***"The mention of my child's name may bring tears to my eyes,***

***but it also brings music to my ears" (Anonymous)***

**Continuing Bond: Memory Making and Legacy Building**

The bond between parent and child is not broken by the death. An important part of healing is the process of finding meaningful ways to maintain a connection with your child.

Often others will tell parents to “let go” and “move on” but most find great comfort in feeling their child’s presence. The degree a family is able to or wants to keep their child “present” will vary parent to parent and family to family. The challenge may be in discovering what is meaningful to YOU. You may find ways to remember your child that are very private and personal. You may also need to know that your child will be remembered by others too. And you may want to create rituals that involve family and friends.

On an anniversary, birthday, mother’s day, father’s day and other “special” days, Each ritual can provide meaning, offer structure, invite social support and facilitate the expression of emotions. A ritual a ritual may relieve some of the anxiety and uncertainty on a special day. Parents are encouraged to give thoughtful refection to what they want to accomplish… and be open to changing their mind!

**Rituals & Traditions**

**Anniversaries, birthdays, holidays and other milestone and special events**

The first year after the death, the family will be confronted with many of the “firsts”, first birthday, first anniversary, first mother’s day, first father’s day, first holidays, first day of school, and many that the family did not even anticipate being a challenge. The year becomes marked by these dates. Some families report that the anticipation of these days is often harder than the actual day itself. Parents should be encouraged to discuss as a family what they want to do on that day and what they anticipate their needs will be in order to best cope with the day. However, permission should also be given to change their minds as it is hard to fully anticipate what a parent might feel when that day actually arrives. It can also be important to communicate to others what their decisions are and what they need from them on that day. Otherwise there are often hurt feelings and disappointment when others don’t respond in a way that a parent expected.

The first year marks a shift in rituals and traditions. It is important to talk as a family about what traditions they want to stay the same and what new traditions they might want to introduce as a way of honoring the child as well as recognizing the shift in the family dynamic. And how best to integrate the loss into their lives.

Many families find great comfort in the rituals they develop to maintain this connection to their child. Some of these rituals may become a part of your everyday routine; simple behaviors that link you to your child. Others may be designed around special occasions throughout the year when you want to include your child in the traditions of that day.

Families will need to discover what you find meaningful and your own unique rituals in memorializing your child. This may be a keepsake or personal belonging. Or many families attach significance to special symbols, a favorite song, color, or an object that represents the child to them. Butterflies, dragonflies, and rainbows are common examples. It may also be an action such as visiting the grave, hosting a toy drive, or tending to a special garden that links them to the child.

Some may be private that only you are aware of the meaning while others may include family and friends. The rituals can become a part of tradition and connect the past, present, and future as it continues through time. Rituals can also help give people a comfortable way of talking about your child and help acknowledge your child’s presence on special days as well as in everyday interactions.

The practice of storytelling also allows families to share their child with others. In sharing memories, they are able to teach others about their child. Parents may also ask others share stories. Parents report great comfort in hearing how their child has touched others and in the collecting memories from others. Surviving siblings often take on the memories that they hear as their own. Families should be encouraged to write down or record their memories rather than experiencing the fear of forgetting them. Part of their story, though, is also to include the hopes, dreams, and wishes they had for their child.

The following suggestions are rituals and traditions that families have shared they have found helpful in keeping their child's memory alive and expressing their grief:

* Keepsake box with personal belongings or album for pictures, hospital bracelets and records, footprints, hand prints, sympathy cards, and mementos
* Notecards that encourages family members and friends to write memories or message
* Lighting a candle on special dates to acknowledge the child’s presence or simply every mealtime or at bedtime
* Preparing the child’s favorite food or eating at their favorite restaurant on special dates
* Visiting a favorite location of the child’s
* Engaging in activities the child enjoyed
* Naming a star: star registry program
* Planting a tree or garden, creating stepping stones or a bench
* Releasing butterflies, sky lanterns or balloons
* Designing a quilt from special clothes, favorite t-shirts and/or baby blankets
* Creating a scrapbook, collage, dvds of photographs, or video of still pictures
* Creating a music collection of your child’s favorite songs and/or songs that are meaningful to you
* Commissioning an artist rendering of how the child would look at another age
* Purchasing special jewelry that represents the child- a locket with their picture, monogram jewelry with their name or initial, thump print jewelry
* Fundraising, advocacy, or supporting research and/or a special cause in your child’s name
* Donating toys, books, or money in the child's name
* Personalizing an ornament or a stocking symbolic of the child
* Journaling, letters or poems , drawing, painting or any form of creative arts
* Utilizing movement or dance as self-expression
* Blogs, online support groups and chat rooms, or using social media websites
* Placing flowers or special object that are meaningful on the children's graves
* Identifying a special symbol to represent your child: butterfly, dragonfly, rainbow
* Purchasing wind chimes- African belief is “as the wind sings, the children dance”
* Selecting a stone or rock big enough for your garden or small enough to carry in a pocket
* Planning a memorial service or mass
* Continuing to celebrate the child’s birthday/anniversary annually
* Participating in [walks](http://amourningmom.com/2012/10/14/a-walk-to-remember/) or runs in your [community](http://amourningmom.com/2012/04/18/i-heart-the-march-of-dimes/)
* Buying memorial bricks (local parks etc. often offer this as a fundraiser)
* Volunteering or working on a special project in your child’s memory
* Personalizing tee shirts with child’s picture
* Getting a tattoo in memory of your child
* Creating a place in your home for your child’s special things
* ** Performing random acts of kindness, usually anonymous, in the community in your child’s name
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