

Love, loss and remembering

Autumn has traditionally been a time when Christians explore the big questions about life and death. Watching the leaves fall and the nights draw in is an opportunity for all ages to think about love and loss and remember in special ways.

Children ask questions about death for all kinds of reasons. It may come from seeing a local war memorial, or closer to home with the death of a pet. Or maybe your child has lost a great-grandparent, grandparent, a family friend, a teacher, a neighbour, an aunt or uncle.

For some children, the impact of loss has huge consequences, especially if it's the death of a parent or a sibling. However and whenever those questions come, there are good ways to remember those we see no longer with family at home:

- Light a candle on important days and say a prayer. "Loving God, thank you for _____ and help us to remember them well." This is a simple prayer to say together.
- Gather some items that remind you of that person – letters they wrote, photos of them, items of clothing – and keep them in a nice box. Children can add things to the box.
- Taking part in charities connected to the person who died; Race for Life is a family-friendly event that can honour people who died from cancer, for example.
- Children can help taking care of a gravesite – pulling weeds, choosing flowers or other items to bring at special times, washing a memorial stone, etc.

The church also has ways of remembering those we love who have died. This happens at the start of November, at All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day. A week later, at Remembrance Sunday, we remember those who died in wars, and pray for peace.

At **All Saints' Day** (November 1st), we remember those Christians who have died, who we don't know personally. A "saint" is someone whose life shows us how to follow Jesus.

There are all kinds of saints – teachers, artists, scientists, social reformers, troublemakers, writers, and many more. Is there a saint who shares your child's name? Their birthday? Think of well-known saints, like St George for example, and discover together who they were and what they did.

On **All Souls' Day** (November 2nd), the church remembers all those we know who have died.

Some churches have a special service where they invite people to add any names they would like read out to a list – we can hear the names that mean something to us and light a candle to remember them. Some may have a prayer wall where you can add names. Some may have special services of remembering. Find out what your local church is doing, and how you and your child can remember along with the whole church family.

If your child is struggling with a bereavement, there are resources available:-

- Child Bereavement UK, (<https://childbereavementuk.org/families/support/>) Grief Encounter (<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk>) and Winston's Wish (<https://www.winstonswish.org.uk>), are all charities which offer support to bereaved children.
- SANDS (<https://www.sands.org.uk>) is for anyone coping with the death of a baby, including siblings.
- At A Loss (<http://www.ataloss.org/find-support/search>) can help you find the right services for bereavement in your area.
- Your child's GP may also be able to offer help and support.