

How to Use Memories to Establish a New Relationship with a Deceased Loved One

By Lou LaGrand

A myth that still pervades most of western culture is that when a loved one dies the relationship ends and we need to "let go and move on with life." This suggests that memories of the deceased should be marginalized and moved to the deep recesses of our thought life.

In reality, we certainly do need to move forward, establish a new relationship with the deceased, and reinvest in our new life. Let me emphasize, we are wired to establish a new relationship with the deceased through memory, new traditions, and legacies. And it is healthy to do so.

Love doesn't die when a loved one is no longer physically present. He or she lives on within our hearts and memories--and many believe--in spirit. Establishing a new relationship with the deceased is one of the tasks of grieving. Here is how you can cement that new relationship.

1. To begin with, be determined to follow three key rules. First, make a commitment to reinvest in life. Next, accept the reality of the death both intellectually and emotionally (which can take considerable time). And third, never make a decision affecting your life based on what the deceased would want you to do, if you do not fully agree with it. Always do it your way.
2. Now start loading your memory bank. Review your life with the beloved and start choosing the memories you most cherish. Picture them in detail. If necessary, write them up to read at various times. Go slow, the process of memory retention to use in recalling your loved one can take weeks or months in order to find the keepers. As you return to old places and go through the four seasons, old memories will surface over time.
3. As you recall the cherished memories celebrate them by talking to others at special gatherings. Without fanfare, simply begin with "Remember when . . ." and go on with the story. Much learning takes place through the story involved in memories. Also, use them as inspirations to accomplish some of your goals. Think of a memory involving a trait of your loved one you would like to develop. Then decide on specific behaviors to employ to make that trait part of your new life.
4. Use symbols, photos, or favorite sayings of the deceased as signs to remind you to think positive and/or invest in the future. Each time you see them, use the occasion as a check on the attitude or thought you want to be developing. We all need a mission or purpose and we all have something to give back or teach our children or grandchildren. Your loved one can be part of that mission or new dream with reminders, as you slowly reinvest in life.
5. Create new memories involving the deceased. When you start a new behavior motivated by a trait of the deceased, or find success in using a memory as inspiration, that becomes a new memory. Recall it as a success story. Or, when you tell a story about the loved one that helps others, use it as a new memory. You are moving into your new life with a part of the past remembered in a healthy way. If you wish, you can also create new memories involving new traditions in which you honor the deceased.
6. Whenever you are enjoying a meal or activity and the event naturally brings up a memory share it. For example, sometimes when we are eating a certain kind of food, my wife might say, "My father loved this kind of bread (or this dessert)". This is a normal healthy comment. Like anything else, be judicious in using memory recall openly among friends or relatives. If you do it too much some may well feel uncomfortable or worse, erroneously believe "he or she can't let go." On the other hand, always let it flow naturally, as you sense the appropriateness of the comment.

Memories are great teachers. They allow us to realize that we are all one. Forever connected. Spread the wealth and let others know that memories have great power to heal, motivate, inspire, and enjoy. Cherish your memories and use them as the tool they were meant to be--a beacon of love to share, treasure, and pass on.