

# Continuing Bonds



One of the most difficult things after the death of a loved one is accepting the reality of the death. Our head may know that our loved one died, but our heart yearns to change that reality. We may understand intellectually that death is permanent and irreversible, but we may resist this understanding because we fear moving forward without the deceased or because we want to hold on to the relationship in the way it previously existed. It is important to remember that relationships don't end, they simply change.

Moving forward after the death of a loved one is not about giving up on the relationship or forgetting the person who died. Moving forward is about learning to integrate the memory of the deceased into your new life. It's about connecting the past to the present, a task that is frequently referred to as "developing a continuing bond". You can do this by finding ways to integrate memories of your loved one, along with things you cherished about that person, into the new life that you have built since the death. This will allow you to stay connected with your loved one and continue your relationship. Consider these suggestions:

- Talk about shared memories of your loved one with family and friends.
- Plan for the anniversary of the death and other holidays, such as birthdays, Mother's Day, or Father's Day. If you have children, encourage your children to help. Some ideas include:
  - Go out to eat at your loved one's favorite restaurant; or stay in and cook a meal with their favorite foods.
  - Light a special candle in their honor at special events and on holidays.
  - Make a donation in memory of your loved one to an organization or a charity that they were passionate about.
  - Visit the grave or a place where you feel close to your loved one with family members.
  - Plan a memorial or event to acknowledge the anniversary of the death.
  - Plant a tree or flowers in memory of your loved one.
  - Wear a special item of clothing or piece of jewelry that belonged to your love one.
- Write letters to the deceased person or keep a journal throughout the year.
- Talk about your loved one who died with people who did not know them. Share the things that you cherished about your loved one and the impact that individual had on your life.
- Listen to music that they enjoyed, whether it is in your car or around the house. In this simple way, you can always carry the deceased's memory with you.
- Set aside special times to reflect and remember your loved one who died.
- If you have children who discuss talking with their loved one, seeing them, dreaming about them, etc., reassure them that this is okay. This may be their way to continue the bond.
- Have conversations with the deceased yourself. This is how children often stay connected, so follow their lead. Just like for children, it may give you comfort knowing that you can still talk to your loved one.

When a loved one dies, their life ends but your relationship with that person does not. While you can no longer be with the person that died physically, your relationship continues when you stay connected to their memory. Continuing bonds are as unique as each of us, and there is no one right way to accomplish this task. As always, consider what feels right for you and your family.





## Further Reading:

- *Love Never Dies* by Sandy Goodman
- *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst
- *A Birthday Present for Daniel* by Juliet Cassuto Rothman

## References:

- Continuing Bonds: Shifting the Grief Paradigm - What's Your Grief. (2014, February 17). Retrieved June 30, 2015, from <http://www.whatsyourgrief.com/continuing-bonds-shifting-the-grief-paradigm/>
- Lynn, L. (2014, February 24). Continuing Bonds Theory of Grief. Retrieved June 30, 2015, from <http://www.aftertalk.com/blog/grieving-process-aftertalk-continuing-bonds-theory/>
- 16 Tips for Continuing Bonds with People We've Lost. (2014, March 24). Retrieved June 30, 2015, from <http://www.whatsyourgrief.com/16-practical-tips-continuing-bonds/>

