



GriefCare for Families
Module 2: Helping your family adapt after a loss
Topic 6: Connecting with memories

Your brain has a special memory system for people you love. It keeps you connected to them when they're alive, and also when they die. Your memories and your relationships are unique, but the way this memory system works is similar for all of us. Your memories of a loved one are not erased when they die, but the fact that your loved one is gone changes how memories feel, what they mean to you, and how they are activated.

Learning that a loved one died strongly activates your memories of them. Their death often creates a feeling that you need to find them. It might seem like they could reappear, even if you know that's impossible. It takes time to fully comprehend the finality of their death. You gradually learn the many things that the death of a loved one means to you and what it's like to live in a world without them. As you do this you begin to fully comprehend that they are gone and the feeling you need to find them is less easily activated. You don't forget them, but your knowledge of them now includes an understanding of the reality of their death.

Stories can help you remember things

Exactly what a loved one's death means to you is personal and unique. However, most of us need to find a way to make sense of what happened. Stories can help you understand your relationship with them and what it means that they are gone. Stories can also help your children learn and remember things.

6 kinds of stories you might create

1. Stories about the person who died and your relationship with them
2. Stories about their death, how, why and when it happened
3. Stories of what this death means to you and your family
4. Stories of your grief and your children's grief
5. Stories of your life and your friend or family member's life after they died, including stories of other people in your life
6. Stories about your imagined future and the future of your family

As you adapt to the loss of your family member you might create many versions of each of these stories. These stories help you connect in a meaningful way to your memories. You access and revise memories naturally as you live your life. Your stories may change as you access different memories, or as you understand things in different ways over a lifetime. That's very natural. It's one of the ways we stay connected to a person who died as we live our lives, thriving and growing.