

Making a Memory Box or Book

Making a memory box or book can be a helpful way of giving children permission to talk about the person who has died. It gives you the opportunity to tell the child things about the person that they may not know, such as details about their childhood like where they went to school.

- The child may like to choose a box or book for themselves; children we work with have used simple boxes like a shoe box which they decorate, plastic boxes with lids, or something that belonged to the person who died such as a jewellery box. If they want to they can decorate these with stickers, drawings, or photographs. A memory book could be something like a scrap book or a photo album, which can also be personalised with decorations.
- Memory box / book work can also be done by parents, other family members, teachers, social workers etc. They can also be made by someone who is terminally ill and wishes to leave a legacy for their children.
- The amount of support children may need will vary according to their age, but they are suitable for school age children and teenagers. If the children are very young then you could make one for them to look at when they are older.
- It is important that children are able to work at their own pace. Sometimes, after initial support, older children may want to work on their own. It can be completed in as many sessions as you and the child want. It may take days, weeks, months or even years to complete. It could also be open-ended with children adding to it as things come into their mind.
- Help the child to think of a place to keep their box where it will be safe from damage but don't lock it away. Ensure that they can access it freely, and privately, whenever they wish. You may wish to keep a separate box that contains valuable or breakable things which may be better for children to have when they are older.
- You may find that children are full of enthusiasm initially and then seem to lose interest; this is normal. Children tend to dip in and out of doing the box / book over time.
- Remember that it can be an emotional experience helping a child with this activity, so it's important that you do it when you feel able to support them properly.

Ideas for the Memory Book

A Memory Book can be as simple or elaborate as you like. It reflects on the life of the special person.

- Photos – these can be pictures of the person at any age. It may be old school photos or pictures that remind the child of a special place or memory that they shared together.
- Poems – some children like to write a poem about the person who has died. You may wish to include a poem or reading from the funeral.
- Memories – this could be as little as a few lines or a whole story remembering an event or conversation, times you spent together, special advice given or special words said.
- Letters – special letters or cards received. A letter or cards written to the person can also be very comforting. You could also mark special anniversaries with cards that can be put into the Memory Book.
- Pictures – drawings of special times spent together or feelings and thoughts about the person.
- Family record – a family record can help a child gain a sense of where they and the person who has died fit into your family. A family tree can be put together. Family photographs, documents, certificates and mementoes can be included.
- Favourite things – for example, what was the funniest thing the person ever did? What was their best subject at school? What was the bravest thing they ever did? This could also be a note of everyday likes and dislikes such as favourite foods, smells or things they collected. Including favourite things can prompt happy memories and increase a child's understanding of the person that has died.
- Tickets or mementoes – tickets from a special event that was shared could be included, such as a trip to the theatre or a football match.

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Ideas for the Memory Box

- Photos – this can be pictures of events, holidays and happy times. They may be in the form of loose printed photos, pictures in an album or files stored on a disc to be looked at on a computer.
- Letters and cards – letters you have received from people after the person has died, postcards from special holidays. Birthday and Christmas cards from before the person died. Sometimes children like to put a card to the person in their box on special anniversaries.
- Writings and drawings – this could include messages or poems that the child has written about how they feel or their drawings of the special person. It may include a drawing by the person being remembered or a special poem about the person.
- Objects – items which belonged to the person who died such as their favourite scarf or tie, or a piece of jewellery or their watch. You could also include their favourite perfume or aftershave; smell can be very powerful in evoking memories.
- Other people's memories – you could ask friends and family to write down their own thoughts and memories for the child to read.
- Music / Sounds / Images – you could include a CD or memory stick that hold the person's favourite songs. You can also include videos or DVDs.
- Keepsakes – you may like to keep a passport or a work pass.

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