



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.

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FOREWORD - USING THE IDEAS IN THIS HANDBOOK

This Handbook is designed as a resource that you can dip into when looking for new ways of honouring your child's memory. 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 good ideas here.

There is no wrong or right way to remember, and our own feelings and preferences will likely change as time passes. 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 who they never met. On the other hand, activities such as these bring home the painfully sad reality of the death of our child.

It is our personal choice as to what type of 'memorialising' we do or how much time to spend on it. We should try to be self-aware. For instance, if a remembrance activity becomes a trigger for really sad memories and flashbacks, or if we are spending long periods of time concentrating only on this, we might need to put such activities aside for a while.

Whilst some ideas in this Handbook require some skill or incur a financial cost, many do not. Others can be adapted according to our resources and abilities. For instance, we might not be able to manage a trip abroad to somewhere they loved to visit, but we can still learn about the country and the culture. We might not have much money to donate to a cause close to our child's heart, but we can give in other ways, such as our time, a smaller one-off donation, or by raising awareness by talking about it with others.

Of course, maintaining 'continuing bonds'* with our child is not just about practically doing things or going 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.

If you are reading this online you are welcome to print this PDF file for your personal use in its entirety or individual pages that you find useful.

* For more on 'continuing bonds', see the TCF leaflet *Remembering our Child*

Capturing memories

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

- Create a **tribute scrapbook**. Begin by collecting information and memorabilia about our child, then think how we could outline his or her 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**.
- Perhaps our child really loved visiting new **places**, be it other countries or places local to them. We could mark these out on a map or a globe with stickers and display this in our home. This can be a touching reminder of how our child experienced adventures and felt fulfilled.
- How we preserve our child's memory does not just have to be about visuals. We can play **recordings** of their voice or record ourselves talking about them.
- We can focus on their **favourite smells**, such as perfumes.
- We could do a similar thing with their **favourite tastes** by eating their favourite dish or enjoying their favourite drink.
- **Birthdays** and **anniversaries** can be difficult occasions. Organising anything on these occasions 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.
- If we have a **Christmas** tree in our home, we could decorate the tree in their memory. We may purchase ornaments each year in their memory, or maybe have a small additional tree for them.

Useful Links

www.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 on to our computers, maybe set them as our desktop background or create a special folder onto our computer documents. We can back this up onto a separate drive and/or onto the Cloud, which reduces the risk of losing our precious collection.
- We may have photos on our **mobile phone**, therefore we could select a photo to keep as our lock screen or home screen.
- We can make a **scrap book**, a **collage** or a **printed photo book**. We might want to organise this by themes such as their school days, holidays, friends and so on.
- Another idea is to **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.
- **Meaningful photos** do not only have to be of our child, but could be of a meal they made, their pet, or anything relating to their talents, likes or interests.
- We could also select a series of photos and put them into a slide show format to create a **video**.
- **Blankets, cushions, T-shirts, mugs, fridge magnets** and lots of **other items** can be 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 www.helloprint.co.uk, www.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 - and are confident in using - the relevant equipment.
- Decide to 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

www.paintingsinhospitals.org.uk/4-art-can-begin-to-heal-our-grief

www.recover-from-grief.com/creativity-grief.html

Remembering through music and sound

- We may find comfort in listening to our child's favourite **songs**, 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, be it relating 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

www.psychcentral.com/lib/the-power-of-music-to-reduce-stress

www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/meaning-in-motion/201305/why-should-we-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.
- Consider writing 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

www.creative-writing-now.com/how-to-write-poetry.html

www.telegraph.co.uk/health-fitness/mind/dear-diary-surprising-health-benefits-journaling

'Journey' app for journalling: play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.journey.app&hl=en

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.

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. These are just a few ways in which we can be creative.
- 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.

Whilst we prepare our child's favourite dish or walk past a food place they loved, thinking about what they may have said or felt if they were physically here can act as a gateway to connecting the past with the present. It can make us laugh, smile, cry, but most importantly it can help reinforce the memory of them as a living person.

Useful Links

Recipes we could try with our child's siblings/friends:
www.buzzfeed.com/melissaharrison/cooking-with-kids

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. Immersing ourselves in something our child was passionate about or skilled in can be quite moving.
- 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 would rather not keep our child's belongings; that is entirely a personal decision. In this situation, we may like to consider sharing out our child's belongings with some of our friends and family members who we know would appreciate them. Otherwise, donating our child's belongings to a charity shop or a homeless shelter could be an option.

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.
- Consider getting our child's name engraved on a **necklace**, or buying 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

The gentle fall of leaves at autumn; the hopeful buds of brightly-coloured spring bulbs - nature is meaningful for many of us. 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 and 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.
- If our child loved **animals**, caring for the family pet or a friend's pet can bring us joy.
- **Sponsor/adopt an animal** in a zoo or shelter in our child's memory.

Useful Links

- shop.woodlandtrust.org.uk/in-memory
- www.treesforlife.org.uk/support/plant-a-tree/
- www.nationalparks.uk/support-us
- shop.zsl.org/collections/adopt-animal
- www.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** on the condition from which they died. We may also consider organisations such as **The Compassionate Friends (TCF)** that 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.

Useful Links

www.justgiving.com/fundraising/ideas/top-10-fundraising-ideas

Giving of ourselves

We may prefer to give our time rather than money, be it 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.
- For those of us who can and want to give more time to charity, 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 our child may have faced, and use this as an opportunity to help someone closer to home.

Useful Links

www.do-it.org

www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2014/jun/25/five-ways-to-turn-social-media-campaign-into-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**, be it a holiday destination, a city or other specific place, and discover it for ourselves.
- There's no reason why we can't 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.
- If actual visits to the places that were special to our child are not an option for us, we could **visit virtually**. 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, 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.

Useful Links

There are a number of companies that provide these types of services. For a selection, visit: www.etsy.com/uk/market/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.
- A **memory bench** is another way of sharing our child's memory more publicly, and it can also give us a place to go and sit if we want a bit of time to ourselves. (Our local council might 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**, **Twitter** 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.
- We could start a **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.

The use of technology and the online world may not be for all of us, but if we have the ability, there is so much we can do with it.

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

TCF Leaflet: *Our Digital Legacy*: www.tcf.org.uk/digital-legacy
www.getsafeonline.org

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, 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.

See TCF leaflets: *Our Children's Friends and Our Adult Children's Friends and Partner*

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** for the house that we know they would have picked. 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

www.tcf.org.uk/inyourarea

www.tcf.org.uk/tcfevents

Who are the Compassionate Friends?

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) was founded in 1969 by a hospital chaplain and a group of bereaved parents who recognised the lack of support and understanding they were receiving from those who had not suffered in this way.

TCF publishes over 30 leaflets on different aspects of grief which follow the death of a child. All of them are available at no charge to bereaved parents and siblings (but a small donation is, of course, always welcome). Find them here: <https://www.tcf.org.uk/content/resources/?cat=4>

If you would like to hear more about our work and access further support, you could ring our Helpline number below, and you will be able to talk to one of our volunteers, all of them bereaved parents. He or she could give you the number of a Local Contact and details of any Local Group which may meet regularly in your area. You could also find out from them details of our occasional retreats, when a small number of bereaved parents meet and talk in peaceful surroundings. Most years there is a weekend gathering, to which all members are invited.

Our website at www.tcf.org.uk has more information about our services, how to join TCF as a donating member, private Facebook groups, and support forum where bereaved parents can 'talk' online. We also publish a quarterly journal, *Compassion*, containing articles and poems written by our members about their own experiences. And, if you would also like further reading, please contact our Library for details and recommendations of books on all aspects of bereavement.

TCF Leaflets and Publications

The following leaflets and publications are produced by TCF and are available from the National Office (address on the back page) and online at www.tcf.org.uk/leaflets.

Leaflets, booklets and information available from the compassionate friends (TCF)

- Introducing TCF

Leaflets for Bereaved Parents:

- Living with Grief
- Grief of the Newly Bereaved
- Grieving for our Baby
- The Death of an Adult Child
- Remembering our Child
- Coping with Special Occasions
- Back at Work
- Coping with Judgemental Attitudes
- Prolonged and Intense Grief

Particular Relationships:

- Our Surviving Children
- Childless Parents (those with no surviving children)
- The Bereaved Lone Parent
- A Father's Grief
- A Mother's Grief
- Grieving Couples
- Grieving Child Loss in Blended and Step Families
- The Death of a Stepchild
- Our Children's Friends
- Our Adult Child's Friends and Partner

Particular Circumstances:

- After Suicide
- Bereaved through Drug or Alcohol Use
- Grieving for our Disabled Child
- The Sudden Death of our Child
- When our Child has been Murdered
- When our Child has Died of a Long Term Illness

Leaflets for Siblings:

- A Sibling's Grief for Young Adults

Leaflets for Grandparents:

- When our Grandchild Dies
- Helping our Grandchild when our Child has Died

Factsheets and Practical Aspects of Bereavement:

- Handbook of Ideas for Remembering our Child
- Our Child's Digital Legacy
- Preparing our Child's Funeral
- Death Abroad
- Inquests in England and Wales
- Making a Complaint to or about the NHS in England

Leaflets for friends and professionals supporting bereaved parents or siblings:

- Funeral Directors and the Bereaved Parent
- Helping a Bereaved Employee
- Helping Bereaved Parents (for friends)
- Supporting Bereaved Parents (for professionals)
- The Police and the Bereaved Parents

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



The
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This handbook is sponsored by the family of Matthew Treadgold. A remarkable and compassionate son, cousin, step brother, nephew and uncle who is much loved and sorely missed by us all.

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