

The Remembering Ornament

A Holiday Grief Activity for Children & Teens



Children are often referred to as “forgotten mourners” and this is, unfortunately, all too often true, especially at holiday time.

Children grieve in bursts – a child who is happy and laughing at 10:00 a.m. can be sullen and sad at 10:15 with little understanding of why and very few ways to express it. Consider your own jumble of emotions and then imagine that you are a 6 or 16 year old with very little control over how to make sense of them.

The following activity is simple and inexpensive and lends itself to family/group participation while also allowing for individual expression.

Supplies

1. **Ribbon** in whatever colors you choose. Use at least six colors with young children and ten or more with older ones.
2. **Clear ornaments**, the type you can open. These are usually found in both glass and plastic at craft stores like Michael's.
3. **Strips of paper** in multiple colors, cut thin. If you are doing this with children who would rather draw than write, cut the paper into squares instead of strips.
4. **Shiny tiny things** – beads, stars, snowflakes, etc., all available at the craft store.
5. **Sharpies** for marking.

Set Up

1. Cut all the ribbon into six inch segments.
2. Talk with the children about all the different emotions they feel when thinking about the dead loved one. Make a list of the feelings. Emotions common to young children may include: sad, lonely, happy, scared, mad, love. Older children may have more complex emotions such as: yearning, guilt, regret, hope.
3. Assign each emotion to a different color ribbon and lay them all out on a table. Labeled paper plates are a good way to do this.
4. Place the shiny objects on a paper plate and label them “Memories”
5. Lay out the strips of paper and markers

Putting It All Together

Give each child an ornament. Explain that each ribbon is a different emotion and have them fill the ornament with each emotion they feel when thinking about their dead loved one. This is a great time to talk about feelings and the wide range of emotions they may be experiencing.

Next, explain that the shiny objects represent memories. Encourage them to think about different holiday memories they have of the person who died, then place at least one shiny object for each memory into the ornament. While this is a good opportunity to share memories,

don't push the children too hard. The young ones may have fewer memories and need your help to recall them, but the older ones may not want to share at all.

Finally, ask the children to write or draw anything they want on the strips of paper. This could be a message to the person who died, special memory of them, or anything else they wish. When they're done, add the paper strips to the ornament and close it up. Tie a ribbon to the top and you have a special holiday remembrance of your loved one.