Father's Day is going to feel a little different this year for a lot of people in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. For anyone who is grieving the death of their father, this will be particularly true. What are creative ways that you can remember and memorialize fathers who have died, even under these challenging circumstances? While it is hard to escape all the reminders of Father’s Day, it is possible to prepare ourselves within the confines of our time at home.

1. PLAN AHEAD
Think ahead to what you want to do on Father’s Day. Do you want to do something with your immediate family? Is there something that feels important to do alone? Given that you are unable to go and gather in places like restaurants, faith communities, or other public places, consider creative options to celebrate Father’s Day while you are at home. Since many things are more difficult to find in stores and online, you will want to give yourself plenty of time to shop for anything you want as part of that day too.

2. UNDERSTAND CONTEXT SHAPES RESPONSE
Grief is unpredictable. It challenges us every step of the way. People who are grieving often don’t feel like their ‘old selves’ including increased depression, anxiety, and low energy amongst many other emotions. Anticipate that this could be heightened this year while we are all under extra stress with the COVID-19 epidemic. Be patient and compassionate with yourself, and understand that context will shape response.

3. SEEK OUT SUPPORT
Not everyone will remember that Father’s Day is different for you and your family. In this current context where we find ourselves in a pandemic that grabs all the headlines and news stories, many people might even forget that it is Father’s Day. It is especially important to seek support if you are distancing by yourself. Just because we are all social distancing, does not mean we have to be socially isolated. Start by telling them what you are anticipating that will be challenging on the day, and share what you need in terms of support.

4. GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO FEEL
As Father’s Day approaches anticipate that feelings like sadness, loneliness, isolation, anger, and even joy might be triggered. These are all normal feelings especially in the context of feeling isolated at home and unable to distract yourself with friends, activities, sports, shopping, and all the things we did before COVID-19. Feel your feelings! Cry if you feel like crying. Laugh when you want to laugh. Punch a pillow if you need to punch something. Give yourself permission if you feel ‘okay’ too!
5. CELEBRATE THEIR LIFE

While special dates like Father’s Day can be challenging after someone dies, they are also opportunities to remember and celebrate their life. Even during a time of self-isolation, you can visit their grave, favorite outdoor place, order food from their favorite restaurant, listen to their favorite music, and more. Memorialization is all about the celebration of their life, and there are no limits on how creative you can be.

6. REVISIT AND SHARE MEMORIES

A great activity for a family is to revisit favorite memories about your father. Break out the photo album or videos; take turns sharing stories; make a memory box where family members can write down and save memories; create a photo collage and through it all allow yourself and others to reminisce, laugh, cry, be loud, be silent, and connect to each other.

7. CONTINUE THE BOND

Although your person has died, the relationship continues. During these extraordinary times, search for ways to keep your relationship vibrant and strong. Consider writing a letter to tell your person how you feel; how you miss them; about how you have grown; about the family; about this strange pandemic and period of isolation; what milestones have passed; the ways that they continue to be a part of your life; how you have grown. Then, put a date on it, and save it to re-open next year.