

The most well-intentioned condolences after the death of a loved one often suggest that time will heal the pain, that letting go is essential to moving on with life and that the memory of the loved one will fade. Yet, significant pain may repeatedly return for many years, or even a lifetime. The truth is, memories don't simply disappear (nor would we want them to), and letting go completely may not be possible, or even healthy. Denial of the emotional loss of a loved one can delay the trauma of that loss, or prolong the underlying pain and anger. On the other hand, giving oneself completely over to grief, or stoking its embers for a long period of time, can prohibit you from living your own life and result in serious psychological depression.

A remembrance tradition can provide a place for healthy remembering. It can provide a way to grieve and recognize the person's life and his/her impact on you, while allowing you to live your life. Some people find that involving others in a mutually shared remembrance tradition can provide an opportunity for both honoring your loved one's memory and grieving in a healthy manner. These can involve family, friends or be a solo tradition. A designated time, place and ritual for the tradition provides a structure for expressing appreciation of the deceased person, as well as acknowledging your sadness over the loss. Your ritual might be a prayer, an annual dinner with tributes to the person or another ritualized remembrance.

Some people find a symbol, such as a gravestone or a tree planted in memory of the person, helpful to remembrance. Others may seek less tangible ways. A visit to the gravesite can be made a tradition by going on a designated date each year.

Other ways include:

- Continuing to celebrate the person's birthday.
- Creating a video of the person's life from still photos and viewing it annually.
- Designating a charity in the deceased person's name or endowing a chair or scholarship at the deceased person's alma mater; consider donating to it on an annual basis and attending the charity's annual meeting or school's award presentation.
- Creating a memory book of pictures and stories about the loved one that is passed at intervals throughout the family.
- Making a regular tradition of your own creation.

Death doesn't mean you no longer have a relationship with your deceased loved one. To deny that a relationship existed, or to minimize its importance, is to deny the part of yourself that the loved one contributed to your life. Suppressing or denying the memory of a relationship can result in delayed or prolonged suffering. Your tradition won't stop you from remembering spontaneously during the course of each day, week or month, but can periodically provide you with a safe haven for intentionally remembering, grieving and celebrating your loved one's life.

Hospice of the Red River Valley has many resources available for the public, on a loan basis, through the resource libraries in each of our offices. Topics include caregiving, terminal illness, dying, death, grief and loss. For more information about grief and loss, visit our website: www.hrrv.org or call us at (800) 237-4629.