Helping people to Remember
Memorialisation
Introduction

Hospices, hospitals and care homes care for individuals approaching the end of life, and provide support for their families and those close to them into bereavement.

Bereavement is a very individual experience. Not every bereaved person will access bereavement support, but all those who have experienced the death of a person close to them will remember the person who died, in formal events like a funeral or memorial service, and in more informal, personal ways.

Every bereaved person seeks to make sense of the death of a relative or friend. The surviving bereaved individual will ask themselves and others, questions about the death and its impact. One well-known theory refers to this as meaning-reconstruction. Some events and organisations can help with this, through a funeral, for example, when the life of the deceased is remembered in a social act, or in a one-to-one meeting with a bereavement worker.

As the bereaved individual or family group talk about and share memories of the person who has died, a new understanding of what that person meant to the family and their social group will emerge. The process of meaning-seeking turns towards meaning-making as the deceased family member is ‘integrated’ into the ongoing lives of those close to the person who has died.
This booklet aims to encourage hospices, hospitals and care homes which are supporting people at the end of life and families into bereavement, to think about how both formal and informal opportunities to remember those who have died under their care can be part of the meaning-seeking and meaning-taking processes.

Two ways that can help people find meaning in bereavement are through the holding of memorial services and making available memory books.

This booklet contains ideas and suggestions for both memories books and memorial services to help end of life care providers consider carefully how they can help people, through bereavement and in the years which follow, to remember a loved one and create a space in which they can do this, alone or with others.
Memorial services

Memorial services are becoming more common with local crematoria, funeral directors and care homes, as a way of offering a time to recall someone who has died in a shared community experience. In hospices, hospitals and some care homes these events are run on a regular basis and people who have been bereaved within the last six to 12 months are invited to attend.

Many people will have only one opportunity to attend a memorial service. This reason alone means that it is important for organisers to think about the use of poetry, prose, music and carefully considered faith texts to reflect the breadth of religious, spiritual and secular understandings of grief and bereavement. To do this is a challenge, but it can be met by thoughtful consideration of each element, beginning with the question, ‘why as an organisation do we do this and what do we want to achieve?’

In order to bring this together in a coherent way, the leadership of the service should sit with one person who draws on the expertise and ideas of others in the organisation and bereaved people. In a hospice and hospital setting, this could be the spiritual care lead. It is important for leaders to reflect the demography of the local area in which the organisation is set and the religious, spiritual and secular make up of the community. Members of local faith groups and community leaders could be invited to attend and participate.
Where should the memorial service be held?
The setting for the event matters enormously. Although it can be difficult for an organisation to find a large enough space to accommodate everyone who wishes to attend, it would be helpful to ensure the space does not look too functional.

If a multi-purpose teaching room is used, consider how the space could be made more inviting for a memorial service. This could be done using flowers or pictures and by creating a focus for the event at the front of the room. Bereaved people planning to attend could be invited to bring with them objects or symbols which hold meaning for them and place them around the room.

Consider whether a local hotel or other external function room might provide a welcoming space for the service. However, for many people the place in which a person died or a building associated with the care of the deceased relative has a significant emotional draw, as people can feel a ‘connection’ with the person who has died by coming to such a significant place.

What should you include in a memorial service?
Service content should be carefully thought through. For each attendee the funeral has passed and the early period of meaning-seeking is concluded.

Memorial services are perhaps an opportunity for meaning-taking and the readings, whether religious or secular, poetry or prose need to offer a mixture of recalling bereavement and returning to a life facing the future. Above all, it is important to remember that something which is meaningful for one person will hold no particular meaning for another and a diverse range of materials should be incorporated, perhaps making reference to items contributed by those attending.
It would be better not to include poetry or prose which ‘deny death’ several months after the death. Instead, choose material that recognises that the person has gone, but which recalls their life and their contribution to others’ lives and the bonds which continue to connect by surviving family and friends with the person who has died. Doing this avoids a mixed message around the impact of death some time after that event occurred.

**Readings**

If time is given to craft a service which begins with pieces that have a focus on bereavement and moves to a conclusion with items that reflect the future, that will help in the process of meaning-taking for attendees. In this way, each bereaved person will be given time to experience closeness as well as recognising how death has changed that relationship.

**Music**

It is important to think carefully about what music to include. Pieces of music, whether religious or secular, could be introduced by a service leader, or a brief introduction to them included in a service booklet. This is particularly important if its purpose is to allow time for reflection. Spend time listening to possible music choices before including them into a service and asking questions such as: Why could this be included? What do the lyrics say? What is the tempo of the piece? What will follow it? Consideration of these factors will help to create an atmosphere or sense of a particular moment within the event.
Acts of remembrance

The most significant aspect of a memorial service is the opportunity for an Act of Remembrance. Every person attending a service has come to remember; offering a period in which that remembering takes on a central focus engages attendees and allows each person to remember either alone or with family and friends.

Enabling an action during this time adds to the weight of the moment.

For example, placing a stone or flower on a centrally placed table, or offering time to write personal tributes which are then gathered up and acknowledged communally permits each individual life remembered to be corporately acknowledged. In the same way, reading names and lighting candles recognises the significance of an individual’s bereavement, but does so within a shared experience.

Overall, each memorial service recognises that the lives of those individuals, both children and adults, who were cared for in a hospice, hospital or care home at the end of their life, deserve recognition and bereaved family and friends benefit from a space to reconnect with grief and then face the world once more. Offering an event in which the continuing nature of grief and bereavement are acknowledged, breaks the social convention that shortly after bereavement, family members and friends should not mention publicly that they are bereaved.
Memory books

Memorial services are becoming more common with much has been written about modern grief theories. Maintaining continuing bonds with the person who has died and how people continue grieving over time are well researched within bereavement.

Offering a space and the means to write about the person who has died in a hospice, hospital or care home provides the opportunity for bereaved relatives and friends to meet some of the needs in grief which research has identified.

Memory books are written in by bereaved children and adults to record thoughts, emotions and recollections of family members and friends who have died. For some, a memory book allows space in which thoughts about life with the person who has died can be expressed, and the importance of those memories recalled. Topics written about may include family life, holidays, interests, friendships and social activities. For others, the memory book is a place to share news and information, perhaps about a house move, a new job or a pregnancy. These are present events and the writer is including the deceased person in the heart of family life by writing in this way.

Where should you locate your memory book?

Access to any space allocated for a memory book should be straightforward. A chapel or quiet room may be the best place to locate a book, but any other accessible room which is quiet and in which visitors would not feel rushed and can experience both happy memories and feelings of loss as they
write would be suitable. Buildings which have an entry system or receptionists should be sensitive to those who attend specifically to write. For this reason, it is worth considering whether a space close to the entrance of a building could be found to locate a memory book.

Bereaved people may attend a significant place to remember the person who has died at any time of the year. Some seasons and occasions, however, are more likely to attract a larger number of visitors as families and individuals attend to write about how a deceased relative or friend is loved and missed. Birthdays and other anniversaries may also be important for people who are bereaved to recognise.
Why do people come to write?
Families and individuals come to write in memory books for many reasons; to share news, to tell the person who has died they are missed, to recall the anniversary of a death or marriage, to remember special events and occasions and the gap that the person who has died leaves by their absence, and simply to say ‘I love you.’

What to think about when purchasing a memory book
Free writing takes up space in any book and it is wise to invest in a memory book that clearly shows the institution providing it takes this form of memorialising seriously. There are smart, hard bound A4 books available from the high street, but consideration could be given to having a larger, more striking book, purpose made by a local book binder.

This would achieve two ends; first that anyone who wants to write in the book can see that the organisation providing it takes memorialising seriously and secondly, and more importantly, recognises the longevity of bereavement. Some organisations have had a book of remembrance in which they list on each day those who have died. Having the page open on that day shows the family that people have not been forgotten. Allowing individuals and families the space to physically write, affords them ‘ownership’ of that space, especially if there is room to place cards, photographs or children’s drawings.
Some final thoughts

Remembering those who have died is a way for individuals to hold onto the reshaped post-death relationship which has been created by them. Grief and bereavement are not temporary states which pass.

Meaningful memorial services and a dedicated space for memory books are two important ways for hospices, hospitals and care homes to enable people journeying through grief to reflect on that journey in a significant place. This means the investment in services and books by those who have cared for people in the last phase of life is not so time consuming or costly as to override the emotional, social and spiritual benefits to bereaved people of a well-planned memorial service and a freely available memory book.
Useful resources

**Cruse Bereavement Care**
Website: https://www.cruse.org.uk

A national charity for bereaved people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Cruse Bereavement Care offer support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies and work to enhance societal care of bereaved people.

**Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland**
Website: http://www.crusescotland.org.uk

**National Bereavement Alliance**
Website: https://nationalbereavementalliance.org.uk

An alliance of organisations which support bereaved people. The website includes useful resources and guidelines.

**Childhood Bereavement Network**
Website: http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

A resource for those working with bereaved children, young people and their families across the UK.
**Winston’s Wish**  
Website: https://www.winstonswish.org  
This childhood bereavement charity supports bereaved children, their families and the professionals who support them.

**WAY Widowed & Young**  
Website: https://www.widowedandyoung.org.uk  
A national charity providing support for men and women aged 50 or under when their partner dies.

**Dying Matters**  
Website: https://www.dyingmatters.org/page/coping-bereavement  
A resource of practical information and leaflets aimed at bereaved people and those supporting them.
Acknowledgements

The content has been based on a study of ‘Free-writing in Bereavement’ conducted within the research project ‘Remember Me: The Changing Face of Memorialisation.’ This research project at the University of Hull was led by Professor Margaret Holloway and funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council. Ethical approval was granted by the Department of Social Sciences and the university. It also draws on the theory of meaning-making as comprised of meaning-seeking, meaning-creating and meaning-taking, developed through the fore-runner study, ‘Spirituality in Contemporary Funerals’.

This project from which this publication derives took the form of a study of memorial books and memorial services at 10 hospices across the UK. We are grateful to each hospice who allowed us to conduct research on their site.

We would like to say a special thank you to the following people for producing this resource:

- Andrew Goodhead, Spiritual Care Lead, St Christopher’s Hospice
- Claire Henry MBE, Director of Improvement and Transformation, Hospice UK
- Melanie Hodson, Information Specialist, Hospice UK
Published by Hospice UK in November 2018.

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