

THE IMPORTANCE OF RITUALS
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Lighting a candle... reading a favorite bedtime story each night... saying a special prayer for the deceased... making Grandma's special recipe...

Rituals of all types play a significant role in our lives. Whether they are part of our everyday habits or are intended to allow us to express our grief, rituals can be a means of healing and a way to express and channel emotions. Their repetitive nature is anchoring, and can provide structure and reassurance during anxious and chaotic times. Grief rituals, in particular, can be a meaningful and helpful way to navigate through times of great loss. Rituals help those who are grieving in two key ways:

They allow for transformation: Symbolic acts are transformative. Rituals help us to find a place for those no longer physically present and continue the emotional connection. Rituals are not meant to make us forget the person, but instead to transform our bonds in a way that leaves room for us to continue growing, even though our loved one is not alive and to find new ways of making meaning of loss.

They help us navigate through transition: When someone dies, we often find that our role in society can change. For example, we may now find ourselves a single parent, a widow, an only child. Many adults who grieve the death of an elderly parent still describe a sense of being orphaned. Rituals can support us as we shift and change roles, and learn to define ourselves in new ways.

At Sanctuary Counseling, we encourage an understanding of grief that expands the concept of grieving as merely "letting go" to include a far broader appreciation of the power and pathways taken through grief. Rituals allow us to acknowledge loved ones in a way that honors both the need to maintain connection, as well as the need to continue journeying on one's path. They help parts of us to remain constant, even as we inevitably change.