aside for the time being, or try out some other activities. We can always come back to a remembrance activity at a later date.

Resources, talents, abilities and limitations

“Sometimes just sitting in the park where my child enjoyed playing when they were little and later walking as an adult is one of my best ways of connecting with them. I sit quietly reflecting and remembering.”

Resources, abilities and finances differ from person to person, but in the same way that everyone's relationship with their child is different, so too are the ways we remember them.

For some of us, lack of resources could hold us back from some activities. This can be frustrating, but that doesn't mean we cannot find more affordable alternatives. We might not be able to go on that trip to China, for example, but we can still learn about the country and the culture, and what made our child like it so much. We might not be able to pay for a photo blanket to be made, but that doesn't mean we cannot make use of what we already have, such as saved photos on our phones or physical photos. We perhaps can't donate much money to a cause close to our child's heart, but we can give in other ways, such as our time, or via a small one-off donation. We can raise awareness of something important that relates to our child even by just talking about it with others.

Loving and remembering our child, no matter what

“One benefit I have found from remembrance activities is that I focus on my child as a whole person, not the trauma of how their life ended.”

If our child had a troubled life, it can be a struggle to remember good and happier times. Similarly, if our child died in traumatic circumstances, this can make remembrance activities more difficult, as we might be overwhelmed by sadness or other difficult emotions. On the other hand, remembrance activities can help us put their lives into a better perspective.

If we had a difficult relationship with our child, we too may need to make a conscious effort to remember good and happier times, and the actions we take to maintain our “continuing bonds” can help. We might also want to express our feelings by writing letters or poems.

Differences within the household

“My daughter wanted her brother to be acknowledged at her wedding, so we had a table with photos. This was her choice and it worked well.”

Within the circle of our family or friends, shared memories can be a great source of comfort. Yet everyone grieves in their own way. If we have a partner, it can be difficult if their reactions and needs are not in step with our own. This is not uncommon.

We need to consider all members of our family, particularly if we have other children. If we put too much emphasis on remembrance, there is a risk that they may feel left out. It often works best if we can give them the opportunity to participate in remembering their sibling together with us. In this way, all of our bonds of love are strengthened.

As we undertake various activities to remember our child, we should bear in mind that not everyone will understand or even approve of these efforts. Some family members and friends may be of the opinion that it is unhealthy and we need to “move on”. The reality is that we do not stop being a parent to our child, nor does our child cease to be an important part of our lives, even though they have died. Our “continued bonds” are a necessary means for finding some small comfort.

Going forward in love and memory

Maintaining bonds enables us to build bridges between the past, the present and the future, and we can discover new layers of our relationship with our child. There is no right or wrong way to remember our child and continue our bond with them. We are all different, and what matters is finding what works for us. This may change as time passes.

Ultimately, continuing bonds with our child can give us comfort, courage and purpose for the future. We can keep discovering new opportunities to explore who our child was and what they mean to us, and deciding how much of this to share with others. Our child is not only still giving to us, but is also continuing to contribute to the world in some way through what we are doing in their memory. Our child is still a part of our life's journey, and will continue to be.

There are endless activities and ideas for remembrance; what is in this Handbook is meant as a springboard. We welcome suggestions for future updates.

Who are The Compassionate Friends?

TCF was founded over 50 years ago as an organisation of bereaved parents and families helping each other through their grief. We offer peer support to parents whose child has died at any age (from one month onwards) and from any cause, and also to adult siblings and grandparents. TCF has no religious affiliations and we welcome those of all faiths and none.

Our website at **tcf.org.uk** has more information about our services, including private Facebook groups, online support sessions and residential retreats.

If you would like to talk about your grief, you are welcome to ring our Helpline number below. Calls are answered by bereaved parents. They will also be able to give you contact details of any local TCF groups in your area.

TCF publishes over 50 leaflets on different aspects of grief which follow the death of a child. Our publications can be downloaded from the website, or you can contact our office for printed copies (free of charge for bereaved parents). Find them here: **tcf.org.uk/leaflets**



The Compassionate Friends

Supporting bereaved parents and their families

Call our National Helpline

0345 123 2304

Open from 10am - 4pm and 7pm - 11pm every day.

Calls are always answered by a bereaved parent.

Or email

helpline@tcf.org.uk

For more information and support visit

tcf.org.uk

Find us on social media

f @tcf.org.uk

X @TCFcharityUK

@thecompassionatefriendsuk

This handbook is sponsored by The Adam Simms Foundation in memory of our son, Adam Simms. Adam was taken from us unexpectedly on 21 May 2021, aged 18, in an RTA. We talk about you constantly and miss you immeasurably. You are always on our minds and forever in our hearts.

Love you Mum and Dad. Xx