# Introducing Memory Boxes with Care




A practical guide to supporting connection, care and memory making across the lifespan.

## The purpose of the box

When someone is dying or has died, shock and grief can make it difficult to know what is possible.

A Memory Box can gently open possibilities for connection, participation and remembrance, helping people and families spend meaningful time together and create memories in ways that feel right for them.

## Memory making is not the endpoint, *connection* is

### Connection may include

- Holding, touch, bathing, dressing or personal care
- Reading, playing music, prayer, cultural practices or quiet presence
- Photos, prints, locks of hair, capturing handwriting, artwork or recordings of a heartbeat or voice
- Sharing stories, rituals or meaningful experiences
- Involving children, the wider family or people who are important

### When should I introduce the Memory Box?

Early enough to become part of the person's and family's precious time together and part of their choices - not simply a discharge task.

- Before death – when exploring goals of care, wishes, legacy or meaningful time together
- After death – once immediate needs have been addressed
- Before care or rituals – so items can be used meaningfully
- Revisit if appropriate – offer without pressure and respect a clear no

### Keep the focus on connection

- **Introduce** – Offer one possibility at a time and explain why it may matter
- **Do together** – Demonstrate, guide or participate if invited
- **Step back** – Give the person and family time, privacy and ownership

*Gifting a Memory Box*

*Advice for Health Professionals*

*Guidance for Health Professionals*

*Bereavement Education*

# A Simple Way to Introduce the Memory Box

**How we offer matters.** Avoid asking only "Would you like…?" without first helping the person or family understand what is possible. Offer a little context, one possibility and genuine choice: "Some families find taking a handprint very precious and use them to make a tattoo, piece of jewellery or just to feel close. I can help you and we can do it together. You can decide later what feels right."

- **Notice** Use the person's name. Notice who is present and what matters
- **Ask** Check whether this is a suitable time. Make clear there is no obligation
- **Explain** Briefly explain how the box may support connection and memory making
- **Offer one possibility** Start with one relevant item or experience
- **Guide then step back** Show or do it together if helpful, then let the person and family lead
- **Revisit** Return later if appropriate. Document and safely store keepsakes when needed

## What would you actually say?

| Moment | Possible Words |
|---|---|
| Opening | "I have something to give you, that comes from another bereaved family... a memory box... to show you love and support and that you are not alone. Is now a good time."<br>"The memory box can help us think about ways you might spend time together, care for [name] and create memories. Would it be okay if I showed you?" |
| Offering a possibility | "We could create some hand and footprints. I can show you, we can do it together, or we can come back to it later." |
| If overwhelmed | "You don't need to decide everything now. We can start with one small thing, pause or come back later." |
| If they say no | "That's completely okay." Respect a clear no. Re-offer only when appropriate and without pressure |

**Do**

- Use the person's name and acknowledge important relationships
- Ask what matters to them
- Offer small, manageable choices
- Invite participation where appropriate
- Include family and children appropriate
- Follow local clinical, cultural and consent procedures

**Avoid**

- Treating the box as a checklist or discharge task
- Opening and showing the family everything at once
- Making assumptions based on age, culture or diagnosis
- Creating keepsakes without inviting participation
- Pressuring or implying they may regret saying no
- Letting the box replace compassionate conversation and presence

**Remember** – Our role is not to create the relationship. The relationship already exists. Our role is to notice it, nurture it and help preserve it. Involving families in memory making honours that relationship: the experience of caring, choosing and creating together can matter as much as the tangible outcome.

Selected evidence: Clarke & Connolly (2021); Thornton, Nicholson & Harms (2020); CRE & PSANZ Care Around Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Clinical Practice Guideline (2024). Principles have been adapted for bereavement care across the lifespan.

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