



A Ministry to Bereaved Parents and Their Families

Inviting Hope to Heal Broken Hearts

REMEMBERING OUR CHILDREN DURING THE HOLIDAYS: PRACTICAL IDEAS

It's not like we forget, is it?

And it may be that other folks remember too.

But it can feel oh, so lonely amidst the lights and the laughter when the one name you want most to be spoken aloud just isn't.

So what are some practical ways to include our missing child in holiday celebrations?

I, and three other bereaved moms, together with Our Hearts are Home, shared thoughts and ideas on how to remember -in a tangible, physical way-our child during the holidays.

Two common themes tie them all together: (1)represent your child in a meaningful way that is authentic to who they are; and (2) help lead others into the knowledge that it is not only OK to talk about your child but downright joyful to hear it (even if it makes you cry).

Not every idea will suit every family but there is probably one (or more!) that you might find suit yours.

So here they are.

THANKSGIVING

- ***Light a candle*** (real or battery powered) and put it in a prominent place or as part of a centerpiece. You can attach a lovely tag or put a picture next to it or somehow otherwise indicate that it is in honor of your child.
- ***Memory candles of all sorts are available to order and ideas for making them are easily found online.*** They often have names and (if you want them) dates etched directly onto the candle or on a container designed to hold a candle.
- ***Photographs are always wonderful.*** Some families set a place for their missing child or have a separate chair set aside to note their absence. Pictures can be placed on the table, on a side table next to a child's favorite dish or in some other spot. It's a Jewish tradition to include photos of all close family members gone before during Sukkot (*a biblical holiday many feel is the precursor to our Thanksgiving*) as a way to remember and honor ongoing ties and love
- ***Cook your child's favorite dish and put a note next to it that says so.*** Perhaps bring copies of the recipe or, if something that lends itself to this, prepare take home boxes with a serving or



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two for family members to relish and remember later. Mention to others sharing the meal that this is your child's favorite and why. It's a great way to encourage natural conversation.

- **Share why you are thankful for your missing child.** This can be done in the context of offering thanks for other family members who have joined you and for those who are no longer present if you feel awkward or expect pushback from family members.
- **Provide a ceramic plate with your child's name in the center and acrylic paint markers.** Have family and friends write one word that they think of when they think of your child. Directions for curing the paint and making it permanent can be found online.
- **Donate a holiday meal** in their honor through a local food bank or charity.
- **Watch a favorite movie or show and share memories of why it's a favorite.**
- **Create a memory table** by asking guests to bring something that reminds them of your child. During your time together, ask the guest to share why they chose that item.
- **Create a Thanksgiving memory journal.** Ask others to write a memory in it. You can add to it each year.
- **Do an act of kindness in their honor.**
- **Share stories.** One of the things I've learned is that if I don't bring Dominic up and "give permission" to others, they often won't either. Share about your child in Heaven just as you would one that is here on earth. Every family has a story about that "one Thanksgiving, so and so did..." .
- **Provide a family photo album of Thanksgivings past.** These will naturally spark conversation about memories, about the lives and love of those no longer present and give bereaved parents a great opening to speak about their child.
- **Leave an empty chair or place setting.**
- **Participate in a Thanksgiving walk or run in their honor.** There are lots of 5Ks around this time of year and almost anyone can participate. Get a group, dress up honoring your child and (turkey) trot on!
- **You might just want to visit their grave or a special place that is meaningful to you.**



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- ***Send thank you notes to those who were special to them or played a part in their lives.*** The first Thanksgiving after Dominic left for Heaven, I wrote notes to everyone I could think of who had shown up or helped our family in some way during those early days.

CHRISTMAS

- ***Hang ornaments that represent your child.*** Some parents do a separate tree for their missing child (*and some keep it up all year*).
- ***Hang your child's stocking along with the others.*** You can write letters to your child and encourage other family members to add their own. You can ask family members to fill the stocking with gift cards that can be donated in your child's name to a charity that represents his or her heart.
- ***Volunteer to serve at one of the many organizations that need extra help this time of year.***
- ***Listen to favorite songs.*** It's easy to make an entire dedicated playlist of songs that remind you of your child or are your child's favorites.
- ***Buy a gift they'd like and give it away.*** Many parents purchase gifts for a child who would be the same age as their child this year. You can get names from your local DHR or from churches or other organizations.
- ***One family who draws names for Christmas asked family members to purchase a present that began with their daughter in Heaven's first initial.***
- ***Adopt a family and provide Christmas for them in your child's honor.***
- ***Make a memory chain for the tree.*** One mom said her daughter had family and friends write a memory on the strips and then put them together in a chain. It could be lengthened each year.
- ***Purchase a poinsettia at church remembering your child.***
- ***Give an item that belonged to them to someone who would treasure it.*** This one can be hard because it's difficult to release those physical objects our child last touched. But if/when you are ready, it can be a truly beautiful and special act of remembrance.
- ***Make cookies for caregivers or others who helped during a prolonged illness or hospital stay.*** Make cookies for first responders in your own community.



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- ***Memory table runners are easy to purchase or make.*** Have guests write a favorite memory using permanent markers.
- ***Make a story book of their life and display it where others can see it and enjoy it.***
- ***Make or purchase an ornament with their handwriting imprinted to give to family.*** Because Dominic left for Heaven when my other children were also leaving home, I have made or bought ornaments every year that represent our family and include names. *Dominic's is always included.*
- **(Of course, you could do most of the things listed for Thanksgiving as well.)**