

LONGING

HOPELESSNESS

SADNESS

REGRET

ANGER

CONFUSION

IT'S NORMAL TO FEEL DIFFERENT EMOTIONS

FRUSTRATION

RELIEF

JOY

# WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is the feeling we have after someone dies. Many different emotions are part of grieving. Some people think that there are different stages of grief everyone goes through, but because everyone grieves differently, there's no right way to do it! Being happy or laughing while grieving doesn't mean you aren't grieving "properly", or that you don't love or miss your person. The truth is that grief is hard, and sometimes it can feel unbearable. Most of all, grief is an expression of our love.



## SAYING THE WRONG THINGS

Because people don't talk about death very much, it can be hard to know what to say or do to support someone who is grieving. As a result, people who are trying to be kind sometimes say things that hurt instead of help. Here are a few things you should avoid saying to someone who is grieving.

**"DON'T CRY, YOU NEED TO BE STRONG"**

Not true: crying is good for you! It's our body's way of helping us release emotions that we may be struggling to get out. That's why we often feel better after crying.

**"YOU NEED TO GET BACK TO NORMAL"**

What's "normal" in your life will always be changing – where you live, who your friends are, and your likes and dislikes. So when someone dies, things change. There's no "normal" to return to.

**"YOU SHOULD BE OVER IT BY NOW"**

Some amount of grief will always stay with us, just as the love we have for someone always stays with us, too.



## HOW TO HELP

When someone you care about is sad, the first thing you probably think about doing is cheering them up. It may seem strange, but the thing that will help a grieving person the most is letting them be sad. When we do this, we're acknowledging that their pain is real. As grief expert Megan Devine says, "some things cannot be fixed; they can only be carried". We can't fix grief, but we can help the people we care about carry their grief by listening to them. Sometimes the best thing we can say is something that acknowledges the truth, such as: "I know you're hurting, but I am here for you".



In the past, some African Americans decorated stoneware jugs with small objects. These either belonged to the person who died or were things that they would enjoy.



RIP tees originated within Black communities in the USA. They celebrate a person's life and make their loss visible in a society that often overlooks their deaths.



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

There are plenty of things you can create to keep the memory of someone you love alive. The special memorial or items you make can also help you to continue sharing your thoughts and feelings about the person you're grieving. Here are a few ideas.



Decorate a box that can hold special items that remind you of your person. Later, take your box out to look at the objects, and share stories about them and how you are feeling.

During the Victorian era people would make jewellery using the hair of the deceased.



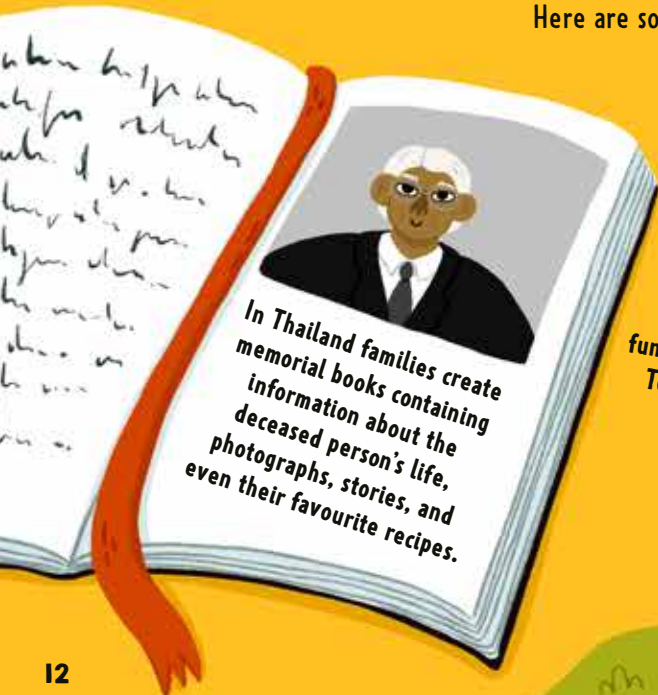
# MAKING A MEMORIAL

Throughout history people have created memorials to remember their dead. These objects can be personal keepsakes, art, statues, or even buildings that honour a person or a historical event in which many people died. Here are some of the things people have created to remember those they love.

Altars are spaces that can be created anywhere using things that are meaningful to you, such as photos, letters, small gifts, or candles.



Create a memorial flower or vegetable garden, or start off with a single potted plant you keep indoors that reminds you of your person.



In Thailand families create memorial books containing information about the deceased person's life, photographs, stories, and even their favourite recipes.

Roadside memorials, or *descansos*, originated in Mexico as places where funeral processions could rest. Today they mark the places where people have died.





# DEATH FESTIVALS

## OBON

Deceased Japanese ancestors are welcomed during Obon with a fire, offerings of food, and folk dances. When it's time to say goodbye, glowing lanterns are released at night to float along rivers and lakes to guide the dead home. They remind people that their loved ones will return again next year.

## DAY OF THE DEAD

This festival, known as *Día de Muertos* in Spanish, has been celebrated by indigenous people in Mexico and parts of South America for centuries. During the festival it's believed that the spirits of the dead visit their living families, who welcome them by leaving offerings called *ofrendas* on altars, cleaning and decorating their graves, or flying large kites.



Around the world people remember their dead with food, music, and cultural rituals. These rituals can be as simple as lighting a candle and saying a prayer at home, or as elaborate as multi-day festivals requiring months of preparation. No matter how big or small the ritual, what matters most is that they help us to grieve, celebrate those we love, and reinforce the bonds between us that not even death can break.



## ALL SOULS' DAY

Catholic people honour their dead on 2 November – All Souls' Day. They attend a special service at church and visit cemeteries to clean graves and leave flowers. In Sicily, Italy, the spirits of the dead are believed to visit the homes of the living to leave children gifts of marzipan.

## FAMADIHANA

The Malagasy people of Madagascar remove the bodies of their ancestors from their crypts each year. They re-shroud them in silk and re-inscribe their names so they will always be remembered. Then, in a ritual called "the turning of the bones", they dance with the dead in celebration and remembrance.

## CREATE YOUR OWN MEMORY DAY

You can create your own special day to remember a loved one. It can be as simple as watching your person's favourite movie, or you could gather with others to share stories and memories.

# FOOD AND DRINK

People around the world mark life's most important moments with food and drink – whether it's cake for birthdays or a toast with champagne. When special food and drinks are included it lets people know that the occasion they're gathering for is a noteworthy one. For many cultures no meal or ritual is more important than a funeral feast. When food is shared it can help us feel more connected to each other, and to the person who has died.

Ancient Romans put special devices into graves to deliver drinks, called libations, to the dead.



In parts of the UK and North America, funeral biscuits were given out as an invitation to a funeral, or handed out as a keepsake afterwards.

*Pan de Muerto* is a sweet bread enjoyed by both the living and the dead during Day of the Dead.

During the Obon festival in Japan, people make vegetable animals for spirits visiting the world of the living to ride on back to the afterlife.

During the 19th century in Sweden, sweets shaped like little corpses and wrapped in paper were given out before funerals.

## FOOD IDEAS

Throughout history people have used food to honour death, the dead, and their own grief. It's as though there is a special kind of magic when we join with others to remember our loved ones and mourn over a meal. Here are a few ideas for how you can remember loved ones with food.



Set an empty place with a plate of food at your table. This is something many different cultures do to mourn their loved ones.



Eat in silence and, with adult supervision, burn a letter written to the dead, its words carried to the spirit world by smoke.



Cook your person's favourite dish or recipe using their cooking utensils, and share it with friends and family.