

## Create a Memory Table

### A Ceremony Following the Death of a Loved One

On November 1 and 2 in Mexico, in connection to All Saint's Day and All Souls Day, most people celebrate the Día de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead). Though the name may sound morbid, at the heart of the celebration is a spirit of remembering those we have lost through death. Central to the day is the creation of altares (altars) in honor of each person. Because of my Protestant background, I use the term "memory table" rather than altar. Certainly each person should use the term that resonates most with their spiritual tradition.

#### Designed for Ages 5+

#### Materials

1. A table or piece of carpet that can be dedicated for this purpose for one or two days
2. Battery-operated or wax candles
3. Items that represent the person being remembered: photos, favorite drink or food, item of clothing, item representing favorite hobbies, etc.

**Time Investment:** 15 minutes—2 hours

#### How To

1. A few days before November 1, explain to children that you will be making a memory table to honor a loved one who has died. Tell them to think about what they would like to put on the table and take suggestions.
2. Gather items for the memory table. On November 1, arrange them on the table together as a family.

3. As items are placed on the table, talk about the significance of each item. Tell stories about the person and what you remember most about her. Take the opportunity to remember the person's personality as well as her interests. Was she kind and compassionate? Funny? Disciplined?

4. Light candles and place them on the table to celebrate the light the person brought to the world, and the light of his memory.

#### Notes

- This activity presents an opportunity to talk about death and dying, and about the ways in which people are present to us after we die, though the focus should be on remembrance and life. Ask questions to get the conversation going: How does the person being remembered still live on in your lives? How can you honor the memory of that person?
- If a significant family member has died before the child had the opportunity to know that person personally, make a memory table and use it as an opportunity to teach the child about the significant person. *"You didn't have the chance to meet great-grandma, but she loved peppermints, so that's why we are including them on her table! This is what she looked like."* Leave the table up for a day or two and take a picture of it before taking it down.

#### Variations

- Take turns remembering different people each year. Alternate who gets to choose the person who will be remembered.
- Make a memory book or poster instead of a table.
- Do this activity at a different time of year (not in connection with Día de los Muertos).

This activity is from *Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home* by Traci Smith