

## *Using Rituals to Heal Grief*

**“Rituals can surround us and offer opportunities to make meaning from the familiar and the mysterious at the same time. Rituals give us protected time and space to stop and reflect on life’s transformations.”—Rituals of Our Times**

A ritual is a dynamic and symbolic action, usually done in community, which may evoke meaning by inviting us into a sacred space and providing comfort or healing. Rituals and ceremonies often give us strength and courage during difficult times. They also provide opportunities for reflection on our past while at the same time moving more fully into the present. Some rituals are formal, such as religious ceremonies, and others are uniquely personal. Some are very simple, such as lighting a candle in remembrance of someone; others are more complex, such as planning a memorial service.

Rituals and ceremonies that encourage us to express our grief facilitate healing by:

- Recreating order in our lives by promoting a sense of familiarity and continuity in the face of change.
- Strengthening the bonds of solidarity with others in the community through shared symbols and shared action.
- Providing an automatic support system for people in the community who suffer loss.
- Creating a sacred space within which to honor our loved ones.
- Widening the support systems of those who are grieving.
- Encouraging the expression of painful thoughts and feelings.
- Using art, symbols, music, drama, poetry, and dance as ways to express grief that words alone cannot describe.

### **Creating Your Own Ritual**

The only rule regarding rituals is that you feel comfortable with whatever you plan. Do not do anything that offends your own belief system because you feel you “should” do it a certain way. Planning a ritual starts with forming your intention as to the meaning it holds for you and for others (if done with the community). Gather everything you need in advance, such as candles, music, poetry, sacred objects and symbols. Set aside a special time for your ritual when you can have privacy and not be interrupted.

After you've planned your ritual and collected what you need:

- Go to a place that you experience as sacred or healing.
- If others are included in your ritual, form a circle as a symbol of connection and wholeness.
- Invite sacred energy, or spirit, into the healing place, such as by lighting a candle, saying a prayer, smudging, sprinkling with water, and/or decorating it with symbols and objects.
- Complete the ceremony as you have planned it.