

The Healing Power Of Rituals

Rituals are an important way for people to find meaning when they lose a loved one. Most people are familiar with rituals, we often do them without labelling them as being a ritual eg. holidays and celebrations are filled with rituals that deepen our connection to emotion, and to each other or to mark important events in our life. It is the symbolic act of rituals which connects us to something meaningful beyond the act itself. They can be comforting, express feelings, bring about a sense of closure to painful emotions (which may be particularly helping if you are struggling with difficult feelings such as anger, guilt or forgiveness) or keep an important part of the past alive.

Rituals can provide a certain order to life which can feel stabilising and grounding during a time of chaos. Additional benefits indicate that some rituals facilitate the body's release of endorphins which can help reduce anxiety and physical pain.

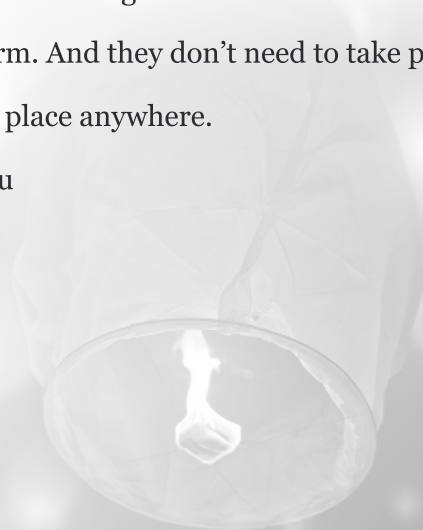
When rituals are carried out to commemorate a loss, they honour both the person who is doing them and the person they've lost. They can give a sense of purpose to our actions and help us to connect to something which is usually greater than ourselves by bridging the world between the profane and the sacred – connecting to cultural traditions, our family, ancestors and our own spirituality.

Create your own rituals

Many people underestimate the power in creating your own rituals. A good starting point is to think about what you would like the ritual to mean for you and how and when you would like to carry it out.

Although rituals often take place on significant dates, such as the day the person died, birthdays or anniversaries, they can be carried out at any time or place of your choosing. You can decide the frequency of them or whether it's a one-off ritual that you would like to perform. And they don't need to take place in a religious or spiritual setting or the grave site itself, they can take place anywhere.

Consider what kinds of actions or activities will most connect you with the meaning of your ritual. And bear in mind, they really don't need to be complicated or lengthy – sometimes, the simpler, the better.



Rituals may involve other people, particularly if they are grieving the same loss to create a communal sharing of grief. If you invite others to join your ritual, you may wish to ask each person to offer a story or memory of your loved one. Or you may feel that you connect more fully to the meaning of your ritual when performed alone.

Some examples of simple rituals include:

- Lighting a candle at particular times of the day or week
- Creating a memory scrapbook or memory jar and filling it with trinkets, photographs, notes, or other significant memorabilia from your life together
- Spending time listening to your loved one's favourite music or creating a special mix of music that reminds you of them
- Writing a letter and creating a symbolic act eg. burning and scattering the ashes
- Reading poems that they enjoyed or that remind you of them
- Going to their favourite nature spot
- Watching his or her favourite movie
- Planting a tree or flowers in your loved one's memory
- Supporting a cause close to their heart
- Creating a work of art in your loved one's memory
- Preparing and eating a special meal in honour of your loved one
- Holding a memorial ritual for your loved one

Continue with your rituals for as long as you need them. They may lessen over time or you may find them comforting even years later.

