

How to Use Linking Objects as You Mourn and Continue with Life

By Lou LaGrand

Linking objects are literally any type of physical object or an image that connects a mourner in a comforting way with a deceased loved one. They can also be used to create a ritual of remembrance or continuity as well as a reminder of a needed behavior when establishing new routines.

The use of linking objects is not widely recommended because many support persons falsely believe they tend to encourage a pathological holding on to the deceased while neglecting to face the task of reinvesting in life. In reality, linking objects can be pivotal motivating factors in accepting the death of a loved one and beginning the new life without the physical presence of the beloved.

Here is what you need to know to utilize this important coping tool.

1. Pick any object belonging to the deceased that has special meaning for you. It could be a key chain, medal, photo, piece of clothing, letter, toy--whatever you would like. (One woman in one of my support groups carried her sister's small change purse inside her own purse.) You could also use something the deceased purchased for you or you bought for yourself on a memorable vacation with him or her.

If you had a visitation dream from your loved one, consider taking something from the dream as the linking object. It could be jewelry or clothing that was worn and that you still have in your possession. Also, consider an award, diploma, teddy bear, or birth certificate if the deceased loved one was a child.

2. Another type of linking object to think about is choosing a word (love, hope, caring, compassion, etc.) or a saying that is descriptive of the character or kindness of the loved one. Take it to a calligrapher and have it written so that it can be framed or reproduced. It can then be placed in various locations that are meaningful to you and used as an inspiration, tribute, or reminder.

3. Call on your creativity to bring special meaning into your life from your linking object. One woman I know had her and her husband's wedding bands melted and made into a new piece of jewelry that brought her a very special message. Or, go to your local library and find a book of symbols that gives long accepted symbolic meanings to various objects or colors. For example, the color green is symbolic of life and growth. Decide how you can weave the information you find into the choice of your linking object.

To summarize, linking objects are in effect transitional objects that assist the mourner in maintaining a healthy bond of remembrance and thanksgiving, as one begins the journey to find new ways to reinvest emotional energy into life. They have intimate meaning for the mourner alone and others often do not see the significance.

These objects are one type of learning tool to bring empathy, understanding, and awareness that love never dies, into the experience of massive change. Psychotherapist Thomas Moore, with extraordinary insight, puts it another way when he says, "Grief is complete only with a shift in being, in the way you live, think, and relate to the world." You can emerge from your sorrow and sadness with new strength, compassion, and vision you never realized you possessed.