



Grieving and Creating a Memorial at Home

Many families will have a loved one die during this time of social distancing when we cannot gather to say goodbye, to offer comfort to one another, and to publicly acknowledge a death and honor the life of the beloved. We know this makes a hard time harder and we are holding you and your family in our hearts. We also know it is important to ritually acknowledge this time and our grief. Here is something we can do at home while we await the time when we can hold a larger, public service.

Create an Altar/Sacred Space

Gather some pictures and personal items that represent what mattered to your loved one who has died. Select a location to create an altar or sacred space to celebrate the precious life of the beloved. Take time and make it special. We might include a fabric covering, the gathered photos and personal items, religious symbols and items, flowers, mementos, artwork from children or others, lovely articles from nature, etc....

Place at least one candle on the altar in a base or holder that is safe to keep lit for a time. This can also become a memorial candle that is lit again when more family and friends can be together in person.

If anyone did not get to fully say good-bye, write or draw a letter of farewell and place it on the altar.

Have some other small item like beach glass, stones, hearts or feathers that rest on the altar for a time then can be given or sent to family and friends in memory.

Home Memorial or Celebration of Life

If sharing this experience via the phone, Zoom or Facetime, invite folks to an agreed upon day and time. Think about where to place the phone or computer and what image/s to show on the screen to best honor the beloved.

Gather around the altar. Take a few breathes to center and calm yourself and to create a special time. Light the candle.

Say any prayers that are meaningful to those gathered and the loved one.

Hold a time of silence in memory of the beloved and in acknowledgment of the many emotions of grief.

Read a poem or sacred reading that is meaningful.

Share memories of the beloved, each person telling a special story or two about their time together.

Sing a song or play music that is meaningful.

Read a second poem or sacred reading as a Closing.

Take a few more deep breaths. To close this special time, blow out the candle knowing that the light and love of the beloved lives on within.



Some families may want to plant seeds, flowers or a tree in the loved one's honor at this time or at a later date.

Please continue to offer yourself and others comfort, share stories of your time with your beloved. Laugh and cry. Allow the feelings to come and go. Be kind.

Rev. Kristen Rohm, Hospice of Santa Barbara Spiritual Care Counselor

Rev. Kristen Rohm, MDiv, is the Spiritual Care Counselor for Hospice of Santa Barbara since May 2019. She is a Unitarian Universalist Minister and a Spiritual Director who has served Congregations in Ventura, Santa Paula and Cleveland, Ohio for the past decade.