



Creating a Container for Grief

"I imagine my grief as something precious. I think of it as something fragile and valuable that I place on the shelf in my living room, where I keep other things that are also special to me and, likewise, fragile. I know I can take it from the shelf and hold it, sorting through it as I need. And when it is too much to hold, I know I can place it back on its shelf, safe and protected, until I need to hold it and sort it again."

~ Roseanne



Sometimes our grief is too much to hold. Sometimes it is too heavy to carry and needs to be set down, allowing us time to rest. Sometimes it is too overwhelming or sad and needs to be contained for a time, allowing us a moment to be and to breathe.

But it is not only heavy, sad, and overwhelming at times but also precious. Grief holds not just what has been lost when one we love dies. It also holds all that remains that is precious and valuable. It holds what is private and deeply personal. It holds these things and keeps them safe.

At a time when we can feel very much otherwise, creating a container for grief can be a way of regaining control. Like Roseanne, we can place grief in a safe, protected place, holding it and sorting it as we are able and allowing a container to hold it for us when we need to set it down.

Technically, this is called compartmentalization and is considered healthy and adaptive coping. Grief is too much to carry all the time. Allowing ourselves to contain it, set it down, distract ourselves, and attend to other things creates balance and is restorative. It is not a denial of grief but allowing ourselves a measure of control during it, allowing needed time for feeling and learning from our grief and necessary time to rest from the same.

Creating a container can be done in one's imagination. However, creating one can be more effective, using it as a tool that helps practice containing grief within yourself – allowing time to hold and sort it and allowing time to rest.



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Supplies

1. A container with a lid like a shoebox, wooden box or a hat box
2. Assorted craft supplies of your choosing, such as:
 - Construction and scrapbooking paper
 - Pieces of fabric
 - Cut images and words from a magazine
 - Copies of photos that can be crafted into the container
 - Any embellishment to glue on your container: rhinestones, buttons...
 - Polymer clay to make symbolic objects to place in your container
 - Items that create comfort and protection for what you place inside the container
3. Scissors
4. School glue and Modge Podge
5. Applicator: for the glue (like foam brushes)
6. Markers, colored pens and or pencils



Choose things you like and that are meaningful to you.



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Instructions

Decorate your container any way you wish, outside and inside; consider making a collage/decoupage, covering it with fabric, or painting it.



Some things to consider:

- When working with glue and Modge Podge, it is best not to cover your container's bottom. Even when dry, the bottom surface can stick to wherever the container is kept.
- Regarding the outside, decorate the box in a way that makes it special – that respects what it will hold inside.
- An easy way to make a container is to use Collage (cutting and pasting words, images, and symbols) to create an awesome container. Working a small area at a time, brush Modge Podge directly on the container (remembering not to work the bottom); place the word, image or symbol; and gently brush over them with more Modge Podge to provide a protective coat. Brushing from the center of the word, image, or symbol to the outside is helpful – this keeps it from shifting or wrinkling.



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Decorating the Inside

- Give the same time and attention to the inside of your container. Remember, what is placed inside your container is precious and valuable – even though it may also be sad and painful. Your container is just as likely to hold special or private memories – things you want to never forget. Create a comfortable interior that keeps whatever you place inside respected, safe, and protected.
- Be careful as you work on your container that the lid or other method of closing is kept separate and is well-dried before placing it on or closing your container. You want to be able to open and close your container as you need.



A bed was crafted to make "grief" feel safe and cared for while in its container.



This box contained memorabilia and objects important to the loved one who died.



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What to Place Inside

With your container complete, it is time to consider what you place inside it. Then, using materials of your choosing, create representations of your grief that you can keep in your container:

- Consider what is special and what you wish to keep from the life shared with your person who died.
- Consider memories that gave you the most joy or made you feel loved by this person.
- Consider complicated feelings or memories that are hard to face and difficult to hold, including regrets or things that feel unfinished between you and your person who died.
- Consider more profound things like beliefs and values that have been reaffirmed or that you have been reminded of because of this loss.
- Consider what you have discovered about your own strength and resilience through this loss experience.
- Consider those things which may feel cluttered and jumbled that need to be sorted out to understand better even what they are.
- Consider the questions that you have. What information do you need to better understand your loss and support you in your grief?
- Consider changes you anticipate because of this loss – changes in your immediate world, including future plans and those that happen inside of you.
- Consider what gives you hope – for yourself, the one who has died, and the future.
- Consider making a symbol for what is unknown in your grief or what you will learn from this experience and is yet to be revealed.

Every relationship is unique. So is every loss. And so is every grief. So, as you choose, create representations of your grief that can be held in this protected space: Write your reflections above on individual pieces of paper and create or find symbolic objects that represent these things.

Your container can include memorabilia – photos, trinkets, and other objects that help you feel connected to your person who died and your memories of the life you shared.



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Using Your Container

Creating a container for grief is not about boxing it up and putting it away, never to be addressed again. Instead, it is about creating a safe place to hold it while we figure out what to do with it, what it means for us, and what lessons it has for us. It gives us permission to set down the heaviness and sadness for a time, to rest until we are ready to pick it up, hold it and sort it.

Taking care of our grief means taking the container from its safe place, opening it up, and sorting through what is inside – taking time to remember, feel emotions, ponder questions, and be curious and comforted. Consider taking your container from its safe place when you are missing your person who died and wish to feel close. Open it on special days when you want to share the occasion with this loved one. Or consider opening it and sharing its contents with someone you trust to better understand and support you in your grief.