Rituals punctuate and mark significant points of transitions in our lives. Rituals can have secular, as well as spiritual dimensions that are shared by members of our community. Rituals can also be personal and private; ones that you share just with close friends and family, or by yourself. In order to create a ritual that will bring meaning to your loss it can help to understand the function of rituals.

Rituals can help find ways of understanding some of the more complicated aspect of our lives. They provide a pattern for our life cycle and can bring order to our lives when we feel we are in chaos. They can help us find a shared meaning in our experience. Rituals also symbolize what we cherish and want to keep in our hearts. They bring us comfort as we commemorate the one who has died. Grief rituals may come from religious or family tradition, but we can create our own as well. Anything that has special meaning to us may be part of our mourning rite, from displaying photographs of our loved one to bringing flowers to the grave.

When you are thinking of creating a ritual that is specific to marking your loss you will want to consider the following questions that can help you meet your unique needs as someone who is bereaved:

1. **How can your ritual help mark the change of your sense of self since your loss?**

When you lost your loved one, your role changed. You were once a wife, a husband, daughter or son, mother or father, brother or sister to your loved one and in this past year that sense of who you are in relation to your loved changed. Perhaps your ritual can give you a chance to reflect on the role your loved one played in your life and how your life has been changed by this loss.

2. **How can your ritual mark the connection you had to your loved one and the one you want to continue having?**

Some religions foster continued connection with the deceased such as the Catholic anniversary Mass or Jewish Yizkor, spontaneous or creative rituals (such as the custom of sharing stories or recollections of your loved one) can also serve to recognize the continued influence of your loved one in your life.

Grief rituals, like grief, are deeply personal. What I offer are just ideas. Follow your inner guidance.

**Grief Ritual Ideas**

- Create a memory book of pictures and personal stories from your loved one’s life.

- Invite close friends and family members to your home for an evening of shared memories. Make your loved ones favorite meal and share stories that are meaningful and make you smile.

- Have a butterfly release.
- Have a balloon release - Write special notes in the balloons, then let them go.

- Plant a tree, a memorial garden, flower gardens, and other types of plants. One family plants a tree every year in the spring on their son’s birthday – one every year for 6 years now. They tell me that they have found it to be the perfect way to honor their son – who loved being out in nature, hiking and camping – and a way for them to contribute beauty and life to the world.

- Eat at your loved one’s favorite restaurant.

- Design a tasteful shrine - While this may seem like a new idea, most grievers create a small shrine and sometimes are not even aware of doing so. One young woman sat her dad’s picture, taken in 1950, on his desk and put his fountain pens in a semi-circle around it.

- Wear a remembrance wrist band – These can be plain black, white or colored bands with one-word or short message. You can also design your own that can have personal significance to you.

- Wear something that belonged to your person who died.

- Create a memory quilt or teddy bears - Some people take their loved one’s clothing and make it into a quilt. One mother used all her son’s soccer T-shirts. A man’s shirts, a woman’s blouses or dresses, a child’s play clothes or a teenager’s jeans can miraculously turn into a thing of beauty with the person’s name, birth and death date embroidered in a corner.

- Keep a journal - This may be the most helpful thing you do. You can use a guided journal or an inexpensive notebook. Record your thoughts, feelings and memories. As you look back over time, you’ll see how you are healing.

- Visit the cemetery or another special place.

- Families whose loved one died in an auto accident have memorials on the roadside.

- There are yard stones you can inscribe with your loved one’s name and any other message.

- Light a candle.

- Buy a very special candle and light it at times that are special to your loved one’s memory, i.e., birthday, Father’s Day, anniversaries, etc.

- Set aside time to get quiet and remember the relationship you had - What you do with that time has endless possibility – do anything that has meaning to you and your relationship. You could light a candle and say “thank you” for that relationship. You can take a walk and remember all that you loved about the loved one who died. You can read a poem that speaks to you about the love and relationship you had. You can visit your loved one’s gravesite. Write a letter to them.

- Letters - Writing a letter is a common ritual and it is a great way to say all those things we didn’t get a chance or simply didn’t say. It can be a way to complete
unfinished business. Some people share their letters with others, some write it and then throw it away, and others create another ritual and bury it or burn it. It’s a very personal process and it’s important to do what feels right and true for you.

- Help feed the hungry/homeless at Thanksgiving, holidays, etc.
- Donate gifts, quilts, etc., in a loved one’s name.
- Find a tree in the woods, tie a yellow ribbon around it, and visit when you feel the need.
- Offer a scholarship in a loved one’s name.
- On birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, etc., buy your loved one a gift and donate it to a hospital, nursing home, etc.
- If you go on a trip at a special anniversary time, do something special to remember your loved one on the trip (i.e., toss a rose in the ocean, light a candle).
- Have your wedding ring made into a new setting for a necklace, etc.
- Have a birthday party for your loved one on his/her birthday.

You don’t have to conduct your grief rituals all alone (unless you want or need to). This is a perfect time to share your grief with others, especially other friends and family members who are also grieving the same loss.

For some ideas on how to get started on some of the projects, there are websites below that can be used as guides:

**Memory Books/Scrapbooks**
- www.paperposey.com
- www.kolo.com
- www.joann.com

**Butterfly Releases**
- www.butterfliesabound.com
- www.butterflyreleases.com
- www.swallowtailfarms.com

**Balloon Releases**
- www.balloonrelease.com
- www.balloonhq.com/faq/deco_releases.html

**Remembrance Wristbands**
- www.wristbandswithamessage.com
- www.24hourwristbands.com
- www.craftsncraft.com/awareness/wristbands2.html
Memorial Quilts
www.timelessthreaddesign.com
www.originalquilts.com/memorial_quilts.htm
www.recover-from-grief.com/memorial-quilts.html

Memorial Jewelry
www.thecomfortcompany.net/Memorial-Jewelry.aspx
www.limogesjewelry.com/personalized-jewelry/limoges-jewelry.asp?catid=404
www.joyjewelers.com