



# How to Make a Grief or Memory Box

An Activity to Help Your Child Walk Through Grief

*by*

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## Introduction

Your family has suffered a loss. A member of your family or someone who is considered as a part of your family is no longer with you. In the days and weeks that follow this person's passing, you search for ways to make meaning of their death. You are processing your own emotions and questions and perhaps even struggling.

There may be more whys for you at this time than there are answers to the questions. Why her? Why him? Why now? Why in this way?

As you wrestle with the disappearance of the loved one from your life, you see your child grappling with this reality as well. Death is such a difficult sea for anyone to navigate.

For our children, who may not have the language to express all of the emotions they are feeling, it can be even more challenging. [The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#) states that anger may be a primary emotion expressed by children. "The anger may be revealed in boisterous play, nightmares, irritability, or a variety of other behaviors. Often the child will show anger towards the surviving family members."

You may not feel you are at a place to process your grief with your child. You may be working your way through your own emotions and feeling the weight of their emotions is just too hard. We may choose silence over discussing with our child how they are feeling out of simple self-preservation.

Yet, how do you help your child to honor the memory of the person they have lost?

We have created this guide to assist you and your child in finding a way to remember the person you have lost, to revisit memories of being with this person, and designing a tool to help you both deal gently with each other and with the grief you are feeling.

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# What is a Memory Box?

A memory box is a box or other container which holds special things that will assist your child in remembering the loved one and the experiences they shared with that person. This box is a way for your child to cope with the loss he is feeling. The child can decide which items prompt the memories they want to honor the most. Your child may also want to draw a portrait of the person or create art that the person would have enjoyed.

You can tailor this activity to your child's age. Younger children may want to draw a picture of a memorable time spent with the loved one. Older children and teens may want to write a short story or a poem to help them to think fondly of the person they have lost.



# What do you need to create the memory box?

- A box or other container
  - Spray paint/paint
  - Wrapping paper
- Stickers\*Glue/glue stick/glue gun
  - Paper
  - Markers/crayons
  - Various craft supplies
  - Photos of the loved one
  - Mementos of the loved one  
or gifts given by this person
- Any item which sparks a memory  
of the loved one

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# Step One

## Decorate your box!

Allow your child to express her creativity. Spray paint, paint or cover your box with wrapping paper. Make your box more beautiful with the stickers, markers, crayons, and various craft supplies. If your child went fishing with the loved one, you might glue lures onto the cover of your box after painting it. You might decoupage the inside of the cover and the box with photos of your loved one. As you decorate the box you might begin to engage with your child.

Ask her some of her favorite memories of the person you have lost.



## Step Two

### Fill your box.

Gather photos or mementos of your loved one. If your child has a special memory of going to a concert with this person, you might put the stub from the concert ticket into the box.

You might ask your child to write a poem about your loved one or to draw a portrait. Add these items to the box. If for your child's 10th birthday, your loved one gave him a pocket watch, you can add the watch to the box. Add anything which holds special meaning for your child as they remember the person whom they loved.



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## Step Three

### Process emotions.

Allow the child to share the stories behind each of the objects in the box. Be as available as possible to answer questions that your child may have. Answer them in a way that is age-appropriate and truthful.



# For Therapists

Ask the child to bring his memory box to your next session. As the parent has done, inquire about each of the items in the box, and have the child explain its significance. Acknowledge the level of the impact of the loss to the child. Allow the child to express her sadness over no longer having special days in the park, being picked up from school, or celebrating certain traditions at holiday time. Explain to the child the importance of the memories in working through the sadness.

Each person will process grief in her own way and timing. Reassure your child/client that a wide range of emotions is possible and to be expected and may last for quite some time. The Memory Box can be a valuable way to hold those emotions and manage them as they arise.



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