



The
Compassionate
Friends

A wreath made of white daisies with yellow centers is arranged in a heart shape on a rustic, weathered wooden background. The wood grain is prominent and the lighting is soft, creating a warm and gentle atmosphere.

Remembering our child

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

Remembering our child

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.

(There are several TCF leaflets that look at these topics in more detail, such as “After suicide”, “Grieving for our child who experienced mental health problems” and “Bereaved through drug or alcohol use”).

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.

(TCF leaflets that may be relevant: “Our surviving children”, “Grieving couples”, “Grieving child loss in blended and step families” and “Coping with friends, family and social situations”).

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.

Those we love don't go away

They walk beside us every day

Unseen, unheard, but always near

Still loved, still missed, and very dear

(Author unknown)

Find more information online

This leaflet is a brief introduction to the topic of memorialising and remembering our child. Download the complete *Handbook of ideas for remembering our child* which contains dozens of practical ideas, **tcf.org.uk/rememberinghandbook**

TCF publications mentioned in this leaflet can be downloaded from our website, **tcf.org.uk/leaflets**

Printed copies of some titles are available free of charge from the TCF office.





The Compassionate Friends

Call our National Helpline

0345 123 2304

*The helpline is open from 10am - 4pm and 7pm - 11pm every day.
Calls are always answered by a parent whose child has died.*

Email our National Helpline

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

General enquiries

0345 120 3785

info@tcf.org.uk

TCF library

0345 120 3785

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*In loving memory of our beautiful
Emma Holly Taylor.*

We still miss you every day xx

