



How to Make and Use Memory Boxes

A memory box can help you remember people you love and times that were important. In a memory box, a family can put photographs or drawings, personal or sacred objects, symbols of special times together, or family stories written down. When the parents are no longer alive, their children can use the memory box to remember them. Some people say the best thing about the boxes is that making the box together as a family helps parents talk openly about what is going to happen to them and to their children in the future.

Beatrice was very ill. She worried about leaving her children, who were so young. One day when the health worker visited Beatrice at home, she told her about a way to help her children remember her. Beatrice began making her memory box that night. She took an old biscuit tin and painted it her favorite colors. Over the next few days she gathered some cloth from her husband's burial, a bouquet of flowers that grew around the village, and beads from her wedding dress. When she finished, her box was full of memories and love. She knew that this box would help her children remember her after she died, and know where they came from.

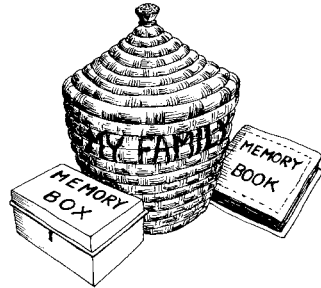


Recalling and sharing memories helps children most when it starts while the parent is still alive. Then, after a parent's death the children can hold and look at the box's contents and hear the voice of the parents in their hearts and minds. Looking through the memory box with other people who can share memories of the child's family and early life can help children recover from loss and build a sense of who they are and the community they belong to. Memory boxes were first created by women living with HIV, but they can be used by anyone who wants to leave a record of their story for themselves or their children.

Making a memory box

Use a container safe for storing keepsakes. You can use a sturdy box, basket or bag. Put objects inside that hold meaning for you or your children. Share stories about your life, your wishes for your children and anything you would like your children to remember. If you cannot write, find someone who will write down your stories for you, or record them using a sound or video recorder. Involving your children as much as possible will make your presence in their memories even stronger.

Choose a container that is strong and will keep the contents safe from water and bugs.



You can make a book out of cardboard covers, loose paper, a nail to make holes, and string to hold the book together.

What to include

- Photographs
- A small doll or toy
- Special cloth or clothing
- Jewelry, or a comb, brush, or hair decoration
- Drawings
- Letters, poems, a journal or diary
- Family stories, traditions, or recipes

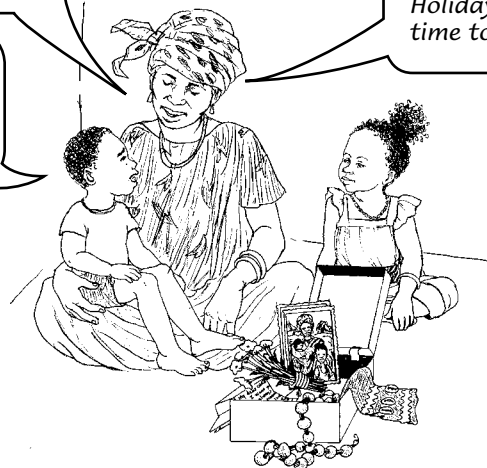


Using a memory box

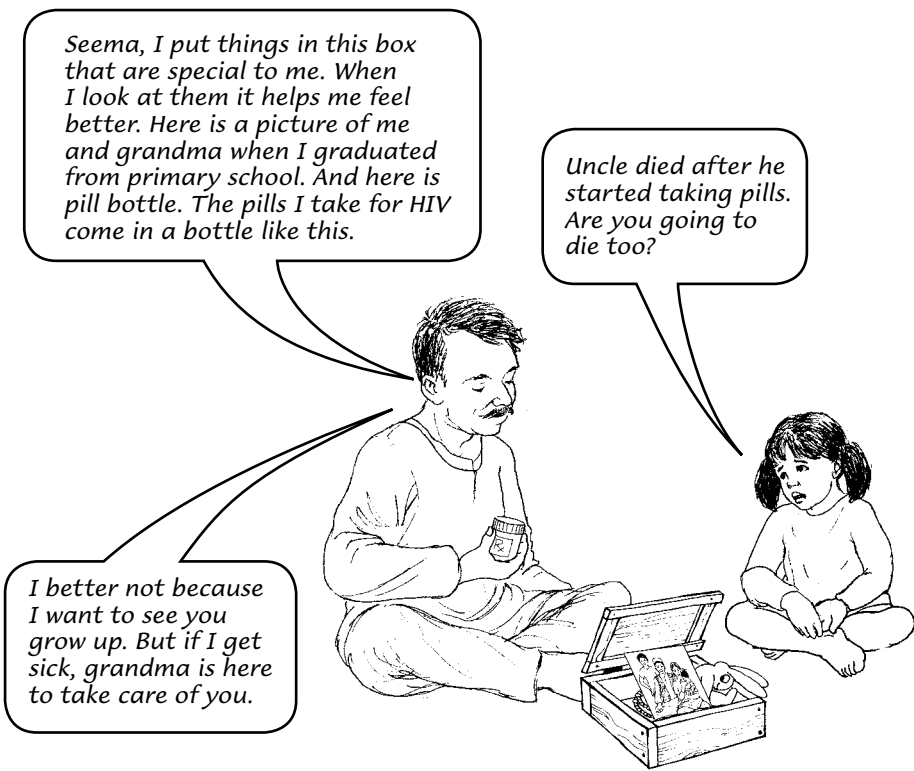
I won't always be here, but these things will help you remember me. My Bible when I was your age. And some poems. These can help you like they help me when I am worried. What do you want to put in the memory box?

Can we put your blue dress? The one you wear on holidays?

Yes, and I could draw a picture of our family. Holidays are a good time to see family.



Making a memory box with your children can be a family project, and will ensure the box includes everyone's memories.

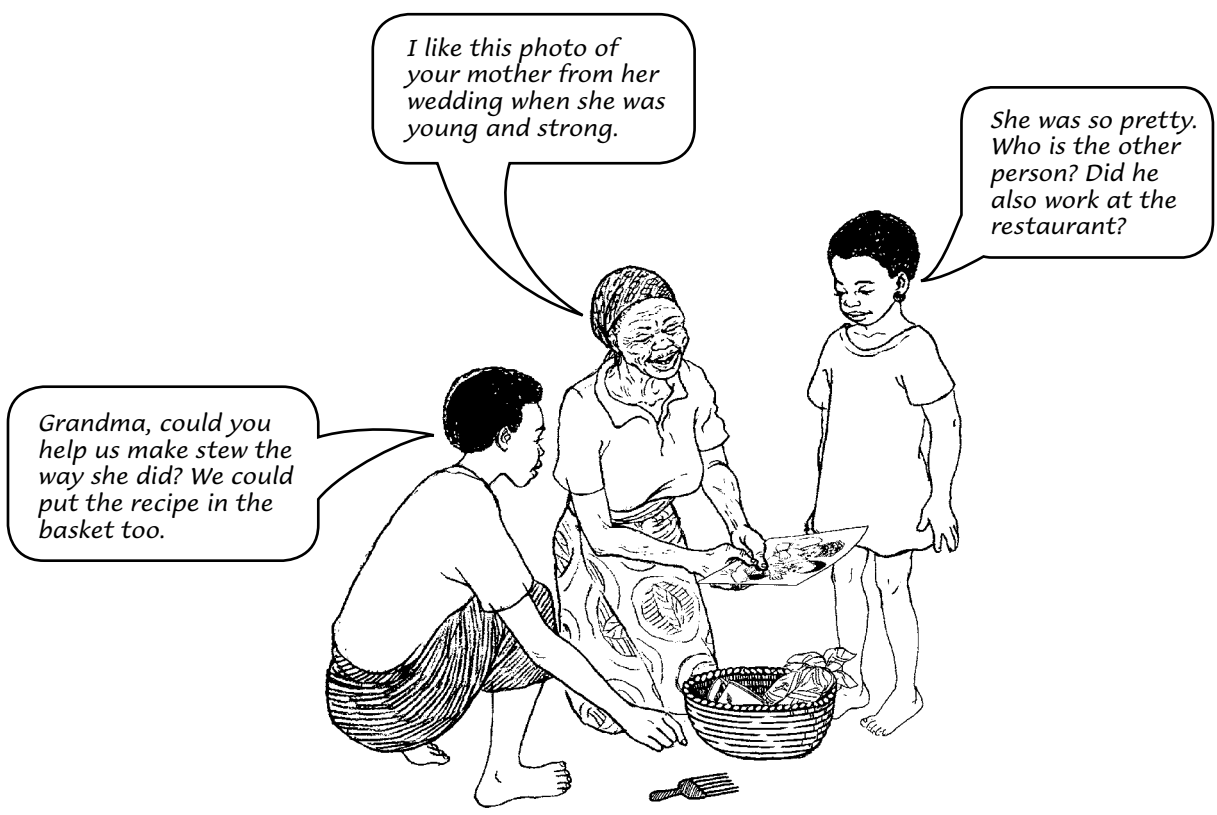


Seema, I put things in this box that are special to me. When I look at them it helps me feel better. Here is a picture of me and grandma when I graduated from primary school. And here is pill bottle. The pills I take for HIV come in a bottle like this.

Uncle died after he started taking pills. Are you going to die too?

I better not because I want to see you grow up. But if I get sick, grandma is here to take care of you.

A memory box can help you let your young children know you have HIV and discuss worries they have about the future.



I like this photo of your mother from her wedding when she was young and strong.

She was so pretty. Who is the other person? Did he also work at the restaurant?

Grandma, could you help us make stew the way she did? We could put the recipe in the basket too.

Talking about things in a memory box can help children learn more about their parent after their death.

Helping children at different ages

Children relate to different objects at different ages. A baby may be comforted by the smell or feel of a piece of clothing. Older children may be more interested in objects, photos, or letters that remind them of what their parents did or loved. When you make a memory box, try to include objects that will mean something to children as they grow.

The memory box that Mama made has different things for each of us. Mama's favorite shirt is for baby Aku. I sometimes wrap Aku in it when he cries. Maybe the smell of Mama comforts him. I like to play with the doll, or comb my hair with Mama's brush.



Credits and other resources

This pamphlet was produced as part of *Helping Children Live with HIV*. The book is designed to empower families and others in communities affected by HIV to support the healthy development and well-being of young children.

Please visit www.hesperian.org to learn more about the book, or about Hesperian Health Guides, and to access health information in over 30 languages.

Illustrations by Heidi Broner and Regina Faul-Doyle.

Thanks also to Tearfund for additional illustrations.

Additional resources:

- *Footsteps* No. 61, December 2004:
<http://tilz.tearfund.org/webdocs/Tilz/Footsteps/English/FS61.pdf>
- REPSSI: <https://www.repssi.org/>
- Ten Million Memory Project: <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/cgc/Jonathan/>