

# How A Memorial Space can help a grieving person

~excerpts~

Creating a personal memorial space is a way of honoring a loved one and inviting positive spiritual feelings into our home. A memorial space can include anything that reminds you of your loved one. It might simply include a photo, along with a few possessions or symbols of that person.

The memorial space doesn't need to be huge or elaborate – it can be something fairly simple and unobtrusive on a dresser, bookshelf, outdoor area or another location. It is a sacred space with special articles of remembrance.

The space can be a portable or permanent fixture in one's daily habitat. It promotes the grieving process as normal and gives the griever personal meaning. It fosters good memories of the loved one, provides comfort and gives us a safe place to mourn, pray, read and remember. This space lets us express our emotions and can reduce stress, anxiety and depression. It shows that grieving is not about forgetting. Grieving is a sorting process. Its presence lets our grieving heal us and allows us to remember with love instead of pain. One by one, we take hold of the things that have become a part of who we are and build ourselves up again.

In a 2001 study, researchers found that creating this space is the second most important ritual activity that helps the bereaved. (The first most important activity is designing a remembrance ceremony or celebration.)

Many of us feel comfortable using a memorial space as often as it feels right to do so – daily, weekly, monthly or yearly on an anniversary date or on holidays.

I hope you, the readers of this piece, find what is best for your memorial space and that it brings you comfort and peace as well.

By Rev. Jennifer Malewski  
Staff Chaplain at the University of KS  
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## Do You Have a Special Memorial Space where you honor the memory of a loved one?

My 6-year-old son Ryan died after a car crash. A friend built a 3-foot-high cross to put in the ground. I added his name and dates, decoupage pictures and painted butterflies, sunflowers and rainbows on the cross. It turned out beautifully and it is a personal and lasting tribute to my angel son.

~Peg French

My son Michael committed suicide in 2008. I have several places where I have put his ashes – under his favorite apple tree in his dad's yard, the ocean near where he lived with my sister for a year, my backyard under a birdbath. I placed some in my future



burial plot, and I have a special place that only he and I know. All of the places have special meaning and bring me comfort.

~Melissa Bothum

After I lost my 26-year-old daughter Amber, who was an LPN, I kept the bedroom that she shared with her son the same with all her pictures, as well as a scrapbook with dried flower arrangements from her funeral. I also have a shadow box someone made with a shirt, a picture of Amber, her nursing pins and other things she loved. When my grandson comes to visit, he loves to go in the room and just look at all the stuff. I have angels all around her things.

~Debbie McCray

On my son's birthday, my family planted a Japanese Maple tree. It was so fragile at first and we worried as it weathered each year's severe winter, but each year it got stronger and fuller. It continues to grow, prosper and bring us beauty everyday. It is a living witness to our son's life and to his eternal presence with us now.

~Maureen Fleagle

When my son died suddenly at the age of 20, we had a Celebration of Life instead of a traditional funeral or wake. We displayed two "story boards" that had pictures of DJ. We included handwritten poems and remembrances along with paper for those attending to jot down their feelings. Those who contributed, sifted through photos, glued, pasted and shared stories said it was incredibly helpful because it directed us onto a path of remembering the good and the smiles as opposed to anger and resentment. The grieving never ends. Those boards are displayed in my office and help move us forward on our journey of healing, a journey we are traveling on together because of this project and our mutual love.

~Shelly

I covered pillows with my son's shirts so I can "hug" him. We also have a room set aside with all his memorabilia on the walls. We will be planting a tree at the cemetery by his grave.

~Nancy Martinez

At my son's funeral, there were beautiful sunflowers everywhere. Since that time I have surrounded myself with sunflowers in memory of him. I have them painted on both my cars and in many places throughout my home. Each time I look at my collection, I think of my sweet boy and the gift of life he gave.

~Pam Charron

I think the best thing we can do is some type of memorial that gives to others in memory of our children. We started a nonprofit for Lance that concerns motorcycle safety.

~Kathy Malone