

Legacy and Honoring the Deceased



Not to be confused with memories, legacy is how you honor the deceased and find the aspects of them that continue on. Finding ways to honor your deceased loved one is an important part of learning to live with the death. It gives you an opportunity to continue to show your love in some way, and reminds you that a part of your loved one is always here. The important part about establishing a legacy is preserving and honoring their memory. Consider these ideas for honoring your loved one and their legacy.

- **Visit places that you associate with the deceased.** This could be the gravesite where their ashes are scattered, or just a place they loved (a favorite fishing spot, an amusement park, etc.) Even though you cannot physically be with the deceased, it may be helpful to set aside time dedicated to visiting a place where you feel close to them. Whether it is once a week, once a month, or once a year, consider doing this as a family.
- **Play the deceased's favorite sport or try their favorite hobby.** If they loved basketball, play as a family at a park. If they loved art, take a painting class. This can be a healing (and fun!) way to honor your loved one.
- **Eat their favorite food.** On your loved one's birthday or the anniversary of their death, visit their favorite restaurant or prepare their favorite home-cooked dish.
- **Make a scrapbook.** Collect old photos, notes, and memorabilia of your loved one to save in a scrapbook. Scrapbooks are great because they act as a visual journal that allows you to go back in time and recall memories with the person who died. You can even add events to the scrapbook that have occurred since the death to symbolize life going on without your loved one.
- **Start a blog or online memorial.** A blog in memory of your loved one is a nice bridge between journaling and open discussion. You can record memories, stories, and pictures of your loved one for others to see. A blog allows you to write down all of your thoughts and feelings, and offers an audience who can sympathize and relate. Check out www.celebratinglegacy.com and other related sites.
- **Do the things they always wanted to do.** Capitalize on the opportunities your loved one didn't have in his or her lifetime. You could take a trip they always dreamed of or just do something you'd both always wanted to do but never had the chance. It could be anything from skydiving to learning a second language.
- **Get involved with an organization or cause about which the deceased was passionate.** This can be a meaningful way to continue their work. Alternatively if there is an organization that supports research or individuals who experienced the same illness that was the cause of your loved one's death, consider getting involved or donating to that organization. This can be a positive way to find meaning in the death.
- **Plan for special days.** Consider celebrating your loved one's birthday the way you previously did or do something they would have enjoyed like watching their favorite movie. During the holidays you may find comfort in including the deceased in family traditions as a reminder that they are still there in a different capacity. For example, lighting a candle in their honor, hanging their stocking with the others, or setting an extra place at the dinner table. Enjoy the traditions you love, but also start some new ones. This can allow your family to discover a healthy balance between honoring the past and moving toward the future.
- **Encourage the positive aspects of the deceased's personality.** You may remember the deceased for their humor, generosity, athleticism, or affection. Think about the aspects of their personality that you or your children looked up to most, and encourage these attributes in your children. Children often say, "I want to be as loving





as my Mom.” or “I want to be as good at soccer as my Dad.” This can be a meaningful way for your loved one’s legacy to live on.

Doing something in honor of your loved one who died can be one of the most meaningful ways to acknowledge their legacy. It may allow you to come to terms with their death and to carry forward the aspects of them that you appreciated, while embarking on a new life without them.

Further Reading:

- *Badger’s Parting Gifts* by Susan Varley
- *A Little Bit of Rob* by Barbara J. Turner
- *Love Never Dies* by Sandy Goodman
- *Sadako* by Eleanor Coerr

References:

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