



## SINCE...

Millions of people are marking a passage of time “*since*.” A year *since* a global event led up to the death of their loved one. A week/month(s)/year *since* they saw, hugged, or were in the physical presence of family and friends. A year *since* their public faces found themselves increasingly covered. During this passage of time millions began a period of mourning as loved ones died of an illness that disrupted our grieving rituals. As these uncomfortable milestones approach, they will be faced with a decision of if and how to mark the beginning of the journey that robbed them of their anticipated future with their loved one. Society can place enormous pressure on us to commemorate these dates; even calling them anniversaries. As we encounter these markers we need to consider if and how we observe this passage of time. The Wendt Center has some ideas for you to consider.

### Shift Focus

After someone dies the focus can shift from the life of the deceased person to how they died. The death event does not define the life of the person who died nor the relationship you have with them. When we focus on the death date or death event, we lose focus on the totality of that person’s life and their significance in ours. This keeps us focused on one moment in time: often the worst moment. This impacts our ability to learn to live with our grief and identify the ways in which we remain in relationship with our loved one. To help shift your focus try to:

- Use birthdays, wedding anniversaries, graduation dates, etc., as markers for memories you want to retain. Utilizing these live events allows you to bring your loved one and your relationship into the future.
- Consider how you want to remain in relationship with your loved one. It may be through sharing of memories or learning to cook their favorite meal. It could be wearing their favorite color or playing their favorite music. The relationship with your loved one doesn’t end, it changes.
- Name the experience of the loss rather than the specific event. For many, the death of their loved one was not a point in time but a prolonged event. Name and acknowledge the entire experience. Each aspect or stage of the experience may have a different impact or intensity.

- Consider how your grief has changed over the year. While our grief doesn't have an end point, it does shift and change. We will always grieve and miss this person's physical presence in our lives, but the emotions may change or feel different.

## Create rituals

Rituals around death help us acknowledge the reality of the death, while also providing an opportunity to communicate openly and honestly about the deceased with people we trust. Rituals serve as our way of maintaining a connection with, or cherishing the memory of, our loved one after they are gone. Rituals aren't limited to the immediate time after the death and can offer opportunities for remembering and healing in the months and years to come. And rituals do not have to be formal occurrences, they can be small, casual, and frequent. Many cultures have routines/rituals to mark a year or the passage of time. We encourage you to consider the rituals present in your culture or religion.

Existing within this pandemic has highlighted the need for and value of connection. Connecting with others in our grief can reduce the isolation that is often felt. Consider how you can invite others to engage in ritual with you. And if you would rather engage in rituals alone, that is fine as well. There is no right way to grieve. If you need a few suggestions here are some to consider:

Share photos along with memories and invite others to do the same

Cook their favorite meal with others (in person or virtually)

Create a playlist of their favorite songs and share it

Have a virtual watch party of their favorite movie

Hike their favorite trail (with others or alone)

Plant their favorite flowers and invite others to do the same

Incorporate their favorite color into what you wear

In these days, weeks, and months ahead be gentle with yourself and others. We don't have all of the answers, and that is okay. The journey to healing starts with compassion and patience, for ourselves and those around us.

*[Wendt Center for Loss and Healing](#) is the Greater Washington region's premier resource for restoring hope and healthy functioning to adults, teens, and children who are coping with grief, loss, and trauma. Wendt Center Training Institute offers customized, trauma-informed [workshops](#) and [certifications](#) that equip mental health and allied professionals with skills to address grief, loss, and trauma in the communities in which they work and live.*